

25 WAYS TO TALK SO YOUR CHILDREN WILL LISTEN

A major part of discipline is learning how to talk with children. The way you talk to your child teaches him how to talk to others. Here are some talking tips we have learned with our children:

1. Connect before you direct. Before giving your child directions, squat to your child's eye level and engage your child in eye-to-eye contact to get his attention. Teach him how to focus: "Mary, I need your eyes." "Billy, I need your ears." Offer the same body language when listening to the child. Be sure not to make your eye contact so intense that your child perceives it as controlling rather than connecting.

2. Address the child. Open your request with the child's name, "Lauren, will you please..."

3. Stay brief. We use the one-sentence rule: Put the main directive in the opening sentence. The longer you ramble, the more likely your child is to become parent-deaf. Too much talking is a very common mistake when dialoging about an issue. It gives the child the feeling that you're not quite sure what it is you want to say. If she can keep you talking she can get you sidetracked.

4. Stay simple. Use short sentences with one-syllable words. Listen to how kids communicate with each other and take note. When your child shows that glazed, disinterested look, you are no longer being understood.

5. Ask your child to repeat the request back to you. If he can't, it's too long or too complicated.

6. Make an offer the child can't refuse. You can reason with a two or three-year-old, especially to avoid power struggles. "Get dressed so you can go outside and play." Offer a reason for your request that is to the child's advantage, and one that is difficult to refuse. This gives her a reason to move out of her power position and do what you want her to do.

7. Be positive. Instead of "no running," try: "Inside we walk, outside you may run."

8. Begin your directives with "I want." Instead of "Get down," say "I want you to get down." Instead of "Let Becky have a turn," say "I want you to let Becky have a turn now." This works well with children who want to please but don't like being ordered. By saying "I want," you give a reason for compliance rather than just an order.

9. "When...then." "When you get your teeth brushed, then we'll begin the story." "When your work is finished, then you can watch TV." "When," which implies that you expect obedience, works better than "if," which suggests that the child has a choice when you don't mean to give him one.

10. Legs first, mouth second. Instead of hollering, "Turn off the TV, it's time for dinner!" walk into the room where your child is watching TV, join in with your child's interests for a few minutes, and then, during a commercial break, have your child turn off the TV. Going to your child conveys you're serious about your request; otherwise children interpret this as a mere preference.

11. Give choices. "Do you want to put your pajamas on or brush your teeth first?" "Red shirt or blue one?"

12. Speak developmentally correctly. The younger the child, the shorter and simpler your directives should be. Consider your child's level of understanding. For example, a common

error parents make is asking a three-year-old, "Why did you do that?" Most adults can't always answer that question about their behavior. Try instead, "Let's talk about what you did."

13. Speak socially correctly. Even a two-year-old can learn "please." Expect your child to be polite. Children shouldn't feel manners are optional. Speak to your children the way you want them to speak to you.

14. Speak psychologically correctly. Threats and judgmental openers are likely to put the child on the defensive. "You" messages make a child clam up. "I" messages are non-accusing. Instead of "You'd better do this..." or "You must...", try "I would like..." or "I am so pleased when you..." Instead of "You need to clear the table," say "I need you to clear the table." Don't ask a leading question when a negative answer is not an option. "Will you please pick up your coat?" Just say, "Pick up your coat, please."

15. Write it. Reminders can evolve into nagging so easily, especially for preteens who feel being told things puts them in the slave category. Without saying a word you can communicate anything you need said. Talk with a pad and pencil. Leave humorous notes for your child. Then sit back and watch it happen.

16. Talk the child down. The louder your child yells, the softer you respond. Let your child ventilate while you interject timely comments: "I understand" or "Can I help?" Sometimes just having a caring listener available will wind down the tantrum. If you come in at his level, you have two tantrums to deal with. Be the adult for him.

17. Settle the listener. Before giving your directive, restore emotional equilibrium, otherwise you are wasting your time. Nothing sinks in when a child is an emotional wreck.

18. Replay your message. Toddlers need to be told a thousand times. Children under two have difficulty internalizing your directives. Most three-year-olds begin to internalize directives so that what you ask begins to sink in. Do less and less repeating as your child gets older. Preteens regard repetition as nagging.

19. Let your child complete the thought. Instead of "Don't leave your mess piled up," try: "Matthew, think of where you want to store your soccer stuff." Letting the child fill in the blanks is more likely to create a lasting lesson.

