

# Parenting The Strong-Willed Child

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## How Might Having A Strong-Willed Child Be A Growth Opportunity?

### What IS A Strong-Willed Child?

#### 1. Definitions

#### 2. Distinctions

ADD / ADHD

Creative

Strong-Willed

#### 3. Common Characteristics

They Can Be \_\_\_\_\_ & Exhibit Intense Angry Outbursts.

They Can and Will \_\_\_\_\_ Forever—Arguing is Aerobic For Them.

They Can Be \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and Tell Others What to Do.

They Demand to Know \_\_\_\_\_.

They Can Be Fiercely \_\_\_\_\_ and Refuse to Do What They Don't Want to Do.

They Can Be \_\_\_\_\_.

Want to Be In \_\_\_\_\_ and Make Their Own Rules.

They \_\_\_\_\_ (Choose Not To Hear) Warnings They Don't Want to Hear.

\_\_\_\_\_ ? What Are Those?

#### The Uniqueness of The Strong-Willed Child

Though there are plenty of times when parenting a strong-willed, sometimes disobedient child is a difficult, exhausting endeavor, it turns out there are plenty of benefits to a little bit of naughtiness or disobedience. *Research shows that disobedient children earn more as adults and are also more likely to be entrepreneurs. As it turns out, some rather intelligent children who defy authority or challenge the status quo tend to think more outside the box, lending them a certain creative upper hand when it comes to new ideas and starting businesses.* Entrepreneurs tend not to play by the rules.

Laura Markham, a clinical psychologist at Columbia University, explains that strong-willed children (those who are described as spirited, headstrong, rambunctious, and even courageous) are usually self-motivated and inner-directed, and *often grow into leaders as adults.* They are *more impervious to peer pressure* and go after what they want with more gusto. They want to “learn things

for themselves rather than accepting what others say, so they test the limits over and over,” and this relates to relationships as well. Such discernment involves not only when they cut their hair, eat vegetables, or choose to wear a coat, but also in whom they decide to trust and in whom they choose to follow or who they allow themselves to be influenced by. (Lauren Knight)

## Foundations of Healthy Parenting

### Who You ARE As A Parent

#### The Inner Attitude Of One Exercising Authority

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| 1. Be motivated by <u>love</u> :                  | Rev. 3:19    |
| 2. Be <u>patient</u> :                            | Prov. 15:18b |
| 3. Have yourself under <u>control</u> :           | Prov. 15:28  |
| 4. Don't be <u>controlled by your anger</u> :     | Prov. 29:22  |
| 5. Have a <u>soft</u> tone of voice:              | Prov. 15:1   |
| 6. Discipline with <u>respect</u> for your child: | Col. 3:21    |

### What You DO As A Parent

#### A. A Bond of \_\_\_\_\_ Love

##### 1. What is “unconditional” love?

I communicate unconditional love when I remind myself that . . .

- they are children.
- they will tend to act like children.
- such of childish behavior is unpleasant.
- if I do my part as a parent and love them despite their childish behavior, they will be able to mature and give up childish ways.
- if I only love them when they please me (conditional love), and convey my love to them only during those times, they will not feel genuinely loved.
- if I love them unconditionally, they will feel good about themselves and will be comfortable with themselves.
- if I only love them when they meet my requirements or expectations (conditional love) they will feel incompetent.
- for my sake as a struggling parent, and for my children's sake, I pray my love for my children will be as unconditional as I can make it.

##### 2. Communicating Love To Your Child (I John 3:18)

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Contact      b. \_\_\_\_\_ Contact      c. \_\_\_\_\_ Attention

**B. Emotional \_\_\_\_\_**

**Rules without Relationship equal Rebellion**

**C. Becoming Emotionally & Relationally Intelligent (ERQ)**

*“The ability to (1) be aware of, (2) identify and (3) understand our own emotions and those of others . . . and to constructively manage and utilize those emotions in ourselves and in our relationships.” (Gary J. Oliver)*

**The ERQ Model of Maturity**

**Recognition**  
(Knowledge/Awareness)

**Regulation**  
(Management/Action)

	<b>Relational Awareness</b>	<b>Relationship Management</b>
<b>Other (RQ)</b> (INTERpersonal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Values Differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Healthy Conflict</li> <li>• Forgiveness</li> </ul>
	<b>Self-Awareness</b>	<b>Self-Management</b>
<b>Self (EQ)</b> (INTRApersonal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional Awareness</li> <li>• Emotional Vocabulary</li> <li>• Accurate Self-Assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional Self-Control</li> <li>• Anger Management</li> <li>• Personal Responsibility</li> </ul>

**D. Provide A Model of Quality \_\_\_\_\_ With Others**

“Children are their parents' guests. They come into the space that has been created for them, stay for a while - fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five years - and leave again to create their own space. Although parents speak about "our son" and "our daughter," their children are not their property. In many ways children are strangers. Parents

have to come to know them, discover their strengths and their weaknesses, and guide them to maturity, allowing them to make their own decisions.

The greatest gift parents can give their children is their love for each other. Through that love they create an anxiety-free place for their children to grow, encouraging them to develop confidence in themselves and find the freedom to choose their own ways in life.” (Henri Nouwen)

## **E. Establish Clear Boundaries**

### **The Difference Between Discipline and Punishment**

1. What is punishment?

2. What is discipline?

a. Instruction:

b. Training:

c. Correction:

### **Final Suggestions**

1. You will feel like a bad parent—deal with it.
2. Don't debate which spouses' genes the child came from.
3. Make sure they know that they are loved, that they are “precious in your sight.”
4. Ask more questions and give fewer commands.
5. Choose your battles . . . don't make everything nonnegotiable.
6. Don't make “goofy” threats.
7. Hand out more tickets and give fewer warnings.
8. Choose discipline over punishment.
9. Respond and don't react.
10. Lighten up . . . but don't let up.

