

Healthy Family Healthy Child Project: Getting children to listen to you

By Megan Hawley, HFHCP Social Service Advocate

Meet Jacob, an active 4-year-old who can be the sweetest little guy, but his mother has a difficult time getting him to listen to her requests.

Jacob can be very defiant and challenging for his mother and she doesn't know how to get him to listen. His mother dreads to hear his favorite phrase, "No, I don't want to!" while he clings to his toys even more after she has asked him to come to the dinner table several times.

This is often seen as a child who is disobedient, but this is not the only reason a child may not listen. Jacob and his mother are not alone in their struggles.

In every relationship, communication stands as the most important, if not the only, way of interacting with each other. Positive communication can lead to a happy healthy life, but negative communication can have devastating effects that often lead to verbal abuse.

In the parent-child relationship, the importance of communication is not different. In this article, I will discuss how to better communicate with our children in a way that will get them to listen. I also

will discuss why it is not necessary to be critical of our children.

There certainly have been times when I have been in tricky situations with children who are at the point in their lives where they would like to "test" the limits of discipline. I will admit I used to be a pushover when it came to taking care of children, so they tended to like me. I didn't feel great about myself.

After learning effective ways to get children to listen over the years, I have been able to use these approaches to get what is best for both of us. Getting our children to listen can be an incredible feat to conquer, but several techniques exist that can effectively get your children to finally do as you ask.

These techniques include being consistent; getting closer; speaking firmly, not loudly; presenting a command as a command and not a question; asking for reasonable requests; going through with your words; not giving too many options; praising; and above all, listening.

These are skills that can be used not only by parents, but by teachers, other professionals, baby sitters/nannies, neighbors and grandparents.

Consistency

It may sound simple, but consistency is such an incredible way to take control of our lives and get your children to listen.

Be consistent with a daily schedule of routines. For example, an after-school routine can include the following: Kids arrive home from school, homework time, dinner time, bath time, play/TV time, reading and bedtime.

If children know they eventually will get play/TV time after they get everything else done, then it causes less conflict and the chances are lower that they will argue.

Being consistent with rules is also very important. If you say that curfew is 10 p.m. for your teenager on the weekend, it should be enforced. Exceptions can be made, however, for such things as a movie that gets out late.

If children break the rule or don't communicate, it would make sense that they don't get to do something the next night or they may have to come home even earlier. This way, the punishment fits the crime.

Follow through. Don't just say you are going to take your children's crayons away several times if they don't stop coloring on the walls. Instead say, "The walls are not for coloring on, paper is for coloring on." If the child persists, take the crayons away right then, not next time.

Proximity

If you need your child to get something done, don't yell for them to get out the door with their football gear by yelling, "Hurry up, we're going to be late!" This will probably do just that and make you late anyway.

Instead, help your child get things done beforehand and have a designated place to store items so you both always know where they are. Also, instead of yelling up the hallway, physically go to their room and help them get going. This will save a lot of time and they actually

will hear you when you are looking them in the eye.

Be appropriate

Being appropriate is an issue I see often. Some parents will ask impossible things of their children and become furious with them if they are unable to complete the request.

For example, it's nearly impossible – and unsafe – for a 3-year-old to bring you the cereal from the top cupboard shelf. Know what an appropriate request is for your child; this may take some reading on the abilities children possess at their different development stages.

Depending on a child's age, his or her development will vary greatly. Being able to understand where a child is developmentally will help parents establish developmentally appropriate practices with their child.

One issue I constantly see from parents is this fear that picking up your 3-month-old child when she cries will produce negative results – this is not true.

What some parents don't realize is that crying is the only way an infant can communicate. Crying is just another way that she is trying to tell you something – she may be hungry, having sensory overload (as her senses are still developing) or she might be teething.

You as a parent also can control how to pick your battles with your child. It is up to you to control how reactive you get when your child makes a mistake.

Instead of getting up in flames about children spilling their dinner all over the floor, simply tell them that, "We must be more careful." If they are old enough, have them clean it up or even help them clean it up so they know how to properly clean it up the next time.

Don't ask questions; if you must, don't ask too many

It is much more effective if you tell your children to do something rather than ask them if they want to do something.