20. Use rhyme rules. "If you hit, you must sit." Get your child to repeat them.

21. Give likable alternatives. You can't go by yourself to the park; but you can play in the neighbor's yard.

22. Give advance notice. "We are leaving soon. Say bye-bye to the toys, bye-bye to the girls..."

23. Open up a closed child. Carefully chosen phrases open up closed little minds and mouths. Stick to topics that you know your child gets excited about. Ask questions that require more than a yes or no. Stick to specifics. Instead of "Did you have a good day at school today?" try "What is the most fun thing you did today?"

24. Use "When you...I feel...because..." When you run away from mommy in the store I feel worried because you might get lost.

25. Close the discussion. If a matter is really closed to discussion, say so. "I'm not changing my mind about this. Sorry." You'll save wear and tear on both you and your child. Reserve your "I mean business" tone of voice for when you do.

Getting your Kids to Listen to You or Listening to Your Kids

As parents, we sometimes behave as if communicating with children simply means putting in advice and getting back good behavior. Or that communicating means prodding and nagging at children and if they don't shape up -- punish them. For many adults, this is the totality of their communication skills with kids. However, there are ways to get your child to *really* listen to you (believe it or not)! Try this:

Recipe

- Answer a child's questions as quickly, candidly, and openly as possible. This lets the child know that his or her question deserves an answer. It also makes the child feel important.
- Say the right thing at the right time and leave the rest unsaid. For example, telling Jane to pick up her room while she is expressing how badly she feels about a fight with a friend doesn't encourage good communication with Jane. Children go through difficult times (as do adults) when they don't feel like discussing issues with their parents. We should respect their feelings at times like this.
- Be fair. Don't use sarcasm and ridicule to make a point -- it only makes children tune you out and feel resentment towards you.
- [Be a good listener](#). Let your children know that you *accept* their feelings, whatever they might be. For example, saying, "Mark you look sad. Is something bothering you?" Shows the child that you are concerned and allows him or her to open up and discuss it with you. Good listening involves conscious efforts to understand and care about what the child is saying -- not moralizing, preaching, or trying to talk the child out of his or her feelings.

Recognizing Attention-Getting Misbehavior

Recognizing it:

1. *It may be triggered* when you start to give your full attention to somebody or something else... for example talking on the phone with a visitor, Reading, watching television, working.
2. *The main result* of the misbehavior is that the child receives lots of attention (good or bad) from the person who matters.
3. *The child may feel relieved and pleased* to be getting the attention, and may not show any unhappiness at all with getting regular negative attention.
4. *You may be constantly reminding, nagging, answering the same questions over and over...*talking a lot and getting nowhere.
5. *You may feel annoyed*, tired of the constant demands, tired of always sounding negative.

Recipe

Right then - **Constructive ignoring**

Examples we can use are,

1. don't look them in the eye (maybe close your eyes)
2. Turn your back
3. Keep yourself from listening (Maybe plug your ears?)
4. Don't talk to them
5. Keep doing what you're doing

Other times - **Giving More Positive Attention**

Examples we can use are,

1. Catch a child being helpful, cooperative, or responsible
2. Say something encouraging
3. Write them a special note or have fun at a "special time"
4. Show confidence in them
5. Show affection for them
6. Notice them when they aren't expecting or asking you to

Recognizing Power-Seeking Misbehavior

Recognizing it:

1. It may be triggered when you order a child to do something or when you use the words: "You have to", "You can't", or "because"
2. The main result of the misbehavior is that the child "wins" more often than "loses." She/he gets control over you -- makes you mad.
3. The child may feel important only when he is in control. Winning is all that matters. He may be interested at all in what the struggle is about. Like that "Few more minutes to play" before bed.
4. You may be giving orders and making threats, repeating them several times before "giving in" when you decide it's not that important (you lose), or, you may decide to "show who's boss" by finally showing anger and using force (you win).
5. You may feel angry, challenged, needing to fight for control. "She can't get away with that!", "I can't make her do it.", or "I'll..."