### **Resources:**

CHR Website: [www.liferelationships.com](http://www.liferelationships.com)

Upcoming CHR Training Opportunities

Give me some feedback at [goliver@jbu.edu](mailto:goliver@jbu.edu) . . .

### **Books:**

Campbell, *How To Really Love Your Child*

Cline & Fay, *Parenting With Love & Logic*

Dobson, *The Strong-Willed Child*

Forehand & Long, *Parenting the Strong-Willed Child* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)

MacKenzie, *Setting Limits With Your Strong-Willed Child*

Oliver & Oliver, *Raising Sons and Loving It!*  
*Mad About Us*

Smalley, *The Keys To Your Childs Heart*

Spears & Braund, *Strong-Willed or Dreamer: Understanding the Crucial Differences  
Between A Strong-Willed Child and a Creative-Sensitive Dreamer*

Tobias, *You Can't Make Me (But I Can Be Persuaded)*

Wright & Oliver, *Fears, Doubts, Blues & Pouts*  
*Raising Kids To Love Jesus*

## **Prayer of a Fumbling Disciplinarian**

Father of perfect discipline,

Give me a heart that loves mercy more than being right,  
that loves grace more than law and compassion more than control.  
Help me not to feel guilt when the discipline is right. Help me to discipline rightly.  
How many times — knowing you were watching, knowing good and well that I could stand —  
how many times have I willfully fallen?  
Yet how quick I am to condemn the same weakness in another.

I know what it's like to be powerless, riddled with guilt,  
and waiting for judgment to fall.  
How gently you restore me!  
Remind what a relief that is.  
Remind me that love — not justice, not guilt, not domination —  
love covers a multitude of wrongs.

Let me not discipline out of my own embarrassment, exhaustion, fear, or haste.  
Let me put away the tools of demolition: shame, rage, sarcasm, fear,  
and fit me instead with the fruit of your Spirit,  
that I may spend it on the little ones  
who wonder what you're like.  
May my instruction always create hope and never crush it.  
May it work restoration, not alienation;  
forgiveness, not condemnation.  
For these are what you have worked in me;  
how quickly I forget it.

And when I fail — when, not if —  
when I rail and scream and kick and flail against you  
like the unruly, hot-cheeked child that I am,  
pick me up, turn me around,  
bend low and speak my name.  
Give me courage to meet your gaze,  
and show me how it's done again.

## Managing The Inevitable Temper Tantrums

Gary J. Oliver, Ph.D.

Nothing can push our buttons like temper-tantrums. You've rushed into Wal-Mart to pick up a few things and pass the Sponge Bob Bubble Bath. Your little guy reaches out to grab it and you move his hand away and say no. The power struggle has begun. In a matter of seconds your sons' emotions can roar like a runaway train through frustration and anger into full-blown rage—out of control and running full tilt into a temper tantrum. Suddenly your precious little cherub shouts, screams, holds his breath, jumps up and down, kicks wildly and now everyone in the store (or so it seems) is staring at you.

An occupational hazard of raising sons is that you will experience a season when your child will struggle with temper tantrums. Temper tantrums first appear during a child's second year, peak between the ages of two and three, and decrease by the age of four—an age when the child is forming a sense of self, when the toddler is old enough to have a sense of “me” but is too young to control getting what he wants when he wants it. It's common for a temper tantrum to happen when a child is frustrated by a boundary you've set around his behavior.

While some tantrums result from organic disturbances or allergies, most are caused by the combination of high energy and low self-control. In many cases the tantrum is evidence of a power struggle—maybe even the result of not setting appropriate boundaries. Tantrums usually last as long as it takes to get what they want or until they realize that their outburst isn't going to work.

**At the outset be aware of where and when the tantrums are most likely to occur.** Most children throw tantrums only in a particular place and with a particular person.

**Be on the lookout for the first signs of a brewing storm.** Prepare your mind and your heart.

**Ask God to help you to *respond* (James 1:5) and not *react* to the next outburst.** We *respond* out of strength when we remind ourselves that this is a teachable moment for our little one. We *react* out of weakness when we choose to set our mind on what others might be thinking of us rather than how God can use this as an opportunity to model healthy emotions and clear boundaries for our little guy.

**At the first signs of a tantrum stay aware of your own emotions.** Temper tantrums in a child often lead to unhealthy expressions of anger in the parent that fuel the fire rather than extinguish it. Thank the Lord for the God-given emotion of anger and for this opportunity to model a healthy response for your child. He won't give you more than you can handle (I Corinthians 10:13). He has promised to supply all your needs (Philippians 4:19). That includes the ability to remain semi-calm and grow through this incident.

**Know that this is an opportunity for you to model healthy responses to anger.** Remember that anger is always a secondary emotion caused by fear and/or hurt and/or frustration. Most of the time temper tantrums are caused by frustration and that what you are experiencing is a developmentally appropriate response to your son receiving the devastating news that he is not the center of the universe. It's an important lesson that some adults have not yet learned.

Pick him up, hold him firmly and in as gentle and kind a voice that you can muster, look him in the eyes and slowly say, “Honey, I love you. I know that you want the Sponge Bob Bubble Bath and you can't have it.” **Avoid the temptation to react to his anger.** Instead you can choose to respond to his frustration and set a clear boundary. No need to enter into a debate, the discussion is over.

**Don't surrender to theatrics.** Your response to your son is much more important than what anyone in the grocery store might think of you. “The child should gain no request by anger,” an ancient philosopher said. “When he is quiet let him be offered what was refused when he wept.” That's still good advice today.