

The Four C's Of Obedience

Why should children obey?

Reasons I want my children to obey

- ★ Safety
- ★ Less stress
- ★ Better relationships
- ★ Training to make good decisions
- ★ Able to serve others

Reasons my children want to obey

- ★ The Bible commands us to obey our parents.
- ★ Obeying our parents keeps us safe.
- ★ Being obedient provides us with freedom and independence.

Barriers to obedience

1. Not assuming your parental authority

- ★ Be consistent.
- ★ Follow through.
- ★ Be loving.

2. Viewing obedience as a battle instead of a partnership

- ★ Recognize when they need help to obey.
- ★ Partner with your child.
- ★ Identify non-negotiable situations.
- ★ Choose your battles.

3. Fear of judgement from others

- ★ Don't be afraid to let them throw a tantrum.
- ★ Extend grace to yourself and your children.
- ★ Recognize that obedience looks different in different situations.
- ★ Extend grace to other parents.

4. Distractions

- ★ Adopt a minimalistic approach during times of habit training.
- ★ Slow down and reduce outside commitments.
- ★ Reduce noise.
- ★ Have their full attention

**It's not a matter of winning the battle.
It's not even a matter of winning the war.
It's about coming alongside your child and providing the guidance and
accountability to build the habit of obedience.**

4 C's of Obedience

Be clear.

- ★ Have their attention before you speak.
- ★ Set expectations ahead of time.
- ★ Pause before you speak.
- ★ Give one direction at a time.
- ★ Give detailed instructions.

Use natural consequences.

- ★ Focus on natural consequences instead of punishments.
- ★ Follow through on the consequences.
- ★ Don't argue or negotiate.

Allow your child to choose how he responds.

- ★ Talk with your child about heart obedience.
- ★ Allow your child to experience the consequences of his choices.
- ★ Don't overreact to mistakes.

Be consistent.

- ★ Work as a unified team.
- ★ Say it once and follow through.
- ★ Notify of changes.

Make learning to obey fun!

Encourage autonomy.

- ★ Give choices.
- ★ Ask questions.
- ★ Make lists.
- ★ Write a note.

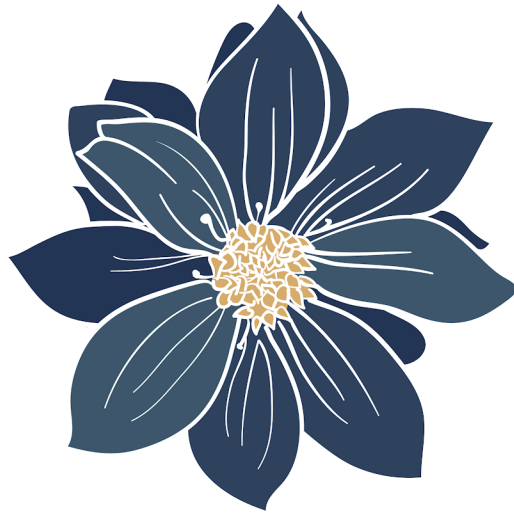
Vary how you say it.

- ★ Have a "Yes" marathon.
- ★ Describe what you see.
- ★ Say it with a simple word or phrase.
- ★ Express it as a positive statement.

Spice it up.

- ★ Play games.
- ★ Role play.
- ★ Make it a race.
- ★ Use timers.

**The days are long, but the years are short.
Gretchen Rubin**



Obedience Toolkit

CRYSTAL J. WAGNER

Obedience Prompts

Training your child to obey requires patience and diligence, but it doesn't have to be boring. When you make learning to obey fun and rewarding, your child has an incentive to develop the habit of obedience.

The obedience prompts in this toolkit fall into one of four categories:

- ★ ways to remove barriers of obedient behavior
- ★ ways to consistently enforce what you say
- ★ ways to vary how you give your child directions
- ★ ways to spice it up and make learning to obey fun

As you implement the obedience prompts, you will add strategies to your obedience toolkit and teach your child to obey while also improving your ability to consistently enforce what you say. You'll have fewer struggles, your home will be more peaceful, and you'll enjoy spending time with your child.

Using the Obedience Prompts

The obedience prompts are neatly arranged on a cheat sheet so you can print the page for quick reference. On the pages following the cheat sheet, each prompt is explained further.

Begin with the "Remove Barriers" and "Improve Consistency" sections.

Prompts in these sections may require multiple days, or even weeks, to become a habit. Work on the prompt in Box 1 until it has become a habit. Then move to Box 2, and work on making it a habit. Soon, you will have an entire toolbox that you can choose from to meet any situation.

For variation while you are working on the first two sections, you can choose one prompt each day from the "Vary How You Say It" or the "Spice It Up" sections.

Find ways to implement it throughout the day, and then choose a different prompt the next day. Have fun with it!

The prompts are meant to be a tool, however, so use them in the way that best serves your family.

