

## Let the Timer Decide

*Do you sometimes have trouble getting your child to get ready for bed? Is it hard to convince her to finish up the art activity?*

You might let the child decide how much time she wants to finish up an activity. Give her a choice between two alternatives: **“Would you rather I read to you for 5 minutes or 7 minutes?”** Then let the child choose and set the timer. When it goes off, the child is usually much more likely to be willing to stop the activity for a couple of reasons:

- ❖ The child chose the stopping time herself. One way of thinking of this is that the idea came **up and out of the child**. Whenever we ask a question that elicits a limit from the child’s lips rather than saying it ourselves, it becomes more likely she’ll be willing to cooperate with us.
- ❖ The child seems to see the timer as a “neutral third party” telling the child when the time is up rather than you being the bad guy who’s telling him it’s time for the fun to end. For some reason kids don’t seem to mind the timer announcing the time in the same way as they do when we say, “time is up”. This also makes it easier to provide empathy at those times when they do happen to object: **“Bummer. You really wish we had more time to read. Would you like to read more tomorrow?”**
- ❖ After using this successfully for a while some kids might say, “I don’t want you to do the timer?” you can respond, **“Would you like the timer to let you know when it’s time, or would you like me to let you know?”** I’ve not seen many kids get tired of choosing how long something is going to last rather than me choosing.

Rather than telling your child when to stop an activity, consider using a timer, letting the timer “decide” when it is time to stop.

You can use time timer technique for all sorts of situations:

- Bath time (in or out)
- Getting ready for bed
- Time to stop playing
- Getting teeth brushed
- Picking up toys
- Getting clothes on
- Clean up time
- Finishing a meal
- Taking medicine
- Putting out school clothes

*In what other situations could you elicit your child’s cooperation at finishing up by “Letting the Timer Decide?”*