

How Do I Get My Kids to Cooperate?

Ten Tips, Tricks, & Techniques to Gain Children's Cooperation – Without Nagging, Hagging, or Bribing!



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INTRODUCTION



When I was asked to write “Ten Ways to Get Kids to Cooperate” I excitedly picked up pencil and paper and began scribbling furiously. As some of the ideas began to crystallize, it dawned on me: All these techniques involve respect, communication, and fun. Aren’t those the basic cornerstones of any cooperative relationship at any age? Children are complete human beings with the same intelligence and emotions as anyone else. They may be smaller, less mature, and less sophisticated, but the same mechanisms work within these “little people.” However, since this list is meant for kids, it is child oriented and fun. Here are ten ways to gain children’s cooperation.

1) Talk on their level



I mean this literally. Crouch down so that you are on eye level and can talk directly with the child. When you are talking to a child and want him or her to really hear you, you need to be able to make eye contact (a generally good social skill regardless of age). This is particularly helpful when children are upset, because the physical gesture shows you are talking with them, as opposed to talking down to them. Put your hand gently on their shoulder, or pat their head. This too promotes connection and is also soothing and reassuring.

Talking on their level also means describing the task in a way that the child will understand. Give clear step-by-step instructions of what you expect to occur. Say, for example, “First we are going to brush our teeth, and then we are going to bed.” If your child asks “why,” or says, “but I don’t want to,” it helps to give reasons that create a positive sense of responsibility. “We need to clean up because this is *our* house, and we need to take care of it.” Speak in such a way that your kid gets it.

2) Flex and Tone



Recognize the need to be flexible regarding the timing of your requests. If a child is tired or hungry, he or she is less likely to be receptive. Wait until after the child has napped, ate, or has had his or her needs taken care of.

Every parent should have a repertoire of “voices.” Use a different tone to show you mean business, you’re prepared to have a great time, or you’re just plain proud, just to use some examples. It’s important to use variation and the right approach to each situation. Be flexible. Don’t overuse any particular voice, even if it’s seemingly positive. Assess the situation, choose the right voice, and say what you need to. If the tone you used was not helpful, it’s okay to switch. You can switch to “I mean business” if you came over too soft or “I care about you” if you came across to harsh, for example.

3) *Be a part of their world*



This doesn't mean becoming your child's friend as opposed to being the parent. Some parents mistakenly befriend their children and then wonder why it is so hard to obtain compliance and respect. Rather, children, like adults, are more cooperative with someone who shows a real interest in them and their world.

Join your child on the floor and play a game. Snuggle on the couch and read a book. Talk about their day. Hug. Your child will want to listen to you and please you when he or she feels understood and connected with you.

4) *Divert and distract*



When your child is stuck on a particular issue and won't listen to you, don't get into a power struggle. Change the subject or say, "I see you are upset. Let's talk about it a little later" - then talk about something else. This is a powerful tool that can be helpful to your child throughout life. Instead of getting "stuck," the child can learn to move away from the issue, than later revisit it when he or she is calmer and better equipped to deal

with it.

Another form of distraction involves physically moving. Ask your child to switch from standing to sitting, or tell him or her to walk into the next room. This physical action creates a shift in your child's energy, which allows him or her to better deal with the situation.

5) Validate, then call the shot



Use this three-step process when your child just doesn't want to listen but quite frankly needs to: Listen, validate, and then call the shots. *Listen:* Allow your child to express him or herself. Then repeat and reflect so that they know you really heard them. "So you don't want to go to school because you are too tired." *Validate:* "I hear you. It's not easy when you are tired." *Call the shots:* "Still sometimes we have to do things even though it's hard."

For some kids the three-step process will be enough. If a meltdown ensues just say, "I know it's hard, but you still have to do it." Then repeat it like a mantra "I know it's so hard when you are so tired." Make sure your child knows that you feel for him or her and that understand how hard it is. Sometimes they need to hear something three to five times before it sinks in. The important part is that the child feels heard.

6) Win /Win



One of the problems with power struggles is that each side wants to win. Fortunately this *is* possible. Give children choices. Allow your child to choose between a few acceptable options, such as two acceptable outfits or two healthy lunches. Do not give too many options because this can become confusing.

If your child insists on something that is not acceptable to you, you can still use this technique: "You have to go to sleep. You can walk, or I can carry you to your room." This allows the child to feel some sense of control even though he did not get to stay up late. A fringe benefit of this technique is that it encourages children to think for themselves and practice making good decisions. Do not underestimate the long-term benefits of healthy decision-making skills.

7) Mastery



Don't you feel good at the end of a project or after an accomplished day? Your child does too! The two most important contributors to a healthy self-esteem in children are feeling loved and feeling a sense of accomplishment. Give your child this gift by allowing him or her to do age-appropriate tasks on his or her own.

You may need to offer supervision if the task exceeds the child's age level or competency. For instance, supervise a young child who wants to use scissors or help around the kitchen. This gives the child a sense of self-sufficiency and promotes confidence.

8) Glass Half Full



Make sure to emphasize positives. "It's really great that you listened to Mommy," or, "good job." Your child will be more likely to comply if he or she feels good about what he or she is doing. Your child will enjoy the validation and will want to please you.

Sometimes this is difficult to do, especially when a child is trying your patience. In reality the child wants attention, connection, and interaction with you. Negative attention and discipline is still interaction. Don't turn a blind eye when a situation that requires discipline arises. Just make sure that your kid hears more than enough appreciation and praise to counteract the criticism. These positive messages will reinforce those positive behaviors.

9) "Do as I Do"



Often parents want their kids to do things that they themselves have a hard time with. "Do as I say, not as I do" *does not work*. If you want your child to cooperate with cleaning his or her room, yours needs to be orderly. If you want your child to eat healthy, go to prayer services, or speak politely, *you* need to model these behaviors.

If you want your child to have certain values, work on thoroughly embodying those ideas. Children will not integrate and respect behaviors unless you live by the same set of rules consistently and authentically.

10) On the same page



Besides for calculus, there is probably nothing more confusing than one child, two parents, and six methods of communication. Parents must have a consistent form of discipline. If your spouse says it is okay to stay up late and you say it is not, you will have a very hard time convincing your child to go to bed on time. Naturally the child is going to go with whoever is easier on him or her. Even if you have different points of view, make sure to work them out with your spouse before you discipline or give directions to your child. This will ensure your child cannot try you in his or her court of law and pit one parent against the other.

Most importantly, enjoy your children. Happy parenting!

***Do you have special tips or tricks that work for your family?
Share your ideas here: <http://www.raisingmallsouls.com/ten-tips>***