Obedience Prompts

Remove Barriers

1	2	3	4	5
Get your child's attention before you speak.	Reduce noise.	Replace "Okay?" with "Do you understand?"	Set expectations ahead of time.	Pause before you speak.
6	7	8	9	10
Give one direction at a time.	Get on your child's level before speaking.	Train your child to acknowledge you.	Respond calmly.	Practice empathic listening.

Improve Consistency

11	12	13	14	15
Work as a unified team with your spouse.	Say it once and follow through.	Utilize natural consequences.	Don't negotiate.	Role play.

Vary How You Say It

16	17	18	19	20
Give choices.	Say it with a simple word or phrase.	Phrase it as a positive statement.	Ask questions.	Make a list.
21	22	23	24	25
Express appreciation.	Describe what you see.	Say it creatively.	Write a note.	Say it in a whisper.

Spice It Up

26	27	28	29	30
Play an obedience game.	Use timers or song playlists to complete chores.	Have a "Yes" marathon day.	Race to obey.	Declare a do-over day.

Remove Barriers

1. Get your child's attention before you speak.

If your child is not paying attention to you, he is less likely to process what you are saying and respond appropriately. Ensure your child is listening before you begin speaking. Listed below are some ways to ensure you have your child's attention.

- ★ **Be in the same room.** If you are not in the same room, go to him or ask him to come to you.
- ★ **Say his name.** Even smart devices listen for their name—"Hey, Siri..." Have a little fun with this and get creative. The more creative you can be, the more fun it is to obey. You could use a phrase such as "Hey kiddliwids..." to mix things up.
- ★ **Have your child's undivided attention.** Ask your child to put down the book, electronic device, or craft project and look at you.

2. Reduce noise.

We are bombarded by noise all day. People and apps demand our attention. Phones, tablets, and computers ding notifications night and day. You can play television shows, movies, and music from just about any device at any moment. If you log into social media, there's a nonstop stream of chatter. Add to the mix our natural tendency of selective listening, and it is no wonder your child tunes you out.

We can train our children, and ourselves, to tune out distractions and listen attentively, but it requires practice and intentionality. Reducing noise and distractions looks different depending on the age of your child. It helps to take a young child to a separate room where there are fewer people and less noise. It might mean turning off the television, computer, or mobile device or asking him to remove his headphones for an older child.

3. Replace "Okay?" with "Do you understand?"

One common trap parents fall into is ending sentences with the word "okay?" It is very confusing for children because they hear, "It is time to go, okay?" as a question, but they do not have the option to say no. Only ask a question if your child has a choice in how to respond. Instead of saying "okay?" after your statement or command, ask, "Do you understand?"

4. Set expectations ahead of time.

Your child is more likely to behave when he knows how you expect him to act. Before your child faces a new experience, explain appropriate behavior for that situation, and provide opportunities to practice that behavior. Examples of behaviors to practice include:

- ★ when to volunteer information
- ★ how to sit quietly during dinner and not interrupt the conversation
- ★ how to behave in a store
- ★ how to accept natural consequences without throwing a tantrum

You cannot prepare your child for everything he might face, but when you pause and consider upcoming situations, you have an opportunity to smooth the journey for everyone.

5. Pause before you speak.

If you provide an answer to your child, then waffle about that decision and give a different response, she may try to negotiate with you to get a more favorable response. She will learn that your answer is not always firm, and there is a chance she can change your mind.

Pausing to think before you answer allows you to think through the consequences of possible responses before providing a final response to your child. You can then reply with conviction and stand firm in your answer. Your child will realize that your first answer is your definitive answer, and that push back will only bring her unpleasant consequences.

6. Give one direction at a time.

Young children are not able to remember and execute multiple tasks. Give your child one task to complete at a time. You can tell her to complete the task and check back with you for further instructions. As she matures, you can give her several tasks to complete in a row. Don't give more than three to five at a time, as the average person can only hold three to five items in their working memory.

7. Get on your child's level before speaking.

Help your child focus on what you are saying by getting on his level before telling him what he needs to do. Make eye contact so you know you have his attention.

Get in your child's line of vision. Kneel or squat down so you can get on your child's level. Place your hands on your child's cheeks or under his chin and gently turn his head to look directly at you.

8. Train your child to acknowledge you.

Training your child to acknowledge you accomplishes two purposes. First, you know she heard you. It may be helpful to choose a simple phrase your child can say in response to direction. Examples include:

- ★ Yes ma'am.
- ★ I'm coming.
- ★ Yes ma'am. I will obey.

Secondly, when your child acknowledges you, it shifts their focus and spurs them into action. You might ask, "What is it you need to do?" or "Please tell me the three things you need to do before you can read."

