

What to Do When Children Beg, Plead, and Make Demands

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Here's a familiar question from a parent of a five-year-old daughter:

"I have a child who wears me down when she wants something that I've said "no" to. She begs and pleads until I yell or give her what she wants. What can I do to stay strong and not give into her demands? I think I'm becoming a real pushover parent."

This mother recognizes that something is out of balance when she feels compelled to change her mind and give in to her daughter. How parents respond is often based on how *their* parents used discipline, their culture, parenting style, and the pressures of daily life. It's possible to discipline in a respectful way without yelling or giving in, but it takes practice, patience, and persistence.

Some children are intense and strong-willed, and learn that if they plead loud and long enough they'll get their way. They're willing to upset a parent if there's a chance they'll squeeze out one more TV show, one more cookie, or the toy they "must" have.

Here are some things that might help:

- **Take a minute to consider what children are asking for before you say "no."** If you decide your child can't have a second cookie, get down to her level and tell her, "No more cookies. If you're hungry, you can have carrots and almond butter." If pleading continues, you can ignore her or ask her to leave the room until she's finished begging. If you give the cookie after you've said no, you're reinforcing that she doesn't have to listen to you.
- **Be proactive and set limits before activities like TV watching or reading stories.** Discuss what the rules are and have your child repeat them back to you. "I'm happy to read you two stories, but after that I'll need to start dinner."
- **Engage children in problem solving.** "Since you've had your hour of screen time, let's figure out what would be fun to do now." If your child gets angry, ask what the rule is, and repeat your offer to help come up with an activity. If crying or yelling continues, tell your child that you understand she's disappointed, but screen time is over until tomorrow. If yelling continues, let her know she will lose her privileges for the next day unless she stops yelling. You can also give her a hug, or distract her by doing something else. Be empathetic, but stick to your limits.
- **Have a list of key rules posted on the wall so you can refer back to it when you or your kids forget.** Give positive feedback when your children are able to follow the rules without a fuss.

It's never too late to adjust your parenting style, and provide love and limits.