



## **Raising Your "Spirited Child", Without Going off the Parenting Deep End!**

**By Kelly Nault, M.A.**

Over 200 pairs of eyes are glued to me as a spirited child screams, "ORDER ME MY MEAL NOW!"

This child has refused to order his own hamburger (as he has done many times before) and when I calmly tell him he can either order it himself, or go home without his burger, he goes completely berserk. Yes, I have entered into a "food fare nightmare"—with my formidable opponent, an eight year old child.

I feel my cheeks flush as public onlookers wait in complete stunned silence to see who will win—the big one or the little one?

### **The Four Parenting Keys to Taming Your Spirited Child**

Surprisingly, over my years as a family counselor, I have come to love working with spirited children. These children have a fire in their belly, a spark in their eye and a feisty attitude that assures their future in walking to the beat of their own drum instead of blindly following the crowd—a trait many parents hope for during the teen years. Yet that day in the food fare I was worn out, embarrassed and on the verge of saying "I quit!"

Raising your spirited child can be exhausting. Fortunately for me, I learned some commonsense parenting tools that eliminated nearly all future fights. Allow me to share some of these parenting tips that can support your efforts in taming your spirited child.

Raising your spirited child with these four parenting tips can help you navigate the emotional mine field successfully:

1. Use consistency. Follow through on EVERYTHING you say. Spirited children are gifted at manipulating "chances" and finding loopholes to obtaining exactly what they want. Hold your ground as calmly and firmly as possible—whatever you do, don't back down.
2. Talk less and act more. This works well, because when you get into a debate with a spirited child you are certain to lose! This is why in my "food fare nightmare" example above I gave two simple options; to order the hamburger or go home without it (the talking less part); and then silently waited (the action part).
3. Develop patience. Waiting out a fight without saying anything (especially if a temper tantrum erupts in public) can be one of the most difficult, yet important, things you ever do as a parent. Spirited children are bright—they know that the biggest weapon in their arsenal is to push your embarrassment button. Swallow your pride—do not cave in just

because you think you look bad in public. Remember if you cave in, your child will learn to use this trump card every time they want their way in a public setting.

4. Take time out for yourself. Parenting children is exhausting (especially a feisty child). Find little ways to take time out yourself (share child care with a friend, hire a babysitter more, use extra hours at daycare) so you will have more energy and patience to draw from during the trying situations.

## What Does the Future Hold for Your Spirited Child?

These commonsense parenting tools tame the negative opposition, but let their beautiful spirit flourish. If you attempt to use traditional discipline practices and make your child do what you want, you face an un-winnable uphill battle.

Fortunately, commonsense parenting does not mean letting your child get away with murder! A commonsense approach uses firm boundaries, mutual respect and discipline—teaching a child to naturally learn and grow from their mistakes rather than fight you every step of the way.

In the midst of your next fight, you may wonder if there will be an end to the madness. I am here to tell you that there will be a resolution to your current dramas. In my case, these tips allowed me to triumph and actually enjoy raising a spirited child.

This same child who gave award-winning temper tantrum performances in public and could bring me to my knees is now a responsible, respectful and enjoyable 17 year old college student whose year ahead is completely paid by scholarships won. For me and him, we both won in the end. May it also be the same for you.

When taming your spirited child remember to keep the faith, learn commonsense parenting tips and know that eventually if you follow the basic principles above "this too shall pass."

**Kelly Nault-Matzen**, MA, family counselor, corporate parenting spokesperson and award winning parenting author of *When You're About To Go Off The Deep End, Don't Take Your Kids With You* shares time-tested tools that motivate children to want to be well behaved, responsible and happy! To gain access to more parenting tools and to access your free online parenting course visit [www.ultimateparenting.com](http://www.ultimateparenting.com)

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