

# ARE YOU LISTENING?

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How many times have you heard your child say to you in frustration, “You never listen to me”? How many times do you recall saying the same thing to your own parents? How many times do we, as parents, tell our kids over and over again to do something, but they are not listening either?

There are many reasons for not listening. One is that we tune out or develop selective hearing. If we don't teach our kids to listen to instructions when they are small they will not understand what important instructions are, and that an action is often required. Teach them that there is a difference between hearing and listening. Most of us hear sounds, but listening requires us to tune in or focus on what another person is saying.

Part of teaching kids to listen is to have them look at you when you are speaking. Another is giving them parameters to the instructions e.g. “I want you to go wash your hands and face as soon as this TV program is over.” Reinforce prompt responses by praising a child for doing as you asked and issue consequences if they ignore your request. “If you don't do as I ask then there will be no TV tomorrow night.” If you don't expect a response, then you won't get one and you will end up nagging your kids, and that is another reason why they learn to tune you out. They will often only jump when you raise your voice. Be consistent. Issue the consequence or they will not take any notice of you the next time either. Don't let your kids nag at you. They think you're not listening or that you will give in if they whine long enough.

Show them how to ask for something appropriately. Listen and give an answer immediately. If you say, “We will see,” then you are opening yourself up to being asked over and over. It is a good idea before entering a store to tell your child that they will or will not be getting candy, cheerios or a toy. If they know your expectations they won't keep pestering you – especially if there is a consequence for doing so. Again, praise is deserved when they have heeded your instructions.

We live in a world of noise. Some feel they can't function without the radio going or listening to their Ipod through earphones to accompany all their waking thoughts. When our ears are constantly assaulted by noise we often don't pick up on the important or subtle messages of others. I remember hearing about a guy whose car was struck by a train on a country crossing because he didn't hear it coming. Parents often feel as if they have been ‘hit by a train’ when their normally docile teenager suddenly attacks them for not listening. Are we too busy to see it coming when they are trying to tell us something of importance to them? We need to appreciate their world rather than rationalize what really is an issue for them. They can't see the ‘greater scheme of things’ from where they are standing.

Teach your children not to talk over the top of someone else speaking, but to wait patiently and listen intently to what they are saying. Give instruction, too, on not thinking of what you want to say while the person is speaking. Often such an answer is not relevant to what was being said and it merely indicates that you are not interested in what they have to say, only what you have got to relate. Be a great model of this yourself as a parent. Too many adults talk over each other.

Our kids feel valued when we not only listen to their views, but also ask about theirs. We need to be involved in their lives enough for them to want our advice, not just tolerate it. You have a relationship with your kids for life, so developing good listening skills both ways is valuable for a lifetime of friendship and appreciation.

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