

How To Talk So Little Kids Will Listen

A Survival Guide to Life with Children Ages 2-7

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Tools for Handling Emotions

- You're giving your child a crucial vocabulary of feelings. Children need us to validate their feelings so they can become grown-ups who know who they are and what they feel. We are laying the groundwork for a person who can respect and not dismiss the needs and feelings of other people.

- **Acknowledge Feelings with Words**
- "You were looking forward to that play date. How disappointing. "
- "It can be so frustrating when train tracks fall apart."

- **Acknowledge Feelings with Writing**
- "Oh, no! We don't have the ingredients we need. Let's make a shopping list."
- "You really want that toy. We will write it on your wish list."

- **Acknowledge Feelings with Art**
- "You seem so sad "(draw a sad face on a piece of paper).
- "You are this angry" (make angry lines or crumple up the paper).

- **Give in Fantasy What You Cannot Give in Reality/Be Dramatic**
- "I wish we had a million more hours to play."
- "Wouldn't it be nice if we could eat candy all day long."
- "I bet you would want to ride your bike in the pool and in your sleep too!"

- **Acknowledge Feelings with Silent Attention**
- "Ugh....Mmm....Ohh....huh."

- **Resist The Urge to Ask Questions of a Distressed Child. Use Statements**
- "I sense you are upset. Something happened."

- All feelings can be accepted. Some actions must be limited. Instead of saying, "BUT", use the term, "THE PROBLEM IS" or "EVEN THOUGH YOU KNOW".
 - "The problem is, it's too late to go shopping for a toy."
 - "Even though you know it's too late for cookies, you would sure like some right now."

Tools for Engaging Cooperation

- *Don't turn a choice into a threat. Make sure both options are acceptable to you and your child. Appreciate progress before describing what's left to do. When expressing anger or frustration, use the word "I" and avoid the word, "You." Express strong anger sparingly. It can feel like an attack.*

- **Be Playful**
- Make it a game
 - "Can we get all the cars into the box before the timer beeps?"
- Make inanimate objects talk
 - "I'm an empty sock. I need a foot in me!"
- Use silly voices and accents
 - "I...am...your...robot...must...buckle....seat...belt...now..."
- Pretend!
 - "We need to climb this slippery mountain into the carseat."
- Play the incompetent fool
 - "Oh dear, where does this sleeve go? Over your head?"

- **Offer a Choice**
- "Do you want to hop to the tub like a bunny, or crawl like a crab?"

- **Put The Child in Charge**
- "John, will you set the timer and let us know when it's time to leave?"

- **Give Information**
- "Tissues go in the trash."

- **Describe What You See**
- "I see most of the blocks put away in the box. There are only a few left. to go."

- **Describe How You Feel**
- "I don't like food thrown on the floor."

- **Write a Note**
- "Put me on your head before riding. Love, your bike helmet."

- **Take Action Without Insult**
- "I'm putting the paint away for now. I can't let you splatter the other kids."

Tools for Resolving Conflict

- *If nothing is working, you may have to reconsider your basic expectations. Show respect for the conflict. Don't minimize the problem. Remove the disputed object temporarily. You don't have to wait for a problem to occur in order to use problem-solving. When possible, plan ahead!*

1. Express Your Feelings Strongly

- "HEY, I don't like to see people being pushed!"

2. Show Your Child How to Make Amends

- "Your sister got scared on top of the slide. Let's do something to make her feel better. Do you want to offer her some pretzels? Do you think she'd like to play with your toy?"

3. Offer a Choice

- "We're going to give the slide a rest for now. I can see you're in no mood to wait for a turn. You can swing on the swings or you can play in the sandbox. You decide."

4. Take Action Without Insult

- "We're heading home. We'll try the playground another day. I'm too worried about children getting hurt right now."

