

**BIG
CLEAN.
SMALL
PRICE.**

en-minded, I couldn't get away from the mind-set that this is not what boys do." Remember that your child is growing and trying on interesting identities even when she is young (such as "I'm a fireman!" or "I'm Beyoncé!"). "My advice to parents is: Relax," says *Parents* advisor Wendy Mogel, Ph.D., author of *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*. Wait and see whom you are given. Children cherish that child. This will take time. Until then, don't assume today's snapshot of your child is an epic movie of her life."

child? "When a child's cross-gender behavior and declarations are consistent, persistent, and insistent, you should pay careful attention, because she's telling you something important about herself," says Dr. Ehrensaft. For example, she frequently expresses that she is or wishes to be a boy and won't listen to those who try to "correct" her. In that case, you may want to consult with a pediatric mental-health gender specialist or get information from Gender Spectrum (genderspectrum.org) or TransYouth Family Allies (imatyfa.org). ✕

Prepare yourself for rude comments.

You might want to come up with responses ahead of time, so you're prepared in case a stranger or a well-meaning relative makes a remark. It's possible you'll need to discuss with your child the fact that his choices may be surprising to some people and that they may say things that are inconsiderate. Wait for the first bad moment to have this conversation so you don't want feelings of shame in your child," says Dr. Ehrensaft. "Be supportive and matter-of-fact, by saying something like, "That dress looks beautiful, but some people don't understand why you're wearing it and they might say mean things." Practice possible responses for when someone confronts him, such as, "I know boys don't wear dresses, but I like to do it." And if you're concerned about bullying, talk to your child's teachers and to other parents. Ultimately, your goal is to show him that you have his back, even when he's wearing costume fairy wings in the grocery store.

Know when you need to consult an expert.

How can you tell if something more might be going on with your

SCHOOL-AGE
5-6 years

power struggles

Try these levelheaded ways to avoid everyday battles.

by **AMELIA RICHARDSON DRESS**

IT SEEMED like a reasonable thing to ask my 5-year-old daughter to set the table. I even asked nicely: "Honey, it's about time for dinner. Can you set the table, please?" But instead of a chipper "Sure, Mama!" or even a grudging "Fine," Belle responded with a loud "No!"—which sent my blood pressure skyrocketing and launched us into a prolonged back-and-forth. Despite my efforts to set firm limits, we had been having a lot more of these moments.

"Parents often worry that power struggles are a sign that they're not parenting right," said Jim Stokes, Ph.D., a psychologist at the Child



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& Family Counseling Center in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. "But being insistent is your child's way of learning to be her own person." Follow these expert strategies to help you maintain control.

➔ **Encourage his independence.**

Your child wants to express his individuality by making his own choices, so try understanding his resistance. If you want him to do his homework right after school but he wants to do it later, ask him why. Is he hungry? Does he need a break first? Approach the situation as an opportunity to problem-solve with your child. In the case of homework, you might agree to a 20-minute break before diving in, but no screen time. Since he's participated in the decision-making process, he'll be more likely to agree to the boundaries that have been set. Look for various ways to empower your child's growing need for autonomy. "Let him have control over other things like which cereal to have for breakfast or what clothes to wear," says Laura Goodman, a licensed parent coach at Boost Parenting, in Duluth, Minnesota. Letting him have a say in some parts of his day may make it easier when it's time for you to make the decisions.

➔ **Pay attention to emotional triggers.**

When your kid picks a fight, it's not always a sign of strength. "Everyone is susceptible to stress, including children," says Dr. Stokes. "If your child is tired, hungry, or overstimulated,

* "Being insistent is your child's way of learning to be her own person."

she will be more likely to resist when you ask her to do something." If you have to go grocery shopping on the way home from picking her up from school, you can predict she'll fuss because she's tired from a long day. Dr. Stokes recommends acknowledging how she's feeling by saying something like, "I know you're tired but I have to run this errand now. I'll hurry and then we can go home so you can rest."

Power struggles are also likely to happen during times of transition, such as morning and bedtime. "Your kid can't always jump from one thing to another," says Dr. Stokes. She may be reluctant to leave her toys and go to school or might be overwhelmed by the morning rush. Try using humor to lighten the mood or take a quick break for a hug or a back rub.

➔ **Consider your own feelings.**

If your child refuses to clean his room, you might be tempted to threaten to take away the iPad for the week. Regardless of whether you decide to enforce these consequences, try to stay calm; otherwise your child will be more likely to respond heatedly instead of rationally. "Try to identify your own triggers—such as feeling disrespected or unappreciated, or needing to assert authority—that make you initiate a power struggle," suggests Tracie Giargiari, Ph.D., a psychologist at Thrive Health and Wellness in Longmont, Colorado. "Even if your child is the instigator, the situation changes when you remain calm."

Sometimes, you may just need a five-minute break to decide how to handle the situation. You might say, "Since we're both upset, let's talk about this in a few minutes." When you return to the conversation, you can either come to a solution together or explore the reason for his resistance. ✖

BIG KID 7+ years

social smarts

Kids are focused on photos, fans, and followers—like it or not. by **MARISA COHEN**

WHEN Audrey Slater's daughter (we'll call her Katie) was in third grade, she picked up her mom's phone one day and discovered Instagram. It was love at first sight. "She begged me to let her get her own account," recalls Slater, of Brooklyn. She resisted at first but finally gave in, and last year at age 9 Katie began posting silly selfies, videos of herself doing cartwheels, and pictures of her dog. "It's all very age-appropriate and sweet, but I do have to keep a constant eye on her," says Slater.

At ever-younger ages, kids are asking for their own YouTube channel, Instagram account, or even to use Snapchat. Before you say yes, here are some issues to consider.

➔ **Decide whether she's ready.**

Technically, we shouldn't even be having this discussion. According to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, it's illegal for commercial websites and apps to allow children under age 13 to open an online account without verifiable parental consent. "The law was created to keep companies from collecting data about kids and marketing to them," says Stephen Balkam, the founder and CEO of the nonprofit Family Online Safety Institute. Still, most children are savvy enough to get around this rule