

Are you Training Your Children to Ignore You?

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“He never listens to me!”

“I have to say things 100 times!”

“It seems I have to yell louder and louder just to get his attention! It’s driving me nuts!”

We all want our kids to pay attention to us and to do what we ask. What we may not understand is that without realizing it we may have trained our children NOT to listen to us.

Children are little scientists. The world is their laboratory. As they play, they are learning about gravity and volume and the physics of motion. Through interactions, they are also learning about the social world and how it works. Every interaction is an experience that they draw conclusions from. We can ask ourselves, what do children learn from their interactions with US?

I have a client who complains that her son never listens to her. She yells up from the kitchen that it is time to come down to start homework. She keeps yelling but he does not move. He keeps playing. She does not move but she keeps yelling. What is her son learning?

A friend of mine calls out to her family that they are leaving to go to the park in 10 minutes. When ten minutes are up, the children are still playing and she has not yet gotten off the computer. She spends another 5 minutes finishing up what she is doing and then gets off the computer yelling, “I told you to be ready in 10 minutes!” She then takes the next ten minutes getting herself ready to leave AND pushing the rest of the family along. What are the children learning?

I would sometimes lecture my kids, telling them exactly the way things needed to be and why. I’d tell them my feelings about it. I’d even tell them what I thought their feelings should be about it! I thought I was being reasonable...I was logical... I was coherent.I was probably speaking to myself after the first sentence!! When logical, reasonable, maybe a little too long ☺ monologues began, what did my kids learn to do?

From their experiences living with us and interacting with us, our kids may learn a lot! Some of which is NOT what we had in mind! They may learn that we really don’t mean what we say...so why pay attention? They might learn that if they just can ignore our yelling, they can keep doing what they would like. Often they learn that five minutes really means 15 to 25 and they really don’t have to move until we are moving. When kids are not engaged in a back and forth conversation but are talked AT rather than talked WITH, they learn quickly that they can tune out...and do!

If you really want your kids to listen to you, make a concerted effort to stop training them to IGNORE you!! Here are five ideas that encourage them to ENGAGE with you, instead. When kids are engaged, they are connected and conscious. When they are connected and conscious, they are more likely to be cooperative. These ideas help you to set up situations in which kids learn that you mean what you say.

- 1) **SPEAK RATHER THAN YELL:** Go TO your child rather than yelling across a room, across the house or across the playground. Children are MUCH more likely to connect with what you are saying when you are right next to them. Make it a habit when you are asking for cooperation to get on to your child’s level, touch them and speak directly to

them. This is harder than you think! It takes practice but the rewards are almost immediate.

- 2) **BE READY:** Be ready *YOURSELF* BEFORE giving your kids the “We have 10 minutes” warning. Model what you would like to see in them...engagement in the process of getting ready and attention to what needs to be done. When you are focused and are ready ahead of time, you can use your energy to be proactive, and to coach them through the process of getting **THEMSELVES** ready. I can't tell you how much better this feels as a parent. It may take getting up earlier or disengaging from the computer before you would like to, but the results make it worth it!
- 3) **ASK RATHER THAN TELL:** Rather than telling your child what to do, tell them what the circumstances are and then **ASK** them a question. For example, “It is time to get ready for dinner.” The question to follow s may be:
 - What needs to happen now?
 - How long will it take you to get these blocks into the box? Do you need 4 minutes or five? Would you like me to time you?
 - What plan are you going to use to put the blocks away today?
 - Do you need help or can you do it on your own?

As you can see, some of the questions above are a choice. Giving kids choices allows them to feel as though they have some input, some empowerment in the situation and often makes cooperation easier for both of you.

- 4) **ASK FOR HELP:** When children understand that their efforts make a difference, they are more likely to help. When they are being helpful and feeling good about it, being cooperative just happens. So, if it is time to leave the park, you may want to tell them that there are five minutes more and they should go and do the “one more thing” that they would like to do. Then, go to them and tell them you could really use some help getting things to the car. Do they think they could handle the picnic basket or do they think could they manage the dog. By not having any more discussion about the actual leaving, you are teaching them that when you say it is time, it **IS** time. (You mean what you say) Then, it is just about how the child may be a part of the process.
- 5) **KEEP IT SHORT:** Refrain from your lectures, despite how “helpful” and “reasonable” they may be. You have 10 words to use before the average child's eyes glaze over. Use them wisely. Tell them what **TO** do, rather than what **NOT** to do. Use **LESS** than ten words if you can! One word when a child is getting ready for school may be best: “Teeth” for example, or “Shoes?” May work **MUCH** better than a mini lecture. **NO** words can also work...pantomiming may get a lot more attention and more giggles and compliance than a stern few sentences!

The next time your kids ignore what you say, ask yourself what lessons they might have been learning from their interactions with you. Try one or more of these five ideas to engage them and connect with them. You may find that they will begin to hear you better!

