

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: I battle every morning before school with my four-year-old to get him dressed for school. I'm just exhausted. Help!

ANSWER: I'm not sure of the reason for the battle, so I'll approach it two ways:

1. If the battle is because he can't decide what to wear, let him decide the night before. **You help him by giving him no more than two choices** (e.g. "Which shirt would you like? The red or blue? ... Which socks? The white or the striped? etc.) Lay out the choices the night before. This approach helps him take responsibility for his choices, gives him a sense of power, and teaches him about the benefits of planning ahead.

2. If the battle is because of "pokinness" or defiance, you have a little planning to do... Call his teacher (you don't want a call from Social Services) and ask her if she will help you teach your son to be more responsible. Tell her you suspect your son will come to school in his pajamas tomorrow, and you would appreciate it if she would "make a really big deal out of how 'you don't come to school in our pajamas', and 'what are you going to do about it?'" Tell her to feel free to be as loud and dramatic as she can be! Yes, this lesson will involve some embarrassment.

The next morning when your son won't get dressed and it's time to leave, whisk him into the car in his pajamas, drop him off at school, and get out fast. **This approach lets your son own the problem** (and it is his problem), frees you from being the bad guy (let the teacher), and sets the stage for the next day. It also helps him understand consequences. The earlier a child understands cause and effect (consequences), the better equipped he will be for life. Think of the numbers of young men in jail who didn't think about cause and effect.

The next day, don't ask him about what happened at school. Don't ask him about what choice he is going to make today. Don't say things like: "Hope you make a good choice today." Or: "I hope you learned something!" These kinds of comments sabotage the learning and make you the "bad guy." The

child will focus on your reaction and comments and not the learning. This plan works well for most kids!

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