

“Because I said so?” – getting your kids to listen



While many good books have been written on the subject of how to get your kids to listen to you, today we boil this topic down to a few key sticky points. The goal is to make sure your child hears, “Please clean your room,” as well as, “Let’s go get ice cream.”

Here are ways to make requests which yield results:

- **Validate feelings, then make the request.** For example, “I know you are tired. Please pick up your clothes from the floor and put them in the hamper so I can wash a load with the soccer shorts you need for tomorrow.”
- **Give kids a time parameter for getting a task done** so they do not feel you are interrupting their fun. For example, “Dinner is in one-half hour. In the next half an hour, I expect your toys to be cleaned up.”
- **Make a request sandwich.** Use two positive statements with the request in between. For example, “I like how creative you’re being. Remember the crayons need to be put away before bedtime. I can’t wait to see your finished picture!”
- **Give warnings about transitions.** For example, “We are having so

much fun at the playground. We will need to leave in fifteen minutes.” And then, “We will leave in five minutes. Do your last thing.” And finally, “We need to leave now.”

- **Use the phrase, “I expect” rather than “I want”** For example, “I expect your homework to be done by dinner time,” rather than, “I want you to do your homework before dinner time.”
- **Stay on topic.** For example, your child is trying to get out of taking out the garbage and starts giving you a multitude of reasons for not completing the task. He also starts to prattle on about his upcoming baseball game. You say, “I understand you feel it’s your brother’s turn to take out the garbage. I know you would rather continue playing your computer game. I will listen to you talk about the game later. Right now I expect you to contribute to our household by taking out the garbage.” Try to keep your own frustration out of your voice.
- **Don’t nag.** Kids, like all people, get irked by nags. Repetitive nagging only gives them practice at ignoring you.
- **Remember where your child is developmentally.** A thirteen year old can be told to eat after others are served at a restaurant. A thirteen month old can not.
- **Make eye contact when making a request.** Don’t text and talk. Show your children you respect them as people.

A special note about bribes and threats: By three years old, most kids understand bribes and threats. Sounds terrible, doesn’t it?

However, both can be useful when used sparingly. For example, you could offer to take your child out for ice cream, or a bike ride, or a special event, in exchange for cleaning his particularly horrendously messy room. But bribes used too often create a kid who expects to get “paid” for performing reasonable and customary personal and household tasks.

Likewise, threatening a negative consequence must also be used sparingly or else you will end up with a resentful child who will have even more motivation to not listen to you. Remember to take away “extras” rather than essentials. For example, failing to listen may result in losing a finite amount of TV/videogame time. Do NOT threaten to take away eating dinner, reading with your child before bedtime or going to her best friend’s birthday party. Remember to follow through on the consequence immediately. Giving empty threats or putting off threats put you into the “nag” category.

Most importantly, during any ice cream outing, bike ride, or special trip to the park, regardless if it was a planned event or a bribe, flip the table and take the time to listen to what **your child** has to say.

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