9. Respond calmly.

A soft-spoken voice is encouraging and more effective than a harsh word. The story of "The North Wind and The Sun" by Aesop demonstrates this. The North Wind boasted of being the strongest, so they had a competition to see who could get a traveler to take off his coat. The harder the North Wind blew, the tighter the man wrapped his coat around him. When it was the Sun's turn, the brighter the Sun shone, the warmer the air became, and the man soon became hot and took off his coat. The Sun said, "I lit the day. Through gentleness, I got my way."

Additionally, children respond similarly to what they hear. They mirror your words and tone of voice. You set an example for your child every day in how you respond to others. If you model a gentle and loving tone, your child is more likely to be kind and caring.

It is not easy to remember to speak gently. The busier you are, the more likely you are to bark out orders, yell, or overreact. It may be helpful to pause and count to 10 before you respond to your child. While you are counting to 10, take a deep breath. The act of deep breathing helps you relax and reduces your stress level so you can think more clearly and respond calmly.

10. Practice empathic listening.

Stephen Covey described empathic listening as, “reflecting what a person feels and says in your own words to their satisfaction so they feel listened to and understood.” It means listening with your whole being—ears, eyes, and heart.

During a conversation, you not only repeat what your child said, but you also reflect how you perceive he feels. Empathic listening diffuses the situation by allowing your child to vent his frustrations and express his feelings without judgment or lecture. When your child feels heard, he is receptive to hearing your perspective and advice. Or, he might be able to think clearly enough to find a solution to his problem.

Empathic listening during an obedience struggle might sound like the following.

Child: (Throwing a tantrum because you told him to put tennis shoes on so the family could leave to meet friends at the park.) “I don’t want to put them on!!”

Mom: “I can see you are upset that you need to wear tennis shoes when we go to the park.”

Child: “Yes! My tennis shoes won’t stay tied! I’m always falling behind my friends because I have to stop to tie my shoes.”

Mom: “Hmm. I can see how that would be frustrating. There might be another solution. Would you like to hear it?” (Be prepared that he may not want to hear your advice. If he doesn’t want to listen to your opinion, don’t give it!)

Child: (calming down and looking at mom with a wary look) “Maybe.”

Mom: “You need to wear shoes that are safe for the park. Let me know if you want to hear other solutions.”

Child: (Thinks for a moment.) “Could I wear my hiking boots? Are they safe? They stay tied.”

Mom: “Hiking boots would be a great idea. And we could tie a double knot with the laces to make sure they stay tied if you want.”

Improve Consistency

11. Work as a unified team with your spouse.

Children are masters at manipulating a situation to get what they want. If Mom doesn't give in, maybe Dad will. And when the extended family is present, there are endless opportunities to get a different answer. The fastest way to train your child to obey is to provide a consistent and uniform approach. When there is no variance in the response, you can establish the habit faster.

As much as possible, get everyone who interacts with your child working towards the same goal with a similar approach. Enforce the same rules, use the same strategies, and do not contradict each other in front of your child. If you disagree with how your spouse handled a situation, discuss it later in private.

Another benefit of working as a team is being able to hand off a situation when you are at your limit. It is challenging to be consistent, especially when you are tired or have dealt with difficult situations all day. When you implement a unified approach, your spouse can apply consistent discipline while providing his or her unique perspective, which sometimes can have a positive impact on the situation.

12. Say it once and follow through.

When you repeat yourself, your child tunes you out. She doesn't pay attention, and you end up nagging. If instead, you train her to obey after your first statement, she will learn to obey immediately. You may need to take a young child by the hand and help her get started.

Avoid counting to three. Your child should learn to obey the first time you give a command. When you count to three, you train your child to respond on the count of two and not before. She waits to obey until the last possible moment before getting in trouble.

13. Utilize natural consequences.

There are positive and negative consequences of our actions. If your child obeys, allow him to enjoy the positive results. Examples of positive consequences include:

- ★ Accompanying you on a shopping trip when he demonstrates that he can obey quickly and cheerfully at home.
- ★ Going to the park next week because he got in the car promptly when you told him it was time to leave.
- ★ Attending a party or gathering of friends when he was ready to leave the house on time.

If your child does not obey, allow him to suffer the consequences of his actions such as not joining you on the shopping trip, not going to the park the next week, or not attending the party.

14. Don't negotiate.

Children are masters of negotiation. They will argue or negotiate if they think they can get what they want. Instead of arguing with your child, calmly restate what he needs to do, and remind him that he needs to obey or face the consequences of disobedience.

15. Role-play.

Role-playing provides your child with an opportunity to practice how to respond in different situations. You could role-play how to behave in a store, eat dinner in a restaurant, or get into the car quickly and safely.

Role-playing is also helpful for you. It is good to think through common scenarios you might encounter and have a response prepared. For example, if your child says she does not want to do something, you could say, "I did not ask if you wanted to do it." When she asks if she has to clean up her belongings, you could say, "No, but I am taking whatever you do not clean up and getting rid of it." (But be prepared to follow through!) When you repeatedly respond the same way over time and hold firm to your answer, your child will come to realize it is not worth arguing because your answer will not change.

