



How Many Times Do I Have To Tell You!?!?

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Beth wakes up every morning with the same thought, *“I’m not going to yell at the kids once today.”* By lunchtime, she has broken her promise to herself. *“They don’t listen to a word I say,”* she exclaims. *“How many times do I have to tell them to hang their bathing suits on the hook in the laundry room? And I still find soaking wet suits lying in the middle of the kitchen floor! They know to be quiet when I’m on the phone, but instead they choose that time to bicker loudly right in front of me! Do I really have to remind a 12-year-old and a 14-year-old to take showers? My kids are purposely trying to drive me crazy!”* Beth is not alone. All parents want and struggle to achieve consistent cooperation at home, especially over the summer, when there is the opportunity for a lot of quality time together but little structure.

Kids need limits. They may not appear to want them, but they most certainly need them. When boundaries are unclear, kids become uncomfortable and push the edges of the envelope, seeking limits. They will continue to push until we let them know clearly when they’ve hit that edge. A few solid, simple techniques will help you with your discipline at home:

1. Reverse the negative to positive ratio.

It’s much easier to fall into the habit of criticizing rather than praising. When your child is misbehaving, it can be tricky locating any constructive behavior to reinforce. But, take the time to praise cooperative behavior when you see it. Try to say more positive than negative comments each day, reinforcing those behaviors that you appreciate. For example, *“I really appreciate the way you wiped your feet before you came in the house. Please remember to hang up your suit!”*

2. When you discipline, make your statements short and sweet, without harshness.

All kids misbehave at times and need discipline. When that happens, take the minimal approach. Keep it clear. Keep it simple. Keep it cool. The tone of your voice sends an important message. Take a few deep breaths before you react if that helps you. When

you yell at your child, you are effectively training him/her to escalate bad behavior because you “don’t mean it” until you yell.

3. Avoid disciplinary “Don’ts”.

- Don’t use threats
- Don’t use insults or put downs
- Don’t yell or curse
- Don’t interrupt
- Don’t be sarcastic
- Don’t lecture

4. Use effective commands.

When you give your child a directive, make sure that you mean it. Say the command clearly and firmly. Kids know a phony when they see one. If you tell your child to do something, and you have no intention of making sure that the direction is followed, the direction will NOT be followed! Try the following steps when giving a command:

- Make sure your child is looking at you
- Give the command
- Wait silently for compliance (30 seconds or so)
- Impose an immediate consequence if the command is not followed.

For example, “Your bathing suit belongs in the laundry room. Please hang it up now.” (Wait 30 seconds) “If you don’t pick your bathing suit up now, the TV goes off for the rest of the afternoon.” If the bathing suit is not picked up, “I am turning off the television because you haven’t picked up your bathing suit”.

5. Tell your child what you want him/her to do, not just what you don’t want him/her to do.

Establish the behavioral expectations up front whenever possible. The clearer you can be up in advance of a situation with your vision of good behavior, the easier it is for your child to make good choices. Then, when your child still flounders (which he/she will), you’ll have the guidelines to fall back on. Help your child replace bad behavior with alternative positive choices, like:

- Instead of, “Don’t yell!” say, “Please use inside voices.”
- Instead of, “Stop running in the house!” say, “Please walk.”

- Instead of, “Don’t use that tone with me!” say, “When you speak to me with respect, then I will listen to you.”

6. Put responsibilities before rewards.

Work first. Play later. My parents lived by this credo and enforced it with my brother, sister, and me. “You must finish your homework before you go out and play”. “You must clean your room before you leave for basketball practice”. “You must earn some money before you can spend it.” Now I can see how invaluable it is to establish a strong work ethic in our kids. Kids naturally want to skip to the playing part. The “You must...before you...” method of establishing self-discipline is a powerful one. Kids learn that rewards come as a direct result of fulfilling responsibility. When your child doesn’t earn a privilege because he/she did not fulfill a responsibility, empathize with his/her feelings of disappointment but, whatever you do, follow through on your initial directive.

7. Set logical consequences.

Logical consequences are the real-life results of bad behavior. Kids need to know that their choices have direct results which affect them. For example, if your child is slow to get to bed at bedtime, he/she will have to go to bed early the next night.

8. Give choices.

Give your child choices without resorting to negotiating with him/her or breaking the rules you’ve established. Kids of all ages enjoy choices. For example, “Light are out at 9:30. Would you like to read in bed or in the armchair at 9:00?”

9. Use “I” messages

When you say “I feel...” rather than “You did...” or “You are a...” you are more likely to get cooperation and less likely to make someone defensive and resistant. Try saying, “I’m upset that you didn’t listen to me when I asked you not to bounce the ball in the house” rather than “You never listen to me. You could have killed someone bouncing that thing in here!” As a reminder, “I feel you are a big jerk” **is not** an appropriate use of the “I feel” statement. You must follow “I feel...” with an actual feeling.

10. Maintain consistency and follow through.

What’s that expression? “Say what you mean and mean what you say.” There really is no way for a child to understand this concept unless you are unwavering in enforcing rules

and consequences. It's easier to establish rules and expectations than it is to make sure they are being followed. While it's impossible to be perfectly consistent, consistency is a beneficial goal to work towards.

Maintaining discipline throughout these summer months may be challenging, but the strategies above can help you manage your child more easily and effectively. Give them a try!