

How Do I Get My Kids to Cooperate?

Ten Tips, Tricks, & Techniques to Gain Children's Co-operation – Without Nagging, Haggling, or Bribing!



Compiled by: Ellen C. Braun

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INTRODUCTION:



When I began to write “Ten Ways to get Kids to Co-operate”, I excitedly picked up my pencil and lined paper and began scribbling furiously.

As some of the ideas began to crystallize more, it dawned on me: ALL these techniques involve respect, communication, and fun. Aren't those the basic cornerstones of ANY co-operative relationship at ANY age?

My belief is that children are complete human beings with all the same intelligence and emotions as anyone else. They may be smaller, less mature, and less sophisticated, but the same mechanisms are at work within these “little people”. However, since this list IS meant for kids, it is intentionally more child oriented and fun. Here are ten ways to gain children's co-operation.

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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 them 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 a child is upset, because the physical gesture symbolizes coming toward them, and talking WITH them, as apposed to talking DOWN TO them. Put your hand gently on their shoulder, or pat their head. This too promotes connection, and can be soothing and reassuring.

Talking on their level also means describing the task in a way that the child will understand. It is effective to give a clear step by step account of what you expect to occur, for example: “First we are going to brush our teeth, then we are going to bed.” If your child asks “why“, or “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 on the child’s level in 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, they are 10 times more likely to have a meltdown, or otherwise be difficult. If this is the case, wait until after the child napped, ate, slept etc.

When making the request every parent has to have their repertoire of “voices”. There is the “I mean business” tone, the “Wow- it will be so much fun” tone, the “I would be so proud” tone, to mention just a few. It’s important to have variation, and the right approach to each situation. Be flexible.

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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 ok to switch. You can use "I mean Business" if it came over too soft, or "I care about you" if it came across to harsh etc.

3) Be a part of their world.



I am not suggesting becoming your child's friend as apposed to the parent. Some parents mistakenly befriend their children and then wonder why it is so hard to obtain compliance and respect. I am pointing out that children (like adults) tend to behave more co-operatively with someone that takes 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 take more of an interest in listening to you, and pleasing you when they feel connected with, and understood.

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, lets 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.

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Instead of getting “stuck” the child can learn to move away from the issue, than later revisit when they are less upset and better equipped to deal with it.

Another form of distraction involves physically moving. Ask your child to switch from standing to sitting, or walking into the next room. This physical action creates a shift, in your child's energy, which allows them to better deal with the situation. You may choose to move into an unusual setting, such as the laundry room, or guest room, in order to facilitate the change in attitude which often accompanies the change in setting.

5) Validate, then call the shot.



There is a three step process when your child just doesn't want to listen, and quit frankly- needs to. The steps are: listen, validate, than call the shot.

Listen. Allow your child to express themselves. 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., its not easy when you are tired.”

Call the shot. “Still sometimes we got 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 go”. Then repeat like a mantra “I know it's so hard when you are sooo tired” Make sure your child knows that you feel for them, and understand how hard it is. Sometimes they need to hear 3-5 times before it sinks in. The important part is that the child feels heard even though it's hard.

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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 the 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/ her to do age appropriate tasks on their own.

You may need to offer supervision if the task seems a little above the child's age level or competency. For instance, a young child who wants to use scissors, or help around the kitchen can gain from the assistance of a nearby adult. This gives the child a sense of self efficacy, and promotes confidence while acting as a responsible parent.

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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/ she feels good about what they are 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 are still forms of 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 co-operate with cleaning his room, yours needs to be orderly. If you want your child to eat healthy, go to prayer services, speak politely etc. *You* need to model these behaviors for your child.

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

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10) On the same page.



Besides for calculus there is probably nothing more confusing than 1 child, 2 parents, and 6 methods of communication. Parents must have a consistent form of discipline. If one parent says it is ok to stay up late and the other says 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 them. Even if you have different point of views 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/her court of law and put one parent against the other.

Most Importantly- Enjoy your children!!! Happy parenting!!!

P.S. Do you have special tips or tricks that work for your family? Share your ideas here:

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