



Self-Regulation Guide to PROVIDING CHOICE

WHAT IS IT?

Choice is providing students the opportunity to indicate what they would prefer to do at a given moment during the day. Teachers decide on a set of activities (usually two) that are appropriate for the student to engage in and then to encourage the student to choose between these options.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

It's time to clean up in the Dramatic Play center. The teacher asks a child, "Would you like to pick up the food or the dishes first?"

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Autonomy is an important developmental milestone for young children. Every time that teachers allow choice, children are given the chance to have a say and exert this autonomy! Importantly, choices allow children to feel included and part of decision-making. In addition, the more that teachers provide choices to children when possible, the greater the chance that children will show engagement and cooperation.

Incorporating Choice

Allow choice whenever possible throughout the day so that students can engage with the activities and materials that they like the most. Remember to provide choice in both verbal and visual forms. Choice can be particularly helpful to prevent challenging behaviors during certain times. For example:

☒ Use when caught in a power struggle

When a child is having a hard time cleaning up after an activity, you can offer them the choice of putting their toys away independently or with your help. You could also let them choose *which* materials to put away first ("Do you want to put away the crayons first or the paper?"). Either option gets the job done, but this way the child feels like they have a say!

☒ Use to re-engage students

When you notice that one or a few children are starting to become distracted or disinterested in a task, encourage their participation by giving them a choice in something to do. For example, if a child is having difficulty waiting for a snack, give them the choice of passing out paper plates or leading the class in singing while they wait.

☒ Use for students who use escape behaviors

Choice is especially useful for students who display escape-avoidance behaviors. For a student who does not like to walk in the hallway, give them the opportunity to choose a friend to walk next to or give them the option to be line leader.



TIPS FOR PROVIDING CHOICE

1. Embed opportunity for choice throughout the day

- ☒ Design classroom activities that purposefully incorporate choice.
 - Have part of your morning meeting be dedicated to a class vote (rather than choosing *for* them every day).
- ☒ Offer choice spontaneously when appropriate.
 - Offer students the choice of sitting on a beanbag or the floor while reading a book.
- ☒ Intentionally use choice to prevent or shorten negative behaviors.
 - If a student typically does not want to get ready for the bus, offer the choice between getting their backpack or folder first.

2. Be intentional in *what* options you offer and *who* you offer choice to in the classroom

- ☒ Consider students' linguistic, racial/ethnic, and cultural backgrounds when planning choice.
 - Use your knowledge about your students' families to plan culturally relevant choice options (e.g., spontaneous, ongoing exploration versus more structured activities).
- ☒ Equitably distribute choice opportunities across your students.
 - Critically reflect on how your own cultural lens and biases (e.g., racial, ability, linguistic, gender) influence who you tend to offer choice to in the class.

3. Be intentional in *how* you offer choice

- ☒ Make sure you get the student's attention.
- ☒ Use a firm, yet warm tone.
- ☒ Keep it simple (give only 2-3 options at a time).
- ☒ Consider using visuals to make sure that students understand their options.
- ☒ Do not make one of the options a punishment.
 - *All* options should be acceptable activities where students should feel good about either choice they make.

4. After offering choice, make sure to...

- ☒ Provide enough wait time for students to make a decision (at least 5 seconds).
- ☒ Reinforce students' participation and positive behavior following their choice-making.

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT ALLOWING CHOICE

Engaging Children with Choice

[ECE Resource Hub](#)

CASTL ©

Using Choice Brief

[Available as PDF](#)

NCPMI ©

Using Choice Handout

[Available as PDF](#)

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