

MY TWO YEAR OLD WON'T LISTEN!

by Sally and Brian Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I wonder if you have the same issue with your two year-old as a young parent did that asked our advice this week? The following is what we told him.

“How do I get my two year-old to listen to me when she is totally focused on something else?” First of all, she is only 2 years old and is on a steep learning curve. She can't think of any more than one thing at a time so she needs to focus so her mind can make sense of whatever it is she is concentrating on. If what you want to say to her isn't urgent, then don't interrupt her train of thought and let her finish what she is doing. If you do need to break her concentration then say her name – several times if necessary. Get her to look at you. If she won't, then gently turn her head so you are eyeballing each other or bend down to her level so you are eye-to-eye. Say what you want e.g. “Kate, it is time for dinner now!” At the same time physically move her. If she is in danger, then of course she needs to listen to you immediately. Use a firm voice and speak e.g. “Kate, stop now!” At the same time move her quickly out of harm's way.

There are several other reasons why children tune out. They won't want to listen to you if you are always saying, “NO!”, so it is important for them to hear more positive than negative statements. Make sure your messages are consistent. If you say 'no', then mean it. Inconsistency confuses children, whether the confusion comes from just one parent or because many couples have different child-rearing expectations. If you have a noisy household kids often tune out. If they are not given much attention they don't see the need to listen. If they are not listened to, then they won't see the need to listen either. Perhaps they actually have a hearing problem. Try standing behind them and speak their name to check for a response. Have their hearing tested if you have any doubts. My own sister was profoundly deaf from birth and we didn't pick it up immediately, although I do remember her placing her little hand on the guitar when I played it. I didn't realize it, but what she was doing was feeling the vibrations.

You can encourage your children's listening skills by playing games such as having them listen for particular sounds, particularly quiet sounds. You may create some reward for responding quickly to what you ask them to do. A reward may be something like being first to get a treat or perhaps a star on a rewards board.

It is astonishing to realize just how many people do not listen. There is a difference between hearing and listening. Listening means one has to actually tune in and comprehend what someone else is saying, whereas hearing may be purely the awareness of noise. Our children need to understand the art AND the

importance of listening from infancy and it is up to us, as parents, to show them. We need to be great listeners ourselves and train our kids to do the same.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.