

What to do When Kids Don't Listen

You must have told your child at least a hundred times to bring his lunch box in from the car when the two of you arrived home from school. It seemed like a simple task to teach him responsibility and getting him to place it on the kitchen counter everyday would be convenient for you to wash it and repack it the next morning. You are not asking for much and you begin to feel like you have to remember everything for him. It has now become routine for you to notice it missing during your morning rush, so you run out to the car in a huff to retrieve it and then yell with frustration about his lack of responsibility. But it just happens again until you snap and behave in a way that you wish you hadn't, using punishment and getting angry with your child.

Does this scenario sound familiar? Not listening is one of the most common complaints I hear from parents who attend my seminars, and one of the most frustrating common occurrences that sabotage the family and create chaos at home. Parents then see it as misbehavior and feel like their child is not cooperating. It seems so unfair that you do so much for your child and this is what you get in return. The parent then begins to feel the frustration running over into her marriage. When it doesn't stop there, she begins to feel unappreciated, distracted, and unproductive at work; her life feels out of balance.

When a child doesn't listen, I call it *parent deafness*; the child appears to have tuned out the parent's commands, pleads, and requests, and ignores her. The parent in turn, thinks that the child didn't hear the first 50 times so she repeats her commands over and over. The result is that the child hears her even less and tunes her out even more. The primary cause of *parent deafness* is that the adult talks too much. The combination of too much talking, along with the child feeling unimportant or small, overwhelmed with commands, or not allowed to demonstrate frustration can cause the child to ignore the adult and appear not to listen.

One of the bigger reasons for this problem is a child feeling disconnected emotionally from his parent who is very busy. Today's fast paced society has a typical parent scurrying around, acting anxious with all that she has to do, and feeling and appearing busy and stressed. This type of behavior can cause a child to feel emotionally disconnected from his parent and it is this feeling of disconnect that can lead a child to ignore the parent when they are asked to do something. But this is completely repairable with some common sense solutions.

RECONNECT. Take five to ten minutes a day to reconnect with your child to reestablish the emotional connection. They want to know that you are there 100%, not thinking about dinner, bills to pay, or getting to work on time. Sit next to them or in front of them and clear your mind. Use direct eye contact and refrain from talking; let them do it all. If you have to speak, ask them questions or react to their comments with simple phrases like: "Wow!" "Tell me more," "Then what happened," and "Really!" The best time to do this reconnection is in the morning.

TALK LESS. Acknowledge that you talk too much and refrain from doing it. If you have to speak, use one word, such as "lunchbox" instead of "you did it again, you left your lunchbox in the car. Go out there and bring it in," "backpack" instead of "I'm tired of tripping over your backpack, you know where it belongs so put it away now," or "teeth" instead of "it's almost time for bed and you have school in the morning. Go in there and brush your teeth."

SET UP AGREEMENTS. Getting your child to do something that you want her to do requires an agreement set up in advance. When she is in a good mood and open to talk, ask for her time by asking the question "is now a good time to talk?" If she says no, come to an agreement on a specific day and time when the two of you can talk. If necessary, write it on the kitchen calendar. If your child says yes, get to her eye level and ask for what you want, then ask her if she will agree to what you are asking. Be sure and narrow your request to a clearly specific task with a time and even a date if necessary. To complete the agreement, ask your child to restate what she agreed to and thank her for her time and cooperation. You will experience more success and find yourself talking less when setting up respectful agreements.

LEARN TO BE MORE CALM AND PEACEFUL. When a parent is behaving in a stressed manner and anxious about having so much to do, anxiety can be transmitted down an invisible wire to the child. The result can be the child acting out, misbehaving, not listening, and acting in a manner similar to the parent. Take time out to calm yourself and breathe. Simple meditation isn't just for those who practice Yoga. Taking time out to calm yourself, getting centered, and quieting your mind can have extraordinary impacts on your effectiveness as a parent. Your child will learn how to be more peaceful by the example you set for him in your daily life.

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