

Want to Get Your Kids to Do More? Then talk Less!

One of my favorite television cartoons growing up, later on gave me one of the biggest secrets for being a successful parent. Do you remember the Charlie Brown cartoon? My favorite ones were the holiday versions. The Christmas and Halloween holiday seasons just weren't complete without working hard at my best behavior so that I could stay up to watch those special shows on television. But more importantly, do you remember the segments of the show when the kids were in their classroom? I was always stumped as to why the teacher's dialog was always muffled and she seemed to be making a noise that sounded like "Wah, wah, wah." Many years later while parenting one of my children and delivering a typical fatherly lecture, my oldest daughter made a remark one day that revealed to me she didn't hear a word I had said. I don't remember exactly what she had said to me but the gist of it was that she heard me say "blah, blah, blah..." I do remember at that moment that I felt angry with her for implying that I had said nothing really important, or that she purposely did not hear me. But thinking about it after I had a chance to cool down caused me to hear the message she was actually trying to tell me, loud and clear. It was sometime after that I decided I would stop lecturing my children and actually begin to talk less often.

Talking too much to your children, especially through lecturing, reminding, reprimanding, and criticizing can have detrimental effects on your power as a parent; it can cause your children to stop listening to you and go into what I term as "Parent Deafness." When this happens, they begin to tune you out. But more importantly than their lack of listening, is the fact that they may begin to listen more to others, such as their peers. Let me present this as the most important reason for you to talk less.

Parents mean well, especially moms. They have years of experience and wisdom they want to share with their children to help them grow strong and become an effective adult, and live a full and happy life. One of the most entertaining video comedy bits I've seen on this topic is a musical piece from comedienne Anita Renfro and her segment she calls "Total Momsense." She takes every phrase or statement a mom says in a 24-hour period and puts it to the tune of the William Tell Overture. It's worth taking a look if you haven't seen it yet. Just Google "Momsense" or do a search on youtube.com to find it. While this video is funny, it reminds us all that we talk too much and cause our children to tune us out.

Instead of talking too much to your children, here are some suggestions to help you keep your kids tuned in before you lose their attention.

STOP REPEATING YOURSELF

Children are incredibly smart and they know your rules and boundaries if you've taken the time to set them up right. They may, however, do whatever they can to get you to break them if you've given in to their demands in the past. Stop repeating your rules over and over, reminding them of what they already know. You can state the rule once and then let it go, or better yet, ask them to state the rules for you.

SET UP AGREEMENTS AHEAD OF TIME

Whenever you want your child to do something, sit down with them and come up with an agreement together. Explain to them what you need from them and then ask for their agreement to follow thru. Talk with them about what it will look like when the task is accomplished and negotiate for the time the task will be started and completed. An agreement is only made when the child speaks the terms of the agreement, not just by the parent stating the rules.

LOVINGLY GUIDE THEM TO FOLLOW THRU

This one is my favorite. Once you have an agreement with a child there is no need to say anything about it again until it has been completed and you are giving them thanks for their cooperation for following thru. If you have discovered however, that they did not follow thru as agreed, go to the child and lovingly place your hand on their back and guide them to the location

where the agreed upon action was to take place. You do this without speaking and with a friendly look on your face. Once you get them to the location, walk away in silence. If they still don't complete the task, then you never had an agreement with them from the start. If it doesn't work the first few times, keep doing it anyway. I used this with all of my children AND my grandchildren and it worked. It takes time, practice, and your patience to make it work, and it works with children of all ages over the age of 2. The best part is that it may be even more effective with preteens and teens. Whenever I had set up an agreement with one of my teenage children and soon learned that they did not follow thru, I would come looking for them with a loving look on my face and my arm stretched out, ready to place my hand on their back. I remember with a chuckle how they would much rather complete a chore than to allow me to lovingly guide them to it. It still makes me laugh to remember my son exclaiming, "Dad... stay right where you are and don't come any closer! I'm going to do the chore right now!"

Bill Corbett is the author of the parenting class "Love, Limits, and Lessons," and the founder and president of Cooperative Kids. He has three grown children, two grandchildren, and lives with his wife Elizabeth near Hartford, Connecticut. Send him your questions via email to bill@CooperativeKids.com.