Vary How You Say It

16. Give choices.

When you allow your children to choose how to obey, she begins to assume responsibility for her actions. Give your child two choices, both of which are acceptable to you. For example, you might say, "Would you like to wear tennis shoes or hiking boots to the park today?" or "Would you like to take out the trash or put away your books first?"

17. Say it with a simple word or phrase.

When you provide clear, simple instructions, it is easier for children to understand what they need to do. Avoid providing an in-depth explanation about what your child needs to do, why he needs to do it, and how he should do it. Instead, make a simple statement such as, "Put your shoes away."

If you need to remind your child of something he has not finished, you can say a single word as a reminder. For example, if he cleaned up most of his belongings in the living room but left several pairs of shoes by the couch, you could simply say, "Shoes." A single word is often enough to help him see the shoes and take action.

18. Phrase it as a positive statement.

When most children are told not to do something, they usually have a sudden desire to do that very thing they are not supposed to do. Phrasing your direction as a positive statement removes the temptation to do what is forbidden.

Additionally, it is easier to obey when you know what you are supposed to do. For example, instead of saying, "Don't jump on the couch," you could say, "Couches are for sitting on."

19. Ask questions.

Instead of repeating yourself, ask your child questions designed to help her think through the situation and determine what she should do next. Examples include:

- ★ "What is the next step you need to take?"
- ★ "What did I say to do?"
- ★ "What do you need to do to obey?"
- ★ "What are you supposed to be doing right now?"
- ★ "Do you have the strength of will to obey?"

20. Make a list.

Most children enjoy having a list of what they need to do. It helps younger children feel more grown-up and helps older children remember what to do, especially if the list is longer than two or three items. The list could be what your child needs to accomplish or what the family needs to accomplish together.

Lists are helpful even for non-readers or emerging readers. You can make a list of what you and your child need to accomplish. As you complete one task, allow him to check it off and read the next one. He can assume responsibility for accomplishing what is on the list and you can function as a helper. It also allows you to give your child one task at a time to complete.

21. Express appreciation.

A few words of gratitude can change a situation in minutes. When parents notice their children's efforts, the children often take pride in their work and make a greater effort to obey and even complete tasks before being asked.

When you notice your child taking the initiative to complete a task even before you ask, show your appreciation by saying something such as, "I appreciate it when..." or "That's showing initiative. Thank you for taking out the trash." You will likely see a smile on your child's face from ear-to-ear that says, "You noticed!" Expressing appreciation is especially helpful for children whose love language is words of affirmation.

22. Describe what you see.

Stating the obvious reminds your child he needs to complete a task without feeling judged. For example, when he discards his belongings on his way through the living room after returning from the library, you could say, “I see books on the couch and coats on the bench.” A simple reminder can prod him into action.

23. Say it creatively.

Most people would prefer to do what they want instead of what they ought to do. Make it fun to obey by thinking outside the box. Examples include:

- ★ Tell your child what she needs to do using a silly voice.
- ★ Pretend to be the captain on a ship giving orders for the day.
- ★ Announce an outlandish consequence for not completing her assigned tasks.

24. Write a note.

Everyone enjoys receiving a note. Writing a note can be a great way to add a little fun and variety to obedience training. Plus, it can provide a gentle reminder without judgment. You could write a note on paper or a whiteboard. Consider adding a short note about how much you love him, how much you appreciate him, or something you noticed he did recently that demonstrated initiative or maturity. When your child receives these notes, his face will light up with pleasure.

25. Say it in a whisper.

Everyone loves a secret! It makes your child feel special and gets her attention because it is out of the ordinary.

Spice It Up

26. Play an obedience game.

Learning to obey is more fun when you can play a game. Playing obedience games helps your child through a fun activity develop the following skills:.

- ★ how to listen attentively
- ★ how to follow directions
- ★ Improvement of memory skills.
- ★ how to respond quickly
- ★ how to respond cheerfully
- ★ how to respond respectfully

They won't even realize they are learning to obey while they play and spend time with you!

27. Use timers or song playlists to complete chores.

Similar to a race or competition, trying to beat a timer is motivating for some children. Set a timer for 10 minutes and see if you can clean up the living room before the timer goes off.

Alternatively, you could create a playlist of favorite songs. Try to finish your tasks before the playlist ends. It may be helpful to have several playlists of different lengths. Always use the same song as the last song in each playlist. When you hear the ending song, you will know you have about 2 minutes to finish.

28. Have a “Yes” marathon day.

Hearing the word “No” often makes your child want to say, “Watch me!” Try to find ways to say “Yes” instead of saying “No.” For example, instead of responding, “No, you may not have dessert until you eat your dinner,” you could say, “Yes, you may have dessert as soon as you eat your dinner.” It can be challenging to find ways to say “Yes” instead of “No,” but this simple shift can positively impact your interactions with your child.

