

# Did You Know?

## Getting Your Child to "MIND" You

Believe it or not, getting a child to comply does not take magic or wizardry. Children are more likely to follow instructions when they know exactly what is expected of them and just what the outcome will be for their behavior.

### Converting a Behavior into a Habit Requires Lots of Practice

A child who is well-minded (or "obedient") has simply learned certain behaviors —through MANY repetitions—that have eventually become a habit. It takes *repeated* instructions, and many repeated incentives, for random behaviors to become a habit. This is when "knowing" how to do something changes to "mastery" of skills.

Parents often get frustrated and say, "My child knows how to get dressed, but he just won't do it in the mornings." They mistake their child being able to complete a task a few times with him having perfected the task into a habit. Dr. Douglas Ruben, author of *Brat Busters*, teaches parent empowerment using applied behavioral skills. He cautions, "A child who happens to do a chore right the first time—or even a second time—may know how to do it, but he has not mastered it. *Mastery involves repetitive duplication of the skill without adult supervision.*" Dr. Ruben offers helpful suggestions, which I have included below.

### Why Don't Children Listen and Comply?

Non-compliant children are like plants growing in a garden. They are dependent on the watering and feeding and nurturing of their environment. They are products of the parenting they receive. Children respond favorably or unfavorably, based on the *positive or negative treatment* they receive from their parents. Even more important, they respond to the *consistency or inconsistency* of the treatment they receive. So, if certain behaviors are "watered" and "fertilized" more often, those will grow stronger. If negative behaviors are the ones that get the most "watering," those will flourish tenaciously. So too, behaviors that receive inconsistent treatment will fail to grow into mastered skills and habits. Like plants in a garden that are "watered" haphazardly, they will likely be weaker and grow erratically.

Dr. Douglas Ruben believes these are the major reasons children do not follow instructions.

1. The child does not understand the instructions.
2. The child doesn't know how to do the task you are asking of him.
3. The child lacks an important part of the instructions.
4. The child cannot physically do the task.
5. The child is afraid to ask for help and simply doesn't do it.
6. The child is afraid that bad things will follow for doing what you want.
7. The child does not find your rewards very rewarding.
8. The child is busy with behavior that is competing with the desired behavior.

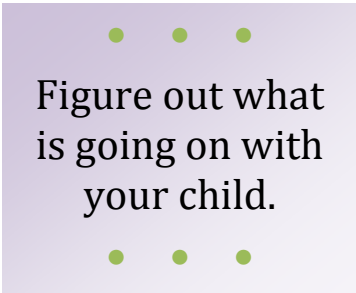


Figure out what  
is going on with  
your child.

Parents need to ask themselves:

- Am I giving too much attention to my child's "delaying" behavior? (*Where am I focusing?*)
- Am I asking him to do too much? (*Should I break my request down into smaller chunks?*)
- Am I arguing too much with my child?
- Have I been too inconsistent?

## Try These Skills

### Step 1: Use "If ...Then" (or "When...Then")

- Tell WHAT you want him to do. "Josh, I want you to pick up the dirt."
- Tell WHEN you want him to do it. "Josh, I want you to pick up the dirt right now."
- Tell HOW you want him to do it. "Josh, I want you to pick up the dirt in this way."
- Tell WHERE you want him to do it. "Josh, I want you to pick up the dirt over here."
- Tell him WHAT HE CAN GET for doing it. "Josh, if (when) you pick up the dirt, then I will "

### Step 2: Look for Delays and Competing Behaviors

- Find and remove the competing thing (i.e.: take the toy away/turn off the TV, etc). Then repeat your first instruction, "Josh, I want you to pick up the dirt."
- Find and remove the competing thing. Promise to return it to the child after he complies.
- Stay calm and don't act with anger.

### Step 3: Find Rewards for Kids

Think about these guidelines from Dr. Ruben:

- Promise your child a few minutes to do things he enjoys by himself.
- Promise your child a few minutes alone with you or his other parent.
- Promise your child a few minutes doing something he chooses to do with you.
- Promise your child some object/event he can play with right after he complies.

### Trouble-Shooting Problems

- *Allow for trial and error.* All children stumble and make mistakes until they get into the "rhythm of rules." Expect imperfection. Dr. Ruben stresses that "imperfect children are not defiant children. They may be fighting between two behavior patterns." When parents take a new approach and try to become more consistent and rule-based, children typically resist. It takes time for adjustment. This is foreign and new. Children in these situations *always* challenge parents in the hope that their parents will resort to the "old way" that is rule-free and comfortably known.
- *Outside influences can undermine your efforts.* Grandparents, childcare providers, friends' parents, and other adults in your child's life can ruin your "compliance teaching" by undermining your efforts. Encourage the key adults in your child's life to respect your rules and expectations.
- *Simultaneous or competing behaviors can receive a high dose of reinforcement.* For instance, watching a movie or TV program is often so engrossing to a child that it becomes a greater reinforcer than anything you have to offer.
- *A child's angry behavior can sidetrack parents.* Highly verbal children become very good debaters, often becoming argumentative and powerful. They test and challenge their parent's authority. In this way, they swiftly lure their parents into conflict with them, which thereby postpones their having to do the task at hand. Dr. Ruben cautions, "Highly verbal youngsters taught to dispute orders and defy authority can become skillful at evading responsibility." This has tragic repercussions for a child later in life.
- *Inconsistency is lethal.* Even the best of us can be forgetful, but when parents fail to deliver the "promised goods" when using the **If...Then** procedure, a child loses faith in them. The next time the parent tries to gain their child's cooperation or compliance, the child will likely ignore their requests or offer of rewards.

Expect RESISTENCE

when you try to  
become more  
consistent!



Just don't give up!