In the text, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, the premise of this idea is displayed beautifully. The book discusses cultural issues in the classroom and the way a teacher addresses the student is said to be a factor in the way that student responds.

This can be used as a parenting tool as well. Instead of asking your child, "After you are done, do you want to eat dinner?" you should make it more clear and state, "After you are done playing with your blocks, in five minutes, you need to wash your hands and come in for dinner."

I'll admit at first when I changed my approach to this more assertive one, I was wary if the children would listen, but after a while I got used to it and so did they.

Praise

Praise is the best way to help parents and children boost their self-esteem.

Notice the good things your child does. When children find that if they do something good, their parent/guardian notices this act and they are rewarded for it with praise, it makes them feel good and they will be more likely to do it again.

It is important to remember that positive reinforcement can be done without bribing. This can be described best by using a sports analogy.

If you are a basketball player and every time you make a basket the crowd cheers and hollers at you for joy, it is going to build your self-esteem and you might even say to yourself, "Whoa, listen to that! I can totally win this game!"

Simply said, when your children feel you appreciate their efforts, they will believe they have the ability to accomplish goals and this will lead them into adulthood with confidence.

Don't be so hard on your children. Constantly criticizing your children can be very damaging to their self-esteem.

The intentions of critiquing our children are usually good, but oftentimes parents can get carried away with trying to make their children "perfect." Ideally, you should say many more positive things to your children than negative.

"Guilt-tripping" is another destructive approach I witness a lot with parents and their children.

I will see a parent say something like, "Well, it looks like you managed to get yourself dressed on your own today, good job. Too bad you didn't choose the dress I said you should; you would look a lot better."

This is essentially a psychological game that you have just played with your child. If you are proud of your child, be proud of your child.

Listen

Lastly, take the time and actually listen to your child. This may sound incredibly simple, but when you start to lose your patience, you lose the ability to be a responsive listener.

Take the time to respect your children and listen to why they missed the bus and now why you have to take them to school. Listening will help you and your child to find solutions for the next time.

Stop yelling! This is a huge issue in parenting and is often the first thing we try to do in desperate measures. I will go into this subject more in the next article and will provide solutions to breaking the habit of yelling and reducing its damaging effects.

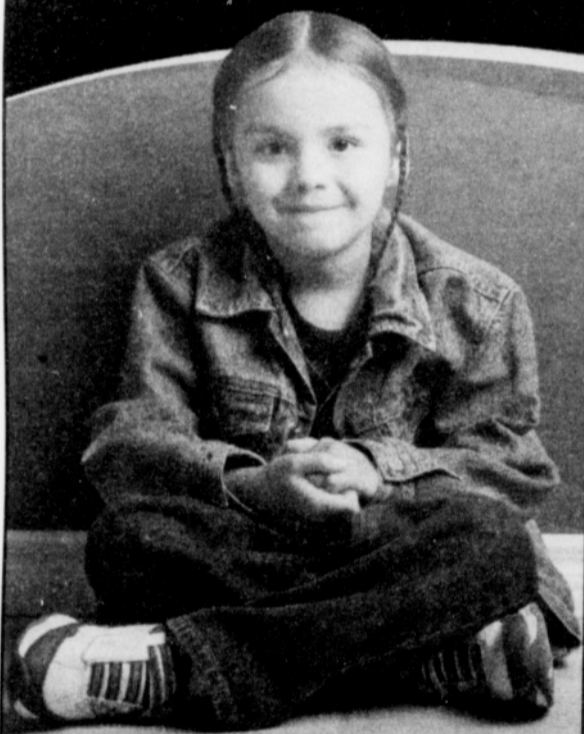
By reading this article, I hope you were able to find solutions to some issues you may be having in your home. Please feel free to contact me at 541-444-8262, or 800-922-1399, ext. 1262; or e-mail meganh@ctsi.nsn.us if you have a parental question or other issue you would like to see in a future article.

Vet rep asks Tribal veterans to call in

All Siletz Tribal veterans are asked to call Tony Molina, Honor Guard director and Tribal veterans representative, to verify their DD214s and enrollment numbers so he can process their names to be placed on the Veterans Memorial on Government Hill.

Molina can be reached at 541-444-8330 or 800-922-1399, ext. 1330.

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