5. Try Problem- Solving

- *Acknowledge your child's feelings*
 - "I can see you don't like your hand held in the parking lot."
- *Describe the problem*
 - "The problem is, I worry about cars hitting children here."
- *Ask for ideas*
 - "We need some ideas so we can go back to the park and have a good time without people getting mad or scared. What can we do?"
- *Decide which ideas you both like*
 - "So you like the idea of holding on to my sleeve and leading me to the playground? Let's do that."
- *Try out your solutions*
 - "Here we are at the parking lot. Grab my sleeve and show me which way to go!"

Tools for Praise and Appreciation

- *Consider asking questions or starting a conversation instead of praising. Sometimes acknowledging feelings can be more helpful than praise. Give a child a new picture of himself. Resist the urge to praise by comparison.*

1. Describe What You See

- “I see Green lines that are zooming up and down the page. And look how they connect all these red shapes!”

2. Describe the Effect on Others

- “The baby loves it when you make those funny sounds. I see a big smile on her face.”

3. Describe Effort

- “You kept working on that button until you got it into that little buttonhole.”

4. Describe Progress

- “You sounded out each of the letters and you put them together. You read a whole sentence!”

- *Don't expect new skills to be used consistently.*

1. Join Them in Their World

- “Can I play the Bubble Game with you? Will you show me how?”

2. Take Time to Imagine What Your Child is Experiencing

- “So to you, the seams of the socks are very irritating!”

3. Put into Words What Kids Want to Say

- “You bad old rain! You took away Johnny’s recess!”

4. Adjust Expectations: Manage the Environment Instead of the Child

- “Let’s take a diaper vacation. We need some time to relax and not worry about peeing in the potty.”

5. Tell Them What They CAN Do Instead of What They CAN'T Do

- “ You can throw your stuffed animals.”

6. Be Playful

- “It’s time to put away the blocks. I need help from the human wheelbarrow!”

- *Resist the urge to...*
 - *insist that your child clean his plate, eat a specific food, or eat a predetermined amount*
 - *offer dessert as a reward for eating healthy food or withhold it as punishment for not eating.*
 - *be a short- order cook*
 - *label your child a "picky" eater*
 - *make food a battleground*

- **Acknowledge Feelings**
- "Even though you usually like chicken, you're not in the mood for it tonight."

2. Offer Choices

- Put an empty plate in front of your child and let him serve himself, or ask for what he wants if he's too young to serve himself.
- Serve some of the meal as simple separates so kids can make choices about what they put on their plates.
- Offer a simple alternative if kids don't want the "grown-up" food- a peanut butter sandwich, bread and cheese, hard-boiled egg, raw carrots, etc.

3. Manage the Environment

- Keep sweets and sugary drinks out of sight.

4. Put the Child in Charge

- Let kids have as much involvement as possible in planning, shopping, as well as preparing the meal.

5. Give Information

- Let kids know that "tastes change," so they don't feel stuck with their limited palate. Tell them, "You might want to give this a try when you're ready."

- **Be Playful**
- (Shoe talking.) “I don’t want that foot in me. Nooooo!”
- (Parent talking.) “You’d better get on Luke’s foot right now. You’re making him late!”

2. Offer a Choice

- “Do you want to walk to the car the regular way or backward?”

3. Manage the Environment

- Keep sweets and sugary drinks out of sight.

4. Put the Child in Charge

- “Can you set the timer? I need you to let me know when it’s time to go out the door.”

5. Try Problem-Solving

- “It’s not easy to remember all the things we have to do in the morning. What do you think about making a chart?”

6. Acknowledge Feelings

- “It isn’t easy to get out of a warm, cozy bed. It’s nice to snuggle for a few more minutes!”

- **Accept Feelings**
- “It can be frustrating to have a baby sister!”

2. Give Wishes in Fantasy

- Let the older child pretend to be a baby. “Come sit on my lap and be my super baby!”

3. Describe What You See

- Notice and appreciate the positive interactions between siblings. “You figured out how to cheer up your sister when she was crying!”

4. Put the Child in Charge

- “Can you pick a board book for the baby? She likes it when you read to her.”

