

How to Leave the Park Without a Fuss!

Tuesday Tip by Anne Gribble

Yeah!! You are at the *park playing with your child or maybe they are playing with other children and it's almost time to leave...

(Note: "the park" could almost be anywhere...it's time to leave from playing anywhere!)

Here's how to leave:

STEP 1: Prepare

Ten minutes BEFORE you actually want to leave:

Go over to your child and say, ***"It's almost time for us to go. We get to go see X now or we get to do Y next."***

(*Say something that is "fun" for the child, so there is an incentive to leave. Not a bribe, don't offer a material object like a toy or prize or food. Examples: "We get to see Daddy." "You get to help me make dinner." "You get to see CoCo (dog) who has been missing you all day!" You don't need to go into detail or explain much.

In five minutes ask: ***"Do you want to go now or in five minutes?"***

(They will always pick the five minutes, but you just gave them a choice which is power in their book.

STEP 2: Leave

When the five minutes are up:

Go over to your child, confidently and kindly announce, ***"Hey sweetie, it's time to go now. We get to go see X now...or do Y now. Say good bye to your friends. See you next time! Thanks for playing!"***

(Smile. Be happy. Stay calm, but expect the worst. Be prepared for resistance – yelling or crying or screaming or running away, but you can handle it!)

IF you get resistance, as you will the first time most likely, say this with REAL empathy, ***"Oh honey, I know you love the park. I do too! We will definitely have to come back here again, but now it's time to go see X or do Y. Do you want to hold my hand as we walk or do you want a piggy back ride?"***

(Leaving the park is not negotiable. You have to stick to the plan. You cannot give MORE time or your child will learn that you don't really mean what you say, so they will not listen to you or trust you. Choices are power. Carry their backpack or you carry it? Give only TWO choices – two that you are OK with.)

Compliment them on their positive choice and how fun it is to hold their hand and leave in a fun and happy way.

But if they don'tGo to your child, get low on their level, comfort them (hug them – let them know you are on their side - if they like to be touched/held – you are showing empathy... it's hard to leave a

place you really like!!! Even for us adults! Think about when your husband/wife says it's time to leave the party (or sporting event or mall) and you really don't want to!)

Stay calm, stay kind, you are in charge...Say, ***"Oh sweetie, I know it's hard, but we do need to leave. You can leave in a nice way or you can leave in a sad way, either way is OK with me, but we are leaving now. You can choose."***

IF they are screaming/crying...you pick them up and carry them. **You leave.**

You can NOT give in. If you do, you can expect your child to resist ANYTHING you say/do that they do not like. They will learn that they can change your mind or actions to get what they want. You don't want them to learn this behavior or your parenting life is going to be much more difficult in the long run.

(Be advised – Don't say, "We'll, I'm going to have to leave without you..." and start to walk away. This technique uses the fear of abandonment and it's not emotionally healthy.)

At home, later when NO one is crying anymore and all have calmed down...

You say in a calm sweet voice, ***"The park was so fun today, but the leaving part was sad. I feel sad that you chose to leave the park in a not so happy way. It's OK with me because it was your choice. I will always love you, but I hope you choose differently next time."*** Hug them. Walk away.

*It's not a guilt trip. You are laying some of the ground work now for tomorrow or the next time you go to the park. You are giving them a chance to reflect. You are reminding your child that they have the power to choose how they behave. You are reminding them that they have power and control over their lives. It is reminding you to disconnect from their behavior. Their ugly behavior is NOT a direct reflection on you, even if you think it is. You didn't leave the park crying or screaming – they CHOSE to.

*Next time your child wants to go to the park you might use one of the following statements:

"Yeah! Sure – let's go, that sounds fun. You left when it was time. You came when I called. You left in a happy way – sure, we can go. Today we'll need to be home by X so we can Y."

(Remind them of their good choices before. Compliment them. Set them up for success for this next time. Set the boundaries early so they know they can't stay all day.)

Get ready – this is going to be hard but SO necessary for future successful park exits...

"Oh, sweetie. I am so sorry! I sure wish we could go, but we can't. Last time you chose to leave in a very sad way. We can't go this time, but maybe another time you can try again."

EXPECT a tantrum! EXPECT screaming and crying! Of course they are going to be upset! They are not getting what they want. You just told them NO! You can walk away and let them scream and cry. Never attempt to reason with a screaming child. The rational side of the brain has shut down.

When they (and you) have calmed down, you can say with sincere empathy, ***“I know...you really like the park and so do I. I can’t wait to go with you again. But we can’t go when you won’t leave when it’s time. I know it’s hard to leave such a fun place, but when you are ready to make a good happy choice, we can try again.”***

Here’s the hard part.... THEY ARE GOING TO try and negotiate with You! They are going to say, “I promise, I will leave nicely. I promise I will do it!!”

This is the critical moment. Do you want to guarantee nice park exits for the rest of your life? Do you want to make your words golden so your child believes what you say? Do you want them to trust what you say and listen to you in the future? So, they will believe you when you say, “I love you honey.”

Your choice.

You can say, ***“Wow – I am so happy to hear that – that’s great news. Let’s go again tomorrow. You can show me how you can leave nicely.”***

If you choose to go to the park again so soon, be prepared. Your child may not do whatever you ask in the future because they have learned that they can control you – your behavior – they can get what they want if they just “beg enough” or “negotiate enough” or “turn on the charm enough” or “apologize enough” or “act super nice enough” or “cry enough” ... you are teaching them how to treat you, how to manipulate you.

Your choice.

IF you choose to NOT go to the park again right away – that’s the hard choice, but the one that will pay off BIG in the long run. They will learn that you say what you mean and they will learn to trust your words. You are giving them a gift by saying NO.

Whenever you do go back to the park again:

BEFORE you go:

Pre-teach – Front-load – Remind them...

“Do you remember how we leave the park? Tell me...”

Together review:

1. “I will let you know when it’s almost time to go – you can pick the time.”
2. “We get to go see X next or go do Y next.” (Plant the seed BEFORE they start to play that they WILL be leaving at a certain time. There WILL be something “fun” to do next.)
3. “When it is time to leave, you get to choose: hold my hand or walk next to me or get a piggy back or I can carry you (whatever **two** options work for you and your child’s age/weight/stage of life...)
4. “Does that sound like a plan?”
(Child should agree because they just really want to go to the park and want to quit hearing you talk at them.)

“Yeah – let’s go have some fun!!”

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