Recipe

Right then - **Avoiding Power Struggles**

1. Leave the scene
2. Refuse to either win or lose
3. Refuse to fight or argue
4. Decide whose problem it is
5. Decide mostly what *you* will or won't do
6. Set limits and take action quietly and firmly

Other Times - **Giving Children Responsibility and Choices**

1. Choices of *what* to eat, drink, wear, play with, etc.
2. Choices in dividing up household chores
3. Choices of *when* to do some things
4. Choices have to be real *
5. Choices don't need to be wide open, two alternatives is enough
6. Children at any age can be allowed a lot of responsibility for themselves
7. Avoid doing for children what they can do for themselves

* "Real" choices have to have at least two "right" answers. Asking, "Do you want to wash up for dinner?" doesn't count.

Things to Think About

Consistency

Consistency is saying something or handling a situation in the same manner each time it occurs.

1. Set clear expectations
2. Follow through on what you say
3. Decide what you want and how you will get results. Then carry out your method of obtaining results the same way each time
4. Give encouragement when the child does what you expect

Encouragement

Practice and use encouraging words and phrases..."That's very helpful.", "I appreciate your help.", or, "You look like you're having fun!" Look for the positive and try to ignore the negative. Encourage your child for specific things yo like to see him or her doing. For example, "I like the way you tied your shoes this morning!"

Activity

Try making a list with your child of five or ten things that he or she likes to do (you might be surprised!). Make a special time when you can do some of the things on the list together. It will probably make both of you feel good.

Communicating So Your Child Will Listen Better and Pay Attention

No one enjoys being interrupted when absorbed in an activity of choice. It is especially hard for a young child to stop playing in order to do something they may not wish to do (e.g, "Come to the table" or "Put your toys away"). Often it is difficult to get your child to listen when you speak, and do what you ask. The following tips and strategies will help your child listen and pay attention:

- Get your child's attention directly before giving directions. This means face-to-face and direct eye contact. Don't expect your child to pay attention when you give directions from across the house.
- You may need to walk over and touch your child (gently) to get his or her attention and eye contact before giving a direction.
- If your child is very focused on a TV show, you may need to turn off the TV before trying to give your child an instruction or direction.
- Keep directions clear, brief, and to the point.
- Adults tend to talk too much when giving directions to children. State what you want your child to do with as few words as possible ("Please, put your shoes on now.")
- Give your directions whenever possible by saying what you want your child to do, not what you don't want your child to do. It is better to say, "Sit on the couch" rather than "Don't jump on the couch" and "We walk in the house" rather than "Don't run in the house."
- Once you have your child's attention and state your direction, stop talking. Again, adults have the tendency to keep on talking and not allow the child a chance to comply.
- Another strategy is to give a direction and have your child repeat or rephrase what he or she is supposed to do. (This checks for your child's understanding of the direction.) Then wait and watch to see that your child starts to do what you ask.
- Give directions that are statements, not questions. Say, "Lights off in ten minutes." Don't say, "Are you ready to turn off the lights?"
- Young children can't remember more than two or three things at a time. Many children can only follow a one-step direction. So break into small steps what you want your child to do.
- Make routines and schedules visual for your child. A helpful technique is to draw pictures (or cut pictures out and mount) on a chart that will be posted in a visible and convenient place for your child to see and reach. The picture chart shows the sequence of the morning routine/activities (or evening routine/activities).

For example, the top section of the chart can show a picture of clothing (indicating to get dressed). The second section may have a picture of a cereal bowl or various breakfast foods (to show eating breakfast). The third section can show a picture of a hairbrush and toothbrush (to

indicate grooming). As your child completes each task, he or she moves a clothespin down the chart to attach next to the corresponding picture.

- Give frequent praise and positive feedback when your child follows directions and/or is making a good attempt to do so. Thank your child for being cooperative.
- Make sure you have provided enough structure and assistance to enable your child to follow through with the direction given, and remember: one step at a time.
- Young children respond well to making a game out of any chore or task you want them to do. For example, set challenges: "Let's see if we can put the blocks back in the basket by the time we count to ten (or by the time this song ends)."

If we want children to develop good listening skills, we need to practice and model what it looks like and sounds like to be a good listener. Being able to listen (to the teacher, classmates, etc.) is a critical part of school learning and a fundamental readiness skill. You can model good listening behaviors for your child by doing the following:

- Be patient when your child struggles to express himself or herself. Give your child the chance to put his or her thoughts into words. Try not to finish children's sentences for them in an attempt to speed them along in what they have to say.
- Good listening means showing interest by making and maintaining eye contact, responding to what someone is saying, and being an "active listener" (e.g., asking questions for more information, paraphrasing what the speaker said, or making comments related to what the speaker said).