

# Discipline for Strong-Willed Children

*How should disciplinary techniques for my strong-willed child differ from those I use with my compliant child?*



Discipline for a strong-willed child requires a firmer hand, often with a greater show of love, than his compliant, eager-to-please sibling. Discipline must be tailored to the child. My grandmother used to say, “Show me a family with ten children, and I’ll show you ten unique personalities.” My own children were living proof that grandma was right. For example, my first-born was a daughter, very sweet and very compliant. When she misbehaved, often all it took to straighten her out was a “look” from mom or dad.

Then along came my second child, a son - and he came out fighting mad. He couldn’t have been more different! His full accompaniment of allergies, asthma, and hyperactivity made him quite a challenge. If someone (like grandpa) would sneak him even a little sweet treat, the child literally climbed the walls (and everything else) for two days. Diet was a definite factor. Now granted, much of his behavior was influenced by his physical issues, but not all of it. He was willfully defiant as well. To put it simply, he was a strong-willed child.

So how did we, the parents, handle discipline differently with these two very different children? With our daughter, we could speak calmly, issue time out or give “that look.” She got it right away. With my son, there was a lot of trial and error. Finding something, anything, that would work was work itself. We knew we couldn’t give in. In time, with consistency and a lot of prayer, he (and we) survived.

## **There were two critical factors in that survival:**

- Finding out what our child valued most.
- Discipline consistently applied without breaking his spirit. Time-outs, scoldings - meant little or nothing to him. So we had to find out what did matter. He was a child who loved the outdoors, nature, and climbing trees. When discipline became necessary, withholding an outdoor activity was the only thing that worked. Knowing your child is critical to any effective discipline.

## **For compliant (and all) children:**

- Speak to your child in a calm even tone. Never scream or yell.
- Set clear and concise boundaries, explain consequences (beneficial and disciplinary). Spend time teaching and training your child in what you expect. They don’t know until you teach them.
- Be consistent and firm; giving-in is detrimental to your success.
- Encourage and give praise when your child is compliant.

## **For a strong-willed child (all the above PLUS):**

- First determine any physiological reasons for behaviors; seek help if needed (doctor, pastor, other experienced parents).
- Keep trying until you find the leverage that works with that child.
- A more rigid behavioral system may need to be applied. Try removing liberties until the child desires compliance. Remember they are willfully defying you. Much of what they do may be for attention.
- Resist the temptation to make allowances for this child, just because he is screaming at you, which you would not make for a compliant child. In an even tone of voice, tell him that his behavior is not acceptable. Establish your control and don’t give it to the child.

Overall, know your children, and know what is age/behavior appropriate. Create a healthy, *non-chaotic* environment. It’s hard work, but so rewarding.