

Kids Won't Listen? 8 Ways to Get Them To Hear You

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A parenting complaint I hear time and again in my practice is that “my kids just won't listen!”

So what do you do when you have tried explaining, reasoning, reminding, distracting, ignoring, punishing, shaming, bribing — and even begging — but nothing works? Have you just got a bad egg? A future deviant? Is there no hope for your little monster?

Don't worry, help is at hand. Shown below are some proven techniques I have used with many families, including those with children who have been diagnosed with [ADHD](#), ODD, and Aspergers. They get parents to really start thinking about why their child isn't listening to them, and how they can turn that around and restore peace to their home.

1. Listen to Them

If you want your child to listen to you then you first need to start listening to them. By this I mean **really** listening, both to their verbal and non-verbal language. Are they out of sorts? Are they overwhelmed, frustrated, unhappy with something?

Don't put them in situations that they can't handle just because you feel they 'should' — if they don't like shopping then find a way to do it without them, if they struggle in big groups then avoid those, if they don't like strangers talking to them talk for them, if they become fidgety in restaurants only use drive-thru's or take-aways. We wouldn't dream of forcing a friend to a concert if they hated loud noise or crowds, so why do it to our children?

Help them navigate and figure out their world in comfort and, when you miss the early signs that they aren't happy then respond gently. Punishing or ignoring our child when they have a loud emotion (ie. what many parents describe as a 'tantrum' or a 'meltdown') is an opportunity to apologize to our child that we didn't notice they were uncomfortable, to find out what is behind their behaviour, and to try to fix what is often an unmet need.

2. Be Reliable

Do you always say what you mean with your child? Do you make a plan and stick to it? 'I won't be long', 'I'll bring you some cake home today', 'You can watch that tomorrow', 'You can have that after dinner' — typical, seemingly innocent 'promises' that we fully mean at the time but end up breaking because we are busy or our minds are elsewhere. However, to a child, breaking these 'promises' erodes trust and eventually they will stop listening to what we have to say.

3. Be Honest

Are you someone who is always honest with and around your children? Do you ever knowingly tell them 'white lies' to appease them like, 'We'll come back tomorrow', 'We'll get that game another day', 'I have no money in my purse right now', 'Tell the lady I'm not home', 'The shop was closed', 'Don't tell your brother I got you that'?

Those little lies build up and, children aren't stupid, they work out quickly if mum and dad are people who tell lies or people who have integrity. Why should they listen to someone who doesn't always tell the truth? Would you?

4. Be Accurate

Motivated by our fear that our kids will get hurt, we tell them all sorts of things and present them as fact just to get them to comply. ‘You will fall if you go any higher’, ‘If you eat sweets your teeth will fall out’, ‘McDonald’s is poison and will make you sick’, ‘That movie will give you [nightmares](#)’, ‘Video games fry your brain’, ‘Smoking will kill you’.

When these ‘facts’ turn out to not be true, but just a matter of opinion, mum and dad will become a less sought after source of advice. That can be pretty dangerous when they then turn to peers for advice in their teenage years. By all means, share your views on certain things with your kids but, if you want them to continue listening to you, be wary of scaremongering and giving advice as ‘fact’ – state your case as your opinion and help them explore other people’s viewpoints and their own.

5. Be Playful

Playing with our kids, especially side-by-side activity, is a great way to get kids talking. And, as we have already discussed, the best way to get our children to listen to us is to listen to them. Don’t expect them to join you in your world doing things you like, but join them in theirs. What do they love? Why? Get engrossed in their latest game, book, sport, craft that they love, in their space, and share it with them and watch the communication just flow.

6. Reduce the ‘No’s’ and Find the ‘Yes’s’

If someone said no to your requests numerous times a day how would you feel about that person? Would you feel like complying when they asked something of you? No, neither would I. If your child requests something that isn’t agreeable to you (for non-arbitrary reasons) then rather than providing an outright no — try and ‘find the yes’ and offer acceptable alternatives to both of you.

This shows you are really listening to them, and are trying to help them.

For example, if your child wants a toy and you can’t afford it, rather than say an outright no you could say, ‘Sure, let’s put it on the wish list and work out ways we can buy it’. Do you have anything you can sell or trade? What about a second-hand one? Let’s work out ways we can save up for it’.

Another example of this is if your child wanted to color on the walls, then an alternative to reprimand is to explain that this would damage the house and *you* like it nice, explore why they want to color on the walls, then suggest an acceptable alternative. We may find out that they would be just as happy to do chalk drawings in the yard, draw on the garage wall, on the fence, or in the kitchen on a large piece of butcher’s paper.

Showing them you are always on their side, trying to find ways to help them, will strengthen their trust in you and set you up as partners rather than adversaries.

7. ‘No’ is an acceptable answer

So many parents say to me ‘yeah, but sometimes I really do have to say no and when I do I need him to just listen’. This may be a ‘No!’ or ‘Stop!’ to serious issues such as hitting a sibling, swearing or screaming in public, or doing something seriously dangerous. Often these can be avoided by being fully present and mindful of the situations we put our child into, but not always.

When it does happen it is far more likely for our child to respond to a firm ‘no’ or ‘stop’ if they are few and far between, and we ourselves accept it when they say ‘no’ to us. Conventional parenting tells us it is rude and disrespectful for a child to say ‘no’ to a request from a parent, or any adult for that matter. However, isn’t it more disrespectful of adults to not accept a ‘no’ just because they are a child? The more we accept ‘no’ as an acceptable answer, the more likely our child is to respond to a ‘no’ from us, and to say ‘yes’ intrinsically rather than out of fear, duty or compliance.

8. Be informative.

If you follow all the above steps with your child, you will eventually find that providing them with information, feedback, and advice — rather than demands or orders — will result in them listening to you. However, don't always expect them to comply with your request — just as you do with them, they may say no but suggest acceptable alternatives to you both.

These techniques will not produce a compliant child, and nor should you want them to, but it will help to produce a reasoning, thoughtful, free-thinking child that has a strong connection with his/her parents, which is something we should all be striving for.