During a “Yes” marathon day, try to find as many ways as possible to say “Yes.” It may happen by accident when you suddenly realize you answered “Yes” four times in a row in response to questions. When that happens, encourage your child to ask as many questions as possible where the answer is “Yes.” Everyone will enjoy the positive shift in perspective!

You can expand this idea to have a “Yes Day.” Tell your child at breakfast that you want to say “Yes” as often as possible that day. You will try to find as many opportunities as possible to answer “Yes” during the day, and he should try to ask as many questions as possible that he thinks you will say “Yes” in response.

29. Race to obey.

Some children thrive in an environment of competition. You could challenge your child to see who can obey first. If you need to clean up toys in the living room, you might say, “I bet I can pick up more toys than you can! Ready, set, go!”

30. Declare a do-over day.

Some days are challenging, and a merciful approach could help turn them around. Consider declaring a challenging day a “do-over day.” When your child does not obey, offer him the opportunity to have a “do-over.” You could say, “Would you like to try that again?” or “How about a do-over?” If he chooses not to obey when offered a do-over opportunity, enforce the natural consequences of his disobedience.

6 Phrases to Reduce Obedience Struggles

Watch a positive transformation take place in your home by making these phrases your default response when your children whine or refuse to obey!

INSTEAD OF THIS...

Put your shoes away, okay?

SAY THIS...

Put your shoes away.
Do you understand?

Phrasing your command as a question is confusing for children. Instead, give a clear, concise direction.

Following your direction with "Do you understand?" provides clarity and allows you to ensure your child heard and understood you.

INSTEAD OF THIS...

No, you may not have dessert until you eat your dinner.

SAY THIS...

Yes, you may have dessert
as soon as you eat your
dinner.

Rewards are very motivating. Finding ways to say yes to your child encourages him to complete his assigned task so he can receive the reward once he is finished.

INSTEAD OF THIS...

I said eat your green beans!

(When your child tells you he doesn't want to eat his green beans.)

SAY THIS...

I didn't ask if you wanted
to eat your green beans.
Take a bite.

When you repeatedly respond the same way over time and hold firm to your answer, your children will come to realize it is not worth arguing because your answer will not change.

INSTEAD OF THIS...

Don't jump on the couch!

SAY THIS...

Couches are for sitting on.

Phrasing your direction as a positive statement removes the temptation to do what is forbidden.

Plus, it is easier to obey when you know what you are supposed to do instead of what you are not supposed to do.

INSTEAD OF THIS...

It's time to leave. Let's go!

(for the fifth time)

SAY THIS...

What one last thing do you
want to do before we leave?

Children need time to transition from one activity to the next. Allowing your child to choose how he will make that transition removes some of the struggles and allows him some control over his environment.

INSTEAD OF THIS...

Take out the trash and
empty the dishwasher.

SAY THIS...

What do you want to do
first—take out the trash or
empty the dishwasher?

We all like to make our own choices.

When we allow our children to have a choice about how to obey, they can begin developing autonomy and taking responsibility for their actions.

Obedience Games

List of Games and Activities by Skill

Listen Attentively

1-2-3
Cooking
Fishbowl
Follow the Leader
I Spy
I'm going on a picnic
Listen for my voice
Memory Games
Mommy Says
Picture Painting
Red Light, Green Light
Run to Mommy
Scavenger Hunt
Secret Mission
Sight-Seeing
Voice Mail

Follow Directions

1-2-3
Cooking
Fishbowl
Follow the Leader
Listen for my voice
Ma'am, may I?
Mommy Says
Scavenger Hunt
Secret Mission

Improve Memory Skills

1-2-3
I'm going on a picnic
Memory Games
Picture Painting
Secret Mission
Voice Mail

Respond Quickly

Fishbowl
Listen for my voice
Mommy Says
Red Light, Green Light
Run to Mommy
Secret Mission

Respond Respectfully

Listen for my voice
Ma'am, may I?
Mommy Says

List of Games and Activities by Age

Preschool

1-2-3
Cooking
Follow the Leader
I Spy
Listen for my voice
Ma'am, may I?
Memory Games
Mommy Says
Picture Painting
Red Light, Green Light
Run to Mommy
Scavenger Hunt
Secret Mission
Sight-Seeing

Elementary School

1-2-3
Cooking
Follow the Leader
I Spy
I'm going on a picnic
Listen for my voice
Ma'am, may I?
Memory Games
Mommy Says
Picture Painting
Red Light, Green Light
Run to Mommy
Scavenger Hunt
Secret Mission
Sight-Seeing
Voice Mail

Middle School

1-2-3
Cooking
Fishbowl
Follow the Leader
I Spy
I'm going on a picnic
Memory Games
Picture Painting
Run to Mommy (whistle)
Scavenger Hunt
Secret Mission
Voice Mail

High School

Cooking
Fishbowl
I'm going on a picnic
Memory Games
Picture Painting
Scavenger Hunt

1-2-3

Summary

A simple game of listening, remembering, and following directions to complete three tasks.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Follow directions

Improve memory skills

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Middle School

Supplies Needed

None

How to Play

The goal is to provide your child with three tasks to complete in order. Make this a fun activity and maintain the spirit of a game.

