My 6-year-old daughter is very smart but refuses to apply herself at home or at school. She recently will do nothing but cry when asked or told to do something, or just flat out refuses. We have tried to reward her for doing good, and grounding her and taking away toys for not doing what she is supposed to do. Now she has gotten to the point that she won`t eat. I don`t know what else to do.

Our beloved children can certainly be puzzling and difficult in their behavior, can't they? This is actually common behavior when we, as parents, intrude too much on what are their areas of responsibility, such as doing their homework and choosing to eat as well as how much to eat. It is hard to hold back from pushing, bribery, punishing and cajoling because we want them to be successful in school and healthy. So what I am going to say will be very counter-intuitive.
**New approach to behavior modification**

Stop all cajoling, bribery, punishment and pushing. Sit down with her and tell her that you know she understands that eating healthy food is important and doing her homework is important to being a good student. They are her responsibility to do and you will no longer interfere in these areas.

However, she will need to eat when there is family meal time or wait until the next meal even if she is hungry. She will also have to go to school if she does not do her homework and let the teacher know she did not do it. It usually takes only one very hungry night and one unhappy experience with the teacher to cure a child of the undesirable behaviors.

**Don't give in**

You have to stick to your guns and remain calm no matter how hard it is. If she begs and whines, remind her of the rules and her responsibilities and offer some words of caring. When she does the right thing, casually mention that you noticed she did her homework or ate well and you are proud of her decision to do the right things for herself.

Don't be effusive and don't offer a tangible reward other than maybe a little hug or a pat on the back. When we are too effusive in our praise, our children usually perceive that as an obvious attempt to control their behavior and they backslide.

**Natural consequences are a good teacher**

I have been in your shoes with my own daughter, so I know this is so hard to do. But I can also assure you that letting her experience the consequences of bad decisions in these types of issues is excellent training for her now and in the future. You both will enjoy each other a lot more as well. Believe it or not, she will be glad you set limits with your reasonable rules and leave her to her choices. She will experience many moments of justifiable pride in her own achievements and you will be right there to celebrate with her.

**Related topics:** behavior, behavior modification, children, defiant behavior, homework, mary gottesman, school