

SIMPLE OBEDIENCE

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Doesn't it just eat you up when you see someone else's kids doing exactly what they are told while yours are throwing a tantrum in Walmart? What is their secret? How do they do it? There's got to be a trick to it somehow! Believe me, there is no magic involved in obedience.

Children are not born with an absolute sense of right and wrong. They have to be taught. When do you start? The answer to that question is from the time they are about a one-year-old. Just because they can't express themselves with words, it does not mean they don't understand what you are saying. Our grandson understood what "Don't touch!" meant when he was 12 months old. His parents deliberately left books in a low bookcase to teach him what he could and could not touch. Whenever he put his hand on the books he was told, "Don't touch the books!"

It took a little while before he understood, but he knew from the change of their voice tone, that they were not pleased with something he was doing. They would take his hand off the books and move him away from the bookcase. They had to repeat the process over and over till he got the message. Now that he is 19 months old, he challenges his mother quite often by putting his hand on the books to see what will happen. It doesn't take him long to find out.

Teaching your children to be obedient is a long, arduous process, but here are several steps that will help. The first thing is to understand that children are not 'born good'. Isn't it strange that you never have to teach a child to be bad, but you have to constantly teach them to be good? They have to learn boundaries for their own safety and to be able to work and play harmoniously with others. As parents, you need to accept that you are totally responsible for teaching your children obedience from their earliest years. They need a clear understanding of right and wrong so that when they are under the authority of others they know how to meet expectations and make wise decisions.

How do you teach simple obedience? First you need to agree together, as parents, what your expectations will be and the consequences for non-conformance. Then you need to explain these expectations to your children. Train them, allowing them time to get each point right. Tell them what the consequences will be for non-conformance and then follow through.

It is important to monitor your training to ensure a healthy balance between praise and correction. Praise for doing the right thing yields greater results than constant negative responses that can make a child feel like they can never do anything right.

Some children are naturally more compliant than others. This relates to their personality type. Strong-willed children often challenge authority when a call to obedience gets in the way of their own contrary wishes. It helps for children to know the reason why they need to obey. No one responds well to demands that appear to have no rationale. We respond more readily when we understand the benefits.

Kids learn obedience more quickly when parents are consistent in responding to negative behaviors. Once children become enrolled in playschool, clubs, school and later work, they will experience many inconsistencies in others' expectations. They need a clear grounding from parents in their earliest years.

Children also need to understand that some demands for obedience by authority figures are not appropriate. With the recent spate of coaches and teachers being prosecuted for inappropriate touching or sexual assault, and the dangers in keeping deep secrets from parents, we need to make our children aware that they shouldn't blindly follow authority figures.

Obedience is an invaluable principle to master. Through obedience we learn to be safe, to keep out of trouble, to work in harmony, to be self-disciplined and to make wise choices. Our lives will be more satisfying and successful.

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.