

How to get your preschooler to cooperate

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You have a preschool child and are worried that she does not hear well. You have to call her multiple times before she answers. When she is in the same room with you, you tell her to stop playing with her blocks and get ready for bed. She does not respond and keeps building with the blocks. You whisper something to another family member about going to a movie and she asks, “Can I go to the movie with you?”

This means she does hear you, but chooses not to comply with your request. In the book, ***The Top 10 Preschool Parenting Problems***, Rosalyn Duffy lists non-compliance as the #2 parenting problem for parents of preschoolers. She separates non-compliance issues into four categories: How Many Times Do I Have to Tell You?; Say It-Do It; the Car Seat Crisis and Cooperation Begins with Me.



Does this sound familiar? How many times do I have to tell you to

- Pick up your toys?
- Put on your shoes?
- Put your books on the shelf?

If you keep telling your child repeatedly to do something, what message are you sending? When you set rules or expectations and keep reminding her numerous times, then she is not taking responsibility for her behavior or her belongings. You are doing all of the reminding and she does not have to remember what to do. Come up with a plan to help her remember. Tell her, “When I say it is 10 minutes until bath time, you need to put away your toys and your books.” Then, every night say, “It is 10 minutes until bath time. Show me what you need to do.” Praise her when she starts picking up her toys and books and tell her she will get to play before bath time tomorrow because she put away her toys and books.



At first, you may have to help her put her things away, but soon she should be able to do this herself. If she refuses, tell her she may play with only one toy or book before bedtime tomorrow night and make sure to follow through. If she puts away the toy and book the next night, then allow her to have a few toys and books before bath time until she is in the habit of putting all of her things away in the 10 minutes before bath time. Sometimes changing the environment helps your child comply quicker. Labeling shelves or baskets with pictures will help your child know where her toys and books belong and make it easier for her to find them and easier to put them away.

You are visiting grandparents and tell your child that if he throws his ball in the house again you are going to take him home. He throws the ball again and you say, "I told you. We are going to leave if you keep throwing the ball." But, you don't leave because you are staying for dinner. Giving your child a consequence that you do not enforce sends him a message that you do not follow through. Think before you speak. If you know you are planning to stay for dinner, don't say you will take him home. A better consequence would be to take away the ball if he throws it in the house again. It is very important to follow through with whatever action you say you will do. So, think about what you say and be prepared to do it.

Say less and mean more. Ask your child what he thinks you may say about throwing a ball in the house. He will probably respond with, "Don't throw the ball in the house." Then you say, "Right, don't do it." Try telling your child what you want him to do in 10 words or less, "It is time to leave, so put on your shoes." Soon, you can say, "Leaving. Shoes." Follow-through is when you say it, do it. Soon your child will respond when you tell him to do something because he knows you will follow through with the consequences.

Picking your child up from child care or school is frustrating because every afternoon it is a power struggle over getting her buckled up in her car seat. She may be tired or want to keep playing instead of sitting in the car for the ride home. Take a few minutes to talk to her to prepare her for the ride home: "Playing with your friends is fun, but we need to go home where you can play with your toys and eat dinner. What do we do when we get to the car? Yes, you get in your car seat and I buckle you in."

If she continues to resist, plan to pick her up a few minutes early and bring a book or something you can do in the car. Put her in the car seat and if she refuses to let you buckle her in, sit in the car and read or do something until she is ready to allow you to buckle her in the car seat. Tell her you have a snack and some water for her when she allows you to buckle the car seat and is ready to go. If she tries to unbuckle the car seat or continues to cry or scream while you are driving, be prepared to pull into a parking lot or side street to wait until she calms down. It is dangerous to drive while distracted by her tantrums. Encourage her cooperation by talking about what you are having for dinner or what she would like to play when she gets home. Playing children's songs and audio books on the ride home may distract her from protesting about the car seat and make for a more peaceful trip home.

Facing everyday problems and chores works better when your child cooperates with you. How do you get your child to cooperate?

First, you have to ask. "I need your help. I have to do the laundry before I begin dinner, so could you please bring me the hamper of clothes from your room and we can eat soon." You may ask him to help you by putting napkins or silverware on the table while you start the washing machine. Ask him what he can do to help. Working together will make him feel important and helpful. When you want him to cooperate, make him feel that he is an important part of the work.

