



10 Ways to Speak So Children Will Listen

Are you at your wit's end when your child doesn't listen to you?

Are you frustrated by always repeating yourself or yelling to be heard?

Learn how to get your son's or daughter's attention when you address them with these strategies:

- **Use eye contact.** Even if you kneel or sit at a table, speaking to your child at eye level not only models good manners, but may improve how you listen to each other.
- **Avoid name-calling.** Insulting or shaming a child will not only erode self-confidence but is a surefire way for your child to eventually tune you out.
- **Speak in a positive manner.** This requires practice but may encourage your child to behave better. Avoid saying “no” constantly. Replace “no running” with “Inside we walk, outside we run.”
- **Say your child's name.** Once you have your child's attention, proceed with what you have to say.
- **Keep directions simple.** Your child, especially if young, may need to focus on one action item at a time.
- **Refrain from screaming matches.** Avoid trying to out-yell your child. Lowering your own voice requires your child to lower his voice in order to hear you. Wait until she or he calms down to talk.
- **Ask questions without yes or no answers.** Focus on questions that ask “when” and “how” to engage your child's brain.
- **Be brief and specific.** Get to the point. Don't offer a lengthy explanation to your child.
- **Watch your tone.** Think about how you talk to cherished friends. Is your tone more respectful and happier? Your child deserves no less.
- **Have your child repeat what you said.** This approach allows you to know immediately if your child was listening or not.
- **Connect choices with outcomes.** Let your child choose to either cooperate or not and then deal with the results. For example, “When you pick up your toys you may go outside.”

It takes practice to change the way you talk to your child. But doing so is worth any extra effort to improve how your child listens and understands.



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1-800-552-7096 Virginia Child Abuse Hotline (language line available)

800-Children (800-244-5373) Parent Helpline