

Getting Your Children to Take You Seriously

by Amanda Formaro

"And" instead of "but," "when" instead of "if." The words seem small, but the impact on your family's dynamic can be significant. Mom of four and Myria contributor Amanda Formaro has some suggestions to help foster respectful discipline while also getting results.

Words to avoid and the alternatives

Have you ever heard yourself say: "I love you very much but you cannot hit your sister," or something similar? The key word here is "but."

Why not change it to: "I love you very much, and that is why I will not let you hit Sarah. Hitting hurts."

I don't want you to hurt her -- just like I don't want anyone to hurt you."

Recently, I attended a parenting class. Something similar to the above struck me. They stated that when telling a child to do something that you must be very specific and never use the word "if." Cut it out completely. For example, when the child asks if they can go outside to play do NOT say "If you clean your room, then you can go out and play." But rather "When you have cleaned your room, then you may go outside to play."

On the other hand, if you want your child to clean their room do not say "When you have cleaned your room you can go out to play." You just offered a choice to a rule. The rule states: Your room must be clean. The choice was clean it or don't. Their choice? Probably to stay inside and not clean their room!

You offered a choice, your child made his/her decision, how can you now get angry?

Consequences

This made so much sense to me. So make the rules very clear and concise. For example, state "Clean room by 12:00pm" instead of just "clean your room." Doing this sets a deadline.

For younger children you may have to be even more specific: Put all your toys into the toy box, make your bed, put your dirty clothes in the laundry hamper and put your books back on the bookshelf. How clear is "Pick up your room?" Not very. :-)

If the rule is broken a consequence must follow. And you must follow through. Here is where we all break down... on the follow through; consistency. So now if the child doesn't clean their room by 12:00pm, what is the consequence? No TV after dinner? No bike riding? What? You decide.

But stick to it!

Sticking to it, sticking together

My husband and I went through this last night. I sent Tony to his room for time out for 30 minutes for hitting his sister. This is torture for Tony because he is not downstairs with the rest of us, he hates to be alone. If he exhibits some other bad behavior on the way up (stopping and talking back, refusing to go upstairs, tossing a toy downstairs, whatever) I add 10 minutes. And I keep adding until he cooperates. It works with him. But my hubby, well meaning as he is, watched Tony toss a toy down the stairs out of

anger. Before I could add the ten minutes hubby proclaimed "Fine, you can just stay up there for the rest of the night!"

Well, that's extremely unrealistic and not a fitting punishment for the action, plus it is almost impossible

to follow through on. As a matter of fact, the bartering began shortly afterward. When the initial 30

minutes was up, Tony started asking if he could come downstairs. My hubby, again well intentioned, asking why he thought he should be allowed to come down. NO!

I talked to hubby about this and he understands now it can't be done this way. This is why he doesn't listen. No follow through, bartering, bribery, promises. WRONG WRONG WRONG. If you send him to bed early, that's where he must stay. Period. Parents must be in agreement on this.

Now that hubby and I are on the same wave length things should go smoother. When disciplining your own children, remember to set a reasonable consequence. Is saying they are grounded for life reasonable? Of course not. And that one is impossible to follow through on.

I also learned at this seminar how to avoid the kind of argument children are so good at getting their parents into. For example, Tony has broken the rule we have which states that he may not ride his bike across a busy road nearby. The consequence is no bike-riding for one week. Two days without his bike and we have the following dialogue:

Tony: Mom, can I ride my bike?

Mom: No.

Tony: Why?!

Mom: You broke a rule. The rule was no riding across Racetrack Road. The consequence is no bike for one week. It has only been two days.

Tony: But Mom I promise I won't do it again.

Mom: Regardless of whether you promise or not, you broke the rule and that means no bike for one week.

Tony: But I promise! I won't ride over there anymore, PLEEEEEZ!

Mom: Anything else?

Tony: [is now stumped and can only repeat himself with please and I promise]

Mom: Sticks to her guns and keeps smiling and repeating "anything else?"

Tony: [Gives up]

Stick to it, don't give in! A rule is a rule and a consequence must be followed through. Be sure to state rules clearly and to follow through. Consistency. Eventually the begging and pleading will stop. Just be sure that your consequences are realistic. Don't ground them for a week if you don't plan on keeping to it. Shorter punishments work better with younger children as they tend to forget why they are being punished if the punishment is too long, and then what has been accomplished? Absolutely nothing. One more time, with feeling:

Clearly state the rules.

Clearly state the consequence of a broken rule.

Eliminate "if," replace it with "when."

If you can stick to these three guidelines, then you are well on your way to a happier household!

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