There are multiple levels at which this game can be played. For a younger child, give him one task at a time to complete. When he completes his task, he should report back to you to receive his next assignment. Repeat this two more times so he completes a total of three tasks. As he gains maturity and skill, combine instructions so he completes two tasks before coming back for his third task. Eventually, you will be able to give him three tasks to complete in a row.

For older children, increase the complexity of the tasks, the length of time the tasks will require to complete, or the number of tasks assigned at once. You could also make this a competition to see who can complete the most tasks.

For all ages, it is best to make the tasks fun, silly, or rewarding instead of chores. Examples could include: touch your toes, run around the house, tell your dad something, or eat a grape.

Cooking

Summary

Turn everyday experiences in the kitchen into learning opportunities.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Follow directions

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

Supplies Needed

Ingredients

Kitchen tools

Recipes

How to Play

When you are cooking, have your children help. Younger children can measure ingredients as you read the recipe step-by-step. Hearing the directions read out loud and then completing the action will help them learn to listen attentively and follow directions.

As your children mature, turn over more of the responsibilities to them. They will continue to build their ability to listen and follow directions as well as acquire a valuable life skill and build memories. It is more fun to cook with someone than to cook alone!

Fishbowl

Summary

A fun word and memory game combining Charades, Taboo, and Password. This game works well with groups of ten or more.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Follow directions

Respond quickly

Appropriate for Ages

Middle School

High School

Supplies Needed

Pens

Paper (3 pieces of paper for each person playing)

A container to hold the pieces of paper

Timer

How to Play

Separate everyone into two equal teams (Team A and Team B). Instruct each person to take three pieces of paper and write a person, a place, and a thing on their papers. Have each person fold their pieces of paper in half and place them into the container. It may be helpful to have players sit in a circle, alternating teams.

There are three rounds in Fishbowl: 1) Taboo, 2) Charades, and 3) Password.

Round 1: Taboo

A person from Team A takes a piece of paper from the container and tries to get his teammates to guess the word on the paper using only words and sentences as hints. He may not use any motions, "sounds like...", or spelling hints. (For example, if the word is "shoe", the person can say "you wear it on your feet"). Team A tries to guess as many words as possible in thirty seconds. A person from Team B monitors the timer.

If the team is unable to guess the word/phrase, the person has the option to say "pass," places the word/phrase back into the container, and continues with a new word/phrase. The person can only pass once during his one minute turn.

After thirty seconds, Team A records the number of successfully guessed words/phrases with each correctly guessed word/phrase counting as one point. A person from Team B takes a turn while a person from Team A monitors the timer.

This alternating process continues until all of the words from the container have been guessed. When the words run out, place all the words/phrases back into the container for the second round.

Round 2: Charades

Use the same instructions as the first round except the person acts out the word/phrase and may use motions as hints. (For example, if the word is “shoes,” the person can point to his feet/shoes). Once all of the words in the container have been guessed, place all the pieces of paper back into the container for the third round.

Round 3: Password

Use the same instructions as the first round except the person can use only one word as a hint. (For example, if the word is “shoes,” the person can say the word “tennis.”) When all the words run out, tally the points from all three rounds.

The team with the most points wins the game.

Follow the Leader

Summary

An imitation game where one player tries to determine who is leading the group in non-verbal actions.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Follow directions

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Middle School

Supplies Needed

None

How to Play

Instruct all players to form a circle. Choose one player to be the investigator. Have this person turn to face away from the rest of the group. Choose another player to be the leader. The leader begins performing a non-verbal action and the rest of the group imitates or follows the leader.

Have the investigator move to the center of the circle. The leader should periodically change non-verbal actions and the rest of the group should follow the leader's cue and change actions too. The investigator is allowed two guesses to identify the leader.

Continue taking turns being the investigator and the leader.

I Spy

Summary

A simple guessing game that can be played anywhere to improve your child's ability to pay attention.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Middle School

Supplies Needed

None

How to Play

Choose a player to be the first "Spy." The Spy identifies an object all players can see and that will be in sight for the duration of his turn but does not tell anyone else what the object is. The spy then says, "I spy with my little eye, something that..." and ends with a descriptive clue, such as "...is blue" or "...begins with the letter B."

The other players take turns asking one question at a time as they try to identify the object. Questions should be phrased in a way that the Spy can answer with a "yes" or "no" such as "Is it inside the car?" "Is it on the wall?" "Is it larger than a shoebox?"

