



Help Stop the Dawdling!

Dawdling: Avoiding the "I'll do it when I'm good and ready" battle.

Dawdling can be a form of control. ("I'll do it in my own, sweet time!"). Exercising control over one's own actions is an important developmental task for preschoolers. If you can give your child more control over the task that needs to be done, she might not have the need to dawdle.

Dawdling can be a bid for attention. Children are perceptive, and learn quickly that mom or dad gives more attention when they don't listen the first time! This form of dawdling often happens when a baby sibling appears. The older child dawdles because it may be the only time they get their parents to react. If you give your child more attention when they follow directions, and ignore them as much as possible when they don't, you can minimize this behavior.

Dawdling may be a way for a child to say "I need to slow down.

We are trying to do too much in one day." Have you overscheduled? Slow down, take a deep breath. Maybe your child just needs some down-time to relax, re-group and re-energize.

Children's sense of time is different than ours. Remember that your child has really not been alive very long, and doesn't have a fully developed brain. Our adult "right now!" and a child's "right now!" are different. Your child may not be trying to aggravate you—they may think they are doing it "right now". "Right now" in child-think, not "adult-think".

Give your child a choice: "You can either do it yourself, or I will do it for you. I am going to count to five, and you make the decision." OR "Do you want to put your shoes on first, or eat your breakfast first?" These choices might seem simplistic to adults, but for a developing toddler and preschooler, any control is good control!

Give your child a certain amount of time to get dressed/put on shoes/finish breakfast. You can even set a timer. Give ten minute, five minute, and one-minute warnings. If the task is not done when time is up, move on, without the task being complete. Follow through: once they realize that you are serious, they will most likely not make that choice again. A child *can* go to school in pajamas...but if there is a safety issue, you will have to skip the negotiating on this one.

Make charts, or lists that your child can follow- charts that delineate the task(s) that need to be done (use pictures to describe tasks- if you can't draw, take photos of your child doing the task, and use these pictures on the chart.) This is the child equivalent of a to-do list. It teaches organization. It also allows a child to have a sense of predictability. "First I do this, then I do this, then this happens"—and predictability increases our sense of control.

Remember to reward the positive: When your child does everything on their to-do list, then they can go to the park/ watch t.v./ help you make cookies.... If the task(s) need to be done in a set amount of time, remember to give ten minute, five minute, one minute, and last time warnings. If the task isn't done on time, they don't get the reward.

Earn it back: Some parents say that their child chooses not to do the task, and then tantrums when it is too late to get the reward. If this describes your child, you can provide means for them to earn back the reward. For example, they can choose to earn back the reward by deciding to do their original task *plus a new task*. Some parents balk at this, thinking that they are giving in to their child's non-compliance. Think of it this way: what is more important to you? Is it punishment, or getting the task done and teaching a negotiating skill?

Use humor- if you can turn a potential battle into a giggle-fest, chances are your child will be more likely to comply. (Do you want to put your shoes on first, or your socks on first? Your shoes? You're teasing, right? Come on- really? Okay- let's try- hmm- doesn't seem to be working? Got any ideas? Okay, silly, let's get those socks on.)

Don't forget — everyone dawdles — including parents! Make sure that your expectations for your child are not higher than they would be for a friend or a spouse or a coworker. The next time someone asks you to do something—and you don't do it right away— think about it: why not? What were you feeling? How would you like someone to respond to your needs?