

10 Ways to Support Your Children and Keep Your Cool

I frequently have parents ask what words teachers use to get their children to listen. Obviously, there is no failsafe way to communicate with children, simply because each child is different. However, there are some simple tips that we all use, that very well might help. Here is a list of my favorite 10 tips:

1. Keep it positive: Children respond best when we word our requests in the positive. Instead of telling them what we don't want them to do, we try to remind them of what we do want them to do. Instead of "don't run", try "walk." Instead of "don't hit the dog", try "be gentle with the dog." "Remember" replaces "don't forget." "Don't stand on the table" becomes "keep your feet on the floor." "Don't touch" becomes "That vase is just for you to look at." With a little practice, this starts to just come naturally.

2. Mean what you say: The first step to getting children to listen is by following through on your words with actions. We all know that. So, start with stating your expectations clearly. Frequently, adults say things like, "I don't think those rocks look safe. I am afraid that you might fall." This just opens the door for arguments or for your child to try to prove you wrong. If you want your child to stay off the rocks, say, "Please come off of those rocks. If you want to climb, there is a climbing structure right here."

3. Model the behavior that you want: We all want our children to be polite. The best way to get them to do this is by being that way ourselves. Resist the urge to prompt them to respond, model instead. When someone gives them something, give them a moment to respond. If they take the gift and don't respond with a thank you, turn them back towards the person, place your hand on their shoulder, and say the words yourself. As adults, our role is to teach social norms. Rather than prompting children to mumble "sorry," take an extra moment to teach them how to make amends. Explain to them, "when I hurt someone by mistake, I ask them how I can make them feel better."

And, of course, make sure that you use the very words that you want your children to use whenever appropriate.

4. Offer choices: One of the toughest things about being a child is how disempowered you feel. Adults control almost every aspect of your life. To help children gain back some power, offer them choices. "Do you want apples or oranges for lunch?" "Which of these three shirts would you like to wear?" "Would you like to climb into the car or shall I lift you in?"

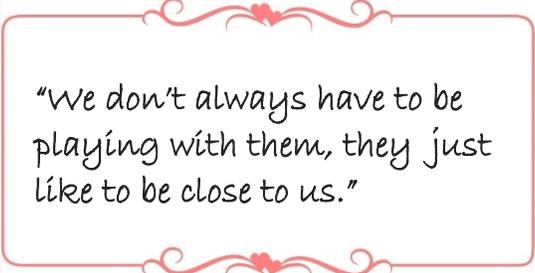
5. Pick your battles: Fighting is exhausting work for both children and adults. It is okay to

let some things go. What is most important to you? Decide what subjects are nonnegotiable and let the other stuff go. Brushing your teeth every night is a must. Taking a bath, not so much. Think about the issues that your child pushes back on, and figure out which battles

you can let go. It's okay for children to be dirty, to wear mismatched clothes, to skip a meal, to wear the same shirt three days in a row, to have knots in their hair, etc.

6. Under react whenever possible: A lot of times, children do things because they enjoy the attention and the reaction their actions bring. The less reaction they get, the less fun it can be. Our own children are particularly good at figuring out what really gets our goat, and pushing our buttons. Try to suppress your big reactions, and downplay their effect on you. This doesn't mean ignore it. Just shut it down calmly. Evaluate the situation. Is it an emergency? Or is it just annoying? Running into the street is an emergency. Dropping a full glass of milk on the floor is just a mess. Leap across the room for the first, let the latter happen. Then, have them help you clean it up.

7. Listen to what they're really saying: Words are just words. As adults, we know that some of them hold more power than others, because of the visceral reaction they create. Children are stilling figuring this out. Most of the



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time, when they hurl horrible words at you, what they are really saying is that they are angry, frustrated, and feeling powerless. Empathize with the emotions behind the words, and respond accordingly. When they scream, "I hate you! I wish you were dead!", try responding with, "Wow. You sound very angry and frustrated. It's okay to be mad, but you still need to get ready for bed."

8. Keep quiet: As adults, we have years of experience. We know that glasses placed on the edge of the table are going to get knocked off onto the floor. We understand how gravity and physics work. We know that it's colder outside than it looks. We do our part in warning our children about what is coming. Sometimes, they want to do things their own way. We need to resist the urge to follow up natural consequences with lectures and "I told you so!" The lesson has been learned. No need to hammer the point home.

9. Let them be close: We all enjoy our alone time. Sometimes we just want our children to go off and play in the other room, so that we can get things done. However, our children love us. They enjoy our company, and enjoy being near by. When they don't want to go play in the other room, try to accommodate their need to be close, by setting up activities that they can do beside you. Maybe they can help you prepare for dinner. Or, maybe they can just sit next to you and look at some books. Can they do a puzzle at the table while you answer email? Can they color with crayons while you pay bills? We don't always have to be playing with them, they just like to be close to us.

10. Take a moment: At the end of the day, children are often beastly because they feel unimportant. What they want more than anything is our attention. And they will behave in all sorts of terrible or annoying ways to get it. The more they demand, the more we think of the 124 other things that we are falling behind in. We have a need to get things done, and they are masters at blocking our progress. Just the same, it is important to take a minute or two to give them what they need. Work on balancing things out. Practice giving in a little. "I can see that you are very emotional today. Why don't we take a minute to be together? I will read you a book/play a game/sit and cuddle you for 10 minutes. After that, I have to make dinner." Give them some one-on-one attention, then get back to your busy life.

Bekke Howell
Head of School

