



"Massive Minds, Huge Hearts, Guided by God"

Getting Children to Listen

Why is it that as parents we can ask children over and over again to do something but they don't seem to hear us? Parents can feel like they are nagging which can be very frustrating for both parents and children. Sometimes it can end up in parents yelling in the hope that children will listen.

Frustrations

One of our biggest frustrations as a parent can be our children not listening to us. We can ask them to do something, we can nag them, ask them twenty million times and they just don't do it. And then we end up getting frustrated, lose control and shout. And when we do that we are not actually parenting at our best, and we are also not showing our children and role modelling what is good effective communication.

As parents we can be really good at telling our children what to do. We can be giving them orders all day - 'Do this', 'Do that', 'Hurry up!'. Just like we don't like to be told what to do every moment of every day, our children really don't like it either.

Impact

When we are telling the children off all the time you will notice that:

- Children stop listening. They just tune out when they hear the constant "wah-wah-wah". They are not really listening and taking it in.
- When we are telling them off or giving them orders all the time we are also not listening to our children. We are not allowing them to have a voice and we are not hearing them from their perspective.
- We are also not allowing our children to listen to themselves and to hear themselves, and then to think and speak their own mind.

We do really need to tell our children what they need to do from time to time, and there is a way to do it well.

Engage

The first thing we really need to do is really connect with our child. We need to go to them, get their attention, make eye contact and then make a really calm and reasonable request. We can also give a simple explanation why we would like them to do something we have asked them to do. For example, it may be that we need to be

at work a little bit early that day so that's why we need to get ready now. 'Could you please put your shoes on? Can you please get your bag ready? Let's go'.

For effective communication, listening is equally as important, if not more important than telling. Our children have their own desires and priorities, and they might be different to our desires and priorities, which means they don't want to leave what they are doing right now and come with us. When we listen we really allow ourselves to understand the situation better. It also helps us to come up with what is a more reasonable request. Because children really do have an understanding of the whole situation, not just our agenda.

The other thing that really helps with listening is, instead of just telling, telling, telling all the time, it really helps if we ask our children questions. When we ask our children questions it helps them to cooperate and also increases our understanding of what really is going on. We might storm into the room and start barking orders, and that's not really understanding what is going on. We can ask our children 'What happened?', 'How do you feel?', 'What do you think is a solution to this problem?' When we ask our children questions like that, we involve them in the problem solving. And with them coming up with the solution, they manage themselves and their behaviour better.

It also helps to give our children choices. But when you give children choices you have to make sure they are actually real choices.

- If you want your child to eat vegetables with dinner you don't ask 'Do you want vegetables with your dinner?' You say 'Which two vegetables would you like to have tonight?'
- If you want your child to go outside and play you don't say; 'Do you want to go for a bike ride?' Instead you say 'Should we go for a bike ride or a walk, or should we go down to the playground?'
- You can also give your children choice around screen time. You can say 'Now right, OK, you have an hour of screen time. Do you want to watch some TV, or do you want to get on the iPad and play some games, or do you want to play the Xbox?'

When you give your children choices it helps them to self-reflect and develop their own sense of self understanding.

Family Rules / Boundaries

We all have a family culture at home. Our family culture is all about 'This is how things are done around here'. Our rituals and routines are really what makes up our family culture, and when we have rituals and routines, we don't have to do as much telling. If our children know what the morning routine is, or what they need to do before bed, they can just go ahead and do it without us having to tell them.

Family rules work well when they are based on your family values. And they are something that you can develop together with your children. You can decide what your family values are and what the rules are at your house, and also what consequences might happen if people don't stick to the rules.

If, as a family, you value respect then you have the family rule of not hitting or yelling in our house. If you value communication, that's when everyone gets a say in your house, everyone has a voice. If you value responsibility that's when there are family rules about everyone helping out, doing chores, everyone taking on their own responsibilities.

Family meetings are also a really good way to install your family values and to talk about your family rules. You could meet once a week over dinner and have a chat about what went really well that week, what needs to improve and also what you are looking forward to. Family meetings also give you time to come together and connect, and celebrate all the good things that are happening in your family. It may be that you all sit down together for dinner every evening, that way you all have time to talk and listen every day.

It can be so frustrating when we feel like our kids are not listening to us. The more you develop your relationship with your child, the more likely they are likely to listen to you. It's about developing that strong relationship and connection to them so they want to cooperate.

When you ask children questions, when you give them options, when you see their perspective and really listen to what is going on for them, it really helps your kids to have more agency and want to be a part of family life. It also helps children to think for themselves so that they are not always relying on us to tell them what to do all the time.

When we have family rituals, when we have family rules that are based on our values, and also family meetings which are regular check-in times, we are really creating that family culture where kids understand what is expected of them. 'This is what we do in our family', and you don't need to tell them all the time what to do.

You can get further advice and information from:

- School
- School Nurse
- <https://parentingsmart.place2be.org.uk/article/building-up-your-listening-skills>
- <https://parentingsmart.place2be.org.uk/article/my-child-just-says-no-to-everything>
- <https://www.positiveparentingsolutions.com/parenting/get-kids-to-listen>
- <https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/> Attribution to: The Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Government of South Australia, Community Engagement, Sourced on 14/12/2021, <https://parenting.sa.gov.au/easy-guides>