



Encouraging Listening and Compliance

Listen. Be a role model for what good listening looks and feels like. Try and listen to your child more than talk. Try not to interrupt your child, add your own comment or summarize. Acknowledge what your child is saying and respond.

Get close. You need your child's attention before you can get them to listen. When you speak to them, be close and at eye level (you may have to crouch down). Let your child know that you need them to listen and ask them (verbally or with a gentle nudge) to look you in the eye.

Be calm (even quiet). Yelling and commanding increases stress and makes it more difficult for your child to listen. Instead, talk quietly (you might even try whispering). You'll surprise your child and if they can barely hear what you're saying, they will be forced to listen more carefully! Remember, you're modeling how you want your child to make requests of other people.

Be specific. Tell your child exactly what you want them to do. Be concrete (not vague), "Please put the blocks back in the block bin," (vs. "Put that away.").

Say please. Research shows that to young children, using the word please makes it sound like they have a choice and make more likely for them to listen to your request. At the same time, you're modeling a polite way for your child to speak to others.

If your child doesn't have a choice, don't ask. Asking your child to do something ("Can you come to the table for dinner?") sounds like there's a choice and you're likely to get the opposite answer than you're hoping for. Instead, give a short, specific, command ("Please come to the table for dinner.").

Give a head's up. Surprise requests or interruptions don't lead to success.

Partner together. Whenever possible, be flexible with you child in order to get the behavior you want. This may mean agreeing to wait until he or she finishes a task or giving them a choice of when an event occurs (for example, "You can brush your teeth before or after your book.")

Say it once. Research shows that when a request is repeated over and over it becomes nagging and makes it less likely for your child to listen.

Don't engage when your child is starting to have a tantrum. The power struggle feels good to your child but is a no-win situation for you.

Make sure what you're asking of your child is developmentally appropriate for their age. Is your request unclear? Does it involve too many instructions? Make sure to have expectations of your child that make sense for his or her age and ability.

Keep your cool. Any big reaction by you when your child doesn't listen increases tension and makes behavior worse. Be a positive role model by staying in control, even when you are frustrated.

Praise listening. Notice the occasions when your child does listen and point them out enthusiastically ("You got in the stroller the first time I asked you to!") and give a high five. Your positive attention will motivate your child to listen to you again.

Consider your child's motivation to listen. If your child quickly responds to your request to brush their teeth, does that mean they'll have to go to bed sooner than if they argue? Make sure the consequences of your child listening and following your directions aren't accidentally negative.