5. Reconnect With Your Child

- Plan for special one-on-one time
- Tell the older child stories about his baby days

6. Take Action Without Insult

- Avoid casting a child in the role of aggressor. “We need to separate. I don’t want anyone getting hurt.”

7. Try Problem-Solving

- Resist the urge to take sides and don’t minimize the problem. “Jamie wants to build by himself and Kara wants to touch the blocks. This is a tough problem. We need ideas.”

- **Put the Child in Charge**
- Have him help make a shopping list and gather groceries to put in the cart.
- Give her an allowance: “You can bring your dollar to the grocery store in case you see something you want to buy for yourself.”

2. Offer a Choice

- “Should we get the spiral pasta or the elbow pasta? You pick.”

3. Acknowledge Feelings with a Wish List

- “You would like to have the match box car. Let’s write that down.”

4. Give Information- Let the Child Know What to Expect

- “We’re going shopping for Elena’s birthday present today. Let’s bring the wish list in case you see something you’d like for yourself.”

Tools In Action: Lies

- **Describe What You See**
- Instead of asking or accusing, state the obvious. "I see chocolate on your face."

2. Describe How You Feel

- "I'm upset that the cake was eaten! I was going to serve it for dessert when our friends come over for dinner tonight."

3. Acknowledge Feelings

- "It's not easy to resist cake. I bet you wish you hadn't eaten it."

4. Try Problem-Solving

- "Next time you're tempted, let me know. I'm sure we can find a way to help you wait."

5. Adjust Expectations- Manage the Environment

- Think to yourself, *The next time I buy chocolate cake, I'll put it out of sight until it's time for dessert so it's not so tempting.*

6. Help the Child Make Amends

- "We're going to need something for dessert when our friends come over. Can you get out some cookies and arrange them nicely on a plate?"

- **Express Your Feelings...Strongly!**
- "I don't like being told I'm mean. It makes me mad."

2. Tell Them What They Can Do, Instead of What They Can't

- "You can tell me, 'Mommy, I'm disappointed! I wanted to go!'"

3. Don't Forget the Basics- Give Yourself /Child Time to Recover

- "I'll talk to you about it after dinner. Right now I'm too upset."

Tools In Action: Tattling

- **Acknowledge Feelings**
- “Jenna didn’t like being poked. That hurt!”

2. Help the Child Make Amends Without Scolding

- “Let’s get a broom and sweep up the mess.”

3. Try Problem-Solving

- “How will we remember not to touch the stove dials? We need ideas.”

Tools In Action: Cleanup

- **Be Playful**
- (Shoes talking.) “Pretty please, put me in the closet with my friends.”
- “How many minutes will it take to toss all the Legos into the bucket? You can set the timer. Ready...set...go!”

2. Offer a Choice

- “Do you want to be in charge of putting away the blocks or the cars?”

3. Write a Note

- “Please hang me on a hook. Love, Your Coat.”

4. Describe What You See

- “I see orange peels on the floor.”

5. Give Information

- “Orange peels belong in the trash.”

6. Describe The Progress

- “You got that whole pile of dirty laundry in the basket! All that’s left to put away are the cars and books.”

7. Describe What You See With Appreciation

- “Wow, look at this big cleanup you did. The floor was covered with dirty laundry and train tracks, and now it’s all clean.”

- **Acknowledge Feelings**
- “It can be scary to think about someone sticking a needling in your arm.”
- “That hurt. You didn’t like that!”

2. Offer in Fantasy What You Can’t Give in Reality

- “I wish they could put the medicine inside a lollipop. You’d eat one a day for a week and then you’d never get sick.”

3. Offer a Choice

- “Do you want to get the shot in your left arm or your right? Do you want to sit next to me, or on my lap?”

4. Give Information

- “The shots are quick. They’re over in the time it takes to clap twice. Like this (Clap! Clap!).” The shots put tiny little fighters in your blood, called antibodies. They fight against tiny germs so you don’t get sick.”

5. Try Problem-Solving

- “What would make it easier to get through these injections? Would it help to have something to look forward to when you’re done?”