If a player thinks he knows what the object is, he can use his turn to guess by saying "Is it...?"

When the object is correctly identified, a new person becomes the Spy and a new object is identified. The next Spy may be chosen in several ways. The person to correctly identify the object may go next or you may take turns being the Spy.

I'm Going on a Picnic

Summary

A memory game that can be played anywhere.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Improve memory skills

Appropriate for Ages

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

Supplies Needed

None

How to Play

The first person starts the game by saying, "I'm going on a picnic and I'm taking..." and inserts something that begins with the letter "A."

The second person says, "I'm going on a picnic and I'm taking (what the first person is bringing) and ..." and inserts something that begins with the letter "B."

Continue this pattern with everyone repeating what the previous people brought and adding the next letter of the alphabet.

If you are playing this game with a larger group, you could play where each person brings an item that begins with the first letter of their name.

Listen For My Voice

Summary

A game to teach younger children to listen for your voice and respond quickly and respectfully.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively
Follow directions
Respond quickly
Respond respectfully

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool
Elementary School (early elementary)

Supplies Needed

None

How to Play

Explain to your children that they should find a nearby hiding place where they will be able to hear your voice. When he hears you say his name, he should come as quickly and quietly as possible to stand in front of you and respond with your chosen phrase such as “Yes, Mommy.” or “Yes, Ma’am.”

Allow your children to find nearby hiding places, then quietly say “(Child’s name), come to me.” If needed, prompt him to say your chosen phrase when he is standing in front of you. Then tell him an affirmation such as something kind he did for someone else or something about his character that you admire. Examples could include: “Johnny, you have been very attentive to my voice lately.” or “Sarah, thank you for helping your sister put away her toys this morning.” Try to phrase the affirmation in terms of what your child did instead of how it makes him a “good boy” or “good girl.”

Call each child multiple times over the course of five to ten minutes. Make the game more interesting by using different volumes and tones of your voice so they become accustomed to listening for your normal speaking voice as well as a whisper.

Ma'am, may I?

Summary

A variation on the game “Mother, may I?” to help children become comfortable saying ma’am and sir.

Skills Reinforced

Follow directions

Respond respectfully

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Supplies Needed

None

How to Play

Have children line up on a starting line. Choose one person to be the caller, i.e. “Ma’am” or “Sir.” The caller should stand on or near the finish line.

Each child on the starting line takes turns asking the caller, “Ma’am (or Sir), may I ...” He inserts requests such as take three giant steps forward or take two bunny hops forward. The caller responds with a “No, sir (or ma’am), you may not.” or “Yes, sir (or ma’am), you may.”

The first child to reach the finish line wins.

Memory Games

Summary

Several variations of this game make it fun for all ages to improve their memory skills.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Improve memory skills

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

Supplies Needed

Varies, see notes below

How to Play

For younger children

A variety of memory games can be purchased or you can make your own with a duplicate set of your own pictures or have your child draw pictures and make a copy.

Shuffle the cards. Lay them out on the table face side down. Players take turns flipping over two cards. If they match, they can keep the cards. If they do not match, turn the cards over and play passes to the next player. The player with the most matches at the end of the game wins.

You can make the game simpler for younger children by using fewer sets of cards.

For older children

Prepare several picture collages electronically (presentation or word processing document) or on a piece of paper or poster board. Make a list of items in the collage.

This game can be played individually or in teams of 2-3. Give each person or team a piece of paper and pen and explain that the object of the game is to remember as many items from the picture collage as possible. Instruct them to look at the picture for three minutes. When three minutes are up, they should write down as many items as they can remember.

Read aloud the list of items. Players/teams receive 1 point for every correct item they write down. They do not receive any points for items on their list that were not in the picture.

Mommy Says

Summary

A Simon Says type game to teach younger children to listen for your voice and to respond quickly and respectfully.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively
Follow directions
Respond quickly
Respond respectfully

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool
Elementary School (early elementary)

Supplies Needed

None

How to Play

Explain to your children that they should play quietly nearby but to listen for your voice. When he hears you say his name, he should stand and face you and respond with your chosen phrase such as “Yes, Mommy.” or “Yes, Ma’am.” He should then listen for your next command, respond with the chosen phrase again, and complete the command.

Allow your children to play for a few moments, then quietly say one of their names. Prompt him to respond with the chosen phrase if needed. Give a simple command such as, “Touch your toes.”, “Pat your head.” or “Give me a hug.”

Repeat this sequence calling each child multiple times over the course of ten to fifteen minutes. Mix it up by using different volumes and tones of your voice so they become accustomed to listening for your normal speaking voice as well as a whisper.

