

Does your child sometimes “just not listen”?

What could you do when you have tried explaining, reasoning, reminding, distracting, ignoring, punishing, shaming, bribing — and even begging — but nothing works? Shown below are some proven techniques to help 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. 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. 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?

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'.

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? 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? 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'. 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

This may be a 'No!' or 'Stop!' to serious issues such as hitting a sibling, 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 your child to respond to a firm 'no' or 'stop' if they are less frequent.

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.

