



FAMILY *Matters*

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Why don't my children listen and do what I say the first time?

This is a common complaint I hear from parents. Many parents with this concern were likely raised in *authoritarian* households where immediate compliance was expected. So when children don't comply quickly, parents become frustrated based on their expectation for immediate compliance. This is a good example of how the childhood experiences of a parent can affect their current parenting style.

Here are two considerations. First, parenting styles have changed over the past 20-30 years to a more *democratic* style. This style leaves some room for discussion and debate between the parent and child but limits are ultimately set. There is research evidence that the *democratic* style of parenting correlates with better social, emotional, behavioral and academic outcomes for children.

Second, children have an innate tendency to want to do what is fun and enjoyable. It is their own biological urges that contribute to their desire to do what is fun rather than chores and responsibilities. This does not mean that parents should let their children do whatever they want, but rather children need to be taught over time, that there is a time for enjoyment and a time for other responsibilities.

Many parents have reported success with the following techniques:

- Don't make requests from afar, i.e. across a room. Stand in front of the child, make good eye contact and make your request. Ask the child to repeat your request and then let the child know the timeframe for getting the task done. Monitor their actions and remind them as needed.
- Understand that it is normal for children to resist. Children often don't like to get ready for bed because that usually means the fun is over for the day. Don't be upset by it, rather manage it by using the

"dangle it" approach. Most parents know what their children like to do or enjoy, so connect that to their compliance. For example, ask your child to do a less desirable task first before doing the more desirable task. After completing the less desirable

task they then have earned the ability to do the more desirable task. Specifically, "after you turn off the TV, brush your teeth and put on your pajamas, I will be happy to read your favorite bedtime story." Presenting the request positively typically increases the chance of success. Some children may

still resist and if so, simply remind them of the condition and say "Did you want that bedtime story," most will respond yes, then remind them of what they need to do to make that happen. Be careful not to present it as a threat such as "if you don't do it, then you lose a bedtime story." It should be presented as a "yes you can if you do the following" approach.

- Praise children for complying with your requests. Over time, this approach can build positive feelings about cooperation. Many parents forget to compliment because they believe kids are "supposed to comply." This belief is often counterproductive and often leads to unnecessary power struggles and conflicts.

Learning effective parenting techniques can help all members of the family get along better and reduce family stress. The major goal of working with parents is to help parents find a good fit between parenting style and the personality/needs of their child. This positive parent intervention can positively affect how well their children develop to become productive members of society.



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