

Handling Unwanted Advice

By Elizabeth Pantley, Author of Gentle Baby Care

“Help! I’m getting so frustrated with the endless stream of advice I get from my mother-in-law and brother! No matter what I do, I’m doing it wrong. I love them both, but how do I get them to stop dispensing all this unwanted advice?”

Just as your baby is an important part of your life, he is also important to others. People who care about your baby are bonded to you and your child in a special way that invites their counsel. Knowing this may give you a reason to handle the interference gently, in a way that leaves everyone’s feelings intact.

Regardless of the advice, it is *your* baby, and in the end, you will raise your child the way that you think best. So it’s rarely worth creating a war over a well-meaning person’s comments. You can respond to unwanted advice in a variety of ways:

Listen first

It’s natural to be defensive if you feel that someone is judging you; but chances are you are not being criticized; rather, the other person is sharing what they feel to be valuable insight. Try to listen - you may just learn something valuable.

Disregard

If you know that there is no convincing the other person to change her mind, simply smile, nod, and make a non-committal response, such as, “Interesting!” Then go about your own business...your way.

Agree

You might find one part of the advice that you agree with. If you can, provide wholehearted agreement on that topic.

Pick your battles

If your mother-in-law insists that Baby wear a hat on your walk to the park, go ahead and pop one on his head. This won’t have any long-term effects except that of placating her. However, don’t capitulate on issues that are important to you or the health or well-being of your child.

Steer clear of the topic

If your brother is pressuring you to let your baby cry to sleep, but you would never do that, then don’t complain to him about your baby getting you up five times the night before. If *he* brings up the topic, then distraction is definitely in order, such as, “Would you like a cup of coffee?”

Educate yourself

Knowledge is power; protect yourself and your sanity by reading up on your parenting choices. Rely on the confidence that you are doing your best for your baby.

Educate the other person

If your “teacher” is imparting information that you know to be outdated or wrong, share what you’ve learned on the topic. You may be able to open the other person’s mind. Refer to a study, book, or report that you have read.

Quote a doctor

Many people accept a point of view if a professional has validated it. If your own pediatrician agrees with your position, say, “My doctor said to wait until she’s at least six months before starting solids.” If your *own* doctor doesn’t back your view on that issue, then refer to another doctor - perhaps the author of a baby care book.

Be vague

You can avoid confrontation with an elusive response. For example, if your sister asks if you’ve started potty training yet (but you are many months away from even starting the process), you can answer with, “We’re moving in that direction.”

Ask for advice!

Your friendly counselor is possibly an expert on a few issues that you can agree on. Search out these points and invite guidance. She’ll be happy that she is helping you, and you’ll be happy you have a way to avoid a showdown about topics that you *don’t* agree on.

Memorize a standard response

Here’s a comment that can be said in response to almost any piece of advice: “This may not be the right way for you, but it’s the right way for *me*.”

Be honest

Try being honest about your feelings. Pick a time free of distractions and choose your words carefully, such as, “I know how much you love Harry, and I’m glad you spend so much time with him. I know you think you’re helping me when you give me advice about this, but I’m comfortable with my own approach, and I’d really appreciate if you’d understand that.”

Find a mediator

If the situation is putting a strain on your relationship with the advice-giver, you may want to ask another person to step in for you.

Search out like-minded friends

Join a support group or on-line club with people who share your parenting philosophies. Talking with others who are raising their babies in a way that is similar to your own can give you the strength to face people who don’t understand your viewpoints.

This article is an excerpt from *Gentle Baby Care* by Elizabeth Pantley. (McGraw-Hill, 2003)