

# Getting Cooperation from your Kids

As parents we want our children to cooperate. With a supportive and respectful approach the spirit of cooperation can grow, while children maintain and develop their sense of self and self esteem.

## GOLDEN RULES

- Make your instructions very clear and make sure your child understands what it is you would like them to do.
- Make sure your child has heard you.
- Check your expectations. Are you being reasonable in what you expect from your child?
- Listen to your child, they may have a good reason for not complying with your request. You may need to negotiate.
- If your child does not like what you have asked them to do, you may need to let them have some time and space to gripe and groan and express their feelings (however, you don't have to listen to it).
- Choose your battles. What really matters? Do I want to set a firm limit here, or is it not worth struggling about?
- Choose your approach. Are my words going to cause confrontation or cooperation? To raise humane children we need to use humane methods. Our interactions influence the kind of children they become.

## TO ENGAGE A CHILD'S COOPERATION

### Describe what you see or describe the problem

*"There's a wet towel on my bed."*

This eliminates accusation that can lead to defensiveness and non-cooperation. When adults describe the problem, it gives children the chance to tell themselves what to do. They can usually work out what needs to be done. Says to the child *"I see you as a person who is capable of helping herself"*.

### Say it with a word

*"The towel!"*

The shorter the reminder the better. With long lectures, children become 'parent-deaf'. Addresses the situation not the child. Gives the child a chance to use her initiative. When the child hears *'the dog'* they have to think *"What about the dog? Oh yes, he needs to be fed"*.

### Give information

*"The towel is making my bed wet."*

Information is easier to take than accusation.

### State your expectations and then leave the child to do it.

*"I expect you to hang the towel up."*

The child maintains their dignity and finds it easier to cooperate.

### Describe what you feel

*"This isn't a good time for me to look at your homework. I am tense and distracted. After dinner, I'll be able to give it the attention it deserves"*.

It can be helpful for children to hear their parents real feelings. By describing what we feel we can be genuine without being hurtful. Children who have their feelings respected are likely to respect their parents feelings.

Caution: some children are sensitive and strong statements such as *"I feel furious when you do that"* are too much. For such children, you can state your expectations. Instead of *"I am furious that you pulled the cat's tail"*, you could say *"I expect you to be kind to animals"*.

### Write a note

Children like receiving notes. Teenagers say *"notes don't get any louder"*. It is a quick and easy way to get through to a child.



## Give a choice

“*Would you like to have a bath or shower?*”  
We select the possibilities, the child chooses.  
Helps children feel competent about making decisions and solving problems.

## Use “As soon as ...” or “When...”

Instead of “*If you don’t get in the bath now, there will be no story*” use “*As soon as..*” or “*When..*”.  
“*As soon as you have bathed, we can read a story.*”

## Frame requests and instructions in the positive rather than the negative.

For example, rather than saying “*Don’t run indoors*” say something like “*I would like you to walk indoors*”.

## Speak only when you expect a response and only say it if you mean it

Talk softly and face to face, then children learn to do the same. Yelling from another room seldom gets the desired response. There is no point in making idle threats. If your child learns from experience that you don’t mean what you say, they will just ignore you.

## Use “No” as seldom as possible

Some alternatives to “No”:

- Give information
- Accept feelings
- Describe the problem
- Begin with a “Yes”
- Give yourself time to think

When using “No”, be firm and consistent.

## Use problem solving

Involve your children in looking for a solution. This will ensure a greater degree of cooperation.

## Start over

“*Let’s erase what just happened and start again*”. Use sparingly.

## Humour

Use different voices or characters.

## Fun, fantasy and wish lists

For example, put toys to bed or pretend to be fairies or elves secretly doing jobs for others.

## Distraction

Songs, rhymes, stories “*When I was little...*”  
“*When you were little...*”

## Environmental changes

For example, hooks lower down, more shelving.

## Routines, clocks and timers

“*The clock says...*”  
Giving advance notice. “*In ten minutes you can finish on the computer and do the washing up*”.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Remember to notice when your child is cooperating. Making a positive, specific comment will encourage them to do it again!



**from** How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk, *Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish*

## Recommended Reading

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen And Listen So Kids Will Talk, *Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish*

How To Really Love Your Child, *Ross Campbell*

Between Parent and Child, *Haim Ginott*