6. Be Playful

- “I can see the medicine going down your throat into your stomach. And now it’s heading down your leg to your toes!”

7. Take Action Without Insult

- “I’m going to hold you on my lap while the doctor gives you the injection. I know you don’t like this.”

Tools In Action: Shy Kids

- **Acknowledge Feelings**
- “It can be hard to walk into a new house filled with relatives. Lots of people want to say hello to you. That can feel scary.”

2. Adjust Expectations

- “You can carry in the chips and put them in the bowl for people to eat.”

3. Offer a Choice

- “Do you want to sit on the couch and watch the kids set up the trains? Or do you want to have a snack with the grown-ups first?”

4. Be Playful

- (Sock puppet talking.) “Hi there! Would you like a corn chip?”

5. Put the Child in Charge

- “Jamie will join you when he’s ready.”

- **Adjust Expectations: Manage the Environment Instead of The Child**
- “Avoid outings that seem like fun but will be more stress than pleasure with a small child.
- There will be plenty of opportunities to see holiday decorations at the mall or enjoy an outdoor concert by the river when your child is a little bit older.

2. Acknowledge Your Child’s Feelings

- “You don’t like it when your hand is squeezed. You want to be free to look around.”

3. Describe Your Own Feelings

- “I worry that drivers backing out of parking spaces can’t see children.”

4. Offer a Choice

- “You can ride in the cart or you can help push.”

5. Be Playful

- “We need to stick together. It’s a jungle out there, I think I just saw the tail of a lion behind that car!”

6. Try Problem-Solving

- “Let’s think of a secret signal we can use that means we have to get to each other as fast as possible.”

7. Take Action Without Insult

- Grab your kid and go home. “We can’t stay here. I have to watch the baby and I’m too worried about losing sight of you by the river.”

- **Take Action Without Insult**
- Make everybody safe. “We need to separate.”
- Attend to injuries. “Let me kiss that bump. Do you want a piece of ice for our head?”

2. Express Your Feelings...Strongly

- “I don’t like seeing Isabel hurt! That makes me very upset.”

3. Help the Child Make Amends

- “Isabel needs something to make her feel better. Can you find her a toy?”

4. Acknowledge Feelings

- “It can be very frustrating to have a little sister grabbing your things.”
- It’s not easy to resist hitting or pushing when you’re mad!”

5. Give Information

- “No pushing allowed in this house. Daddy is not allowed to push me. You are not allowed to push your sister, and she is not allowed to push you. And I am not allowed to push either of you- unless you need a push on the swing!”

6. Try Problem-Solving

- “Sometimes your little sister can drive you crazy! What can a person do when his sister is bothering him? We need ideas.”

- **Acknowledge Feelings**
- “Sometimes it isn’t easy to fall asleep. It can be scary to lie in bed in the dark.”

2. Be Playful

- “I need to smooth out these terrible lumps in your bed! (Press down on legs and arms of child.)

3. Try Problem-Solving

- “Let’s see what ideas we can come up with for staying in your bed at night. A special night-light? A picture book by your bed? A recording of songs?”

4. Take Action Without Insult

- “Mommy and daddy need to sleep! I’m putting you back in your bed. We will play in the morning.”

Tools In Action: When Parents Get Angry!

- *In the moment, if you must yell, use our tools...LOUDLY!*

- **Say It in a Word**
- "CAR!!!!"

2. Give Information

- "BROTHERS ARE NOT FOR KICKING!"

3. Describe How You Feel

- "I CAN GET VERY UPSET WHEN ISEE A BABY BEING PINCHED!"

4. Describe What You See

- "I SEE PEOPLE GETTING HURT!"

5. Take Action Without Insult

- "I can't allow sand throwing! WE ARE LEAVING!!"
- When the moment has passed and everyone's safe, take care of yourself. Do whatever works best for you. Run around the block, take deep breaths, call a friend to vent, etc.
- Reconnect and try problem-solving.
 - "That was no fun. You didn't like getting yelled at. And I was really mad about being late. What can we do next time?"