Picture Painting

Summary

A game that can be played by all ages to create mental pictures in your mind and improve your ability to notice and remember details.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Improve memory skills

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

Supplies Needed

Something beautiful to observe such as a painting or an outdoor landscape

How to Play

Begin mental picture painting by describing what a joy it is to see lovely pictures in your mind whenever you want. Then describe a picture you have in your personal picture gallery. Think about a scene from your childhood or a special trip you took that you remember vividly.

Next, instruct your children to look at a landscape or painting and take a mental picture of it. After they have observed the scene for a few minutes, tell them to close their eyes and visualize what they saw. Ask if they have a clear picture or if any of it seems blurry. If it seems blurry, have them look again until they can visualize the picture in detail.

When they are ready, direct them to turn away from the landscape or painting and describe their mental picture to you in as much detail as possible.

Because this is a mentally taxing activity, play it no more than once a week.

Red Light, Green Light

Summary

A fast-paced game that requires players to listen and respond quickly in a race to reach the finish line first.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Respond quickly

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Supplies Needed

None

How to Play

Have all children line up along a starting line and define the finish line. The caller should stand on or near the finish line. When the caller says “green light,” everyone should run towards the finish line. When the caller says “red light,” everyone should freeze in place. If the caller catches a player moving after the caller says “red light,” he must go back to the starting line. Continue alternating “green light” and “red light” until one player crosses the finish line to win.

You can add variety to the game by introducing different colored lights and assigning variations of how to move towards the finish line when different colors are called such as run on green, walk heel to toe on yellow, hop (or skip, gallop, etc.) on purple.

Run to Mommy

Summary

A game that uses a child's natural desire for affection to teach him to listen for your voice and respond quickly.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Respond quickly

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Middle School (whistle version)

Supplies Needed

Whistle or bell (optional)

How to Play

For younger children

This activity is best played when your child is already in a cooperative mood. Begin by opening your arms wide and saying, "Run to mommy!" with an excited voice and a big smile when he is already coming toward you. As he demonstrates obedience with this command, you can play the game when he is in a cooperative mood but is facing away from you and walking a few steps in front of you.

Over time, practice calling him to you in different settings such as when he is engaged in playing with toys or playing at the park or in the yard. Always keep it in the spirit of a game and reward him with plenty of hugs and kisses when he reaches you.

For older children

This activity is also beneficial for older children. Elementary school-aged children can learn to respond to a whistle or a bell. Explain the importance of coming when called (safety, leaving on time, etc.) and that you will practice this skill by blowing a whistle.

Initially practice in your own yard when they are listening for the whistle and are ready to respond. Work up to blowing the whistle while they are playing in the yard and need to come inside for dinner or are playing at the park and it is time to leave.

Scavenger Hunt

Summary

An infinitely variable game that can be adapted to all ages and increases the participant's ability to pay attention to details and follow directions.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Follow directions

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

Supplies Needed

List of items to find

Camera (optional)

How to Play

Prepare a list of items for your child to find. These could be items around your house, yard, or neighborhood. As your child finds each item, instruct him to cross it off his list.

Alternatively, you could have your child take a picture of each item and report back to you when he has found all of the items. This would work well with older children able to work independently on a scavenger hunt.

To increase the difficulty, you could ask him to look for smaller or more obscure details.

Secret Mission

Summary

A twist on a familiar game to encourage your children to listen to directions and complete a challenge from memory.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively
Follow directions
Improve memory skills
Respond quickly

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool
Elementary School
Middle School

Supplies Needed

Various physical obstacles

How to Play

Arrange physical obstacles for your children to climb over or through, run around, climb under, etc. This can be played indoors or outdoors. Alternatively, you could place messages around the house for them to retrieve.

Tell your children that they will be sent on various secret missions. Their challenge, should they choose to accept it, is to complete the mission as quickly as possible and in the correct order.

One at a time, call your children to you and whisper a series of directions to him. Then tell him, "Your mission starts NOW!" and send him off to complete the series of directions. For younger children, you could place a favorite stuffed animal where he will complete his final direction to give him a concrete goal of saving his "friend."

Only give one or two directions for younger children. For children who demonstrate the ability to complete two sets of instructions, you can increase the difficulty of the game by giving them more sets of instructions to follow. Challenge them to see how many sets of instructions they can remember and complete correctly.

Sight-Seeing

Summary

A game of exploration to improve your child's ability to observe details.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Appropriate for Ages

Preschool

Elementary School

Supplies Needed

An interesting landscape

How to Play

Encourage your children to be explorers and find out all they can about an interesting setting nearby. When they return, ask them to tell you all they saw using as much detail and description as possible. You may encourage them to include additional details by asking a few questions after they complete their initial report. Keep your questions to a minimum though. If they did not obtain enough detail, they may return to investigate a second time.

A sight-seeing conversation at a lake might sound like this:

Mother: "Children, why don't you pretend to be explorers and see how much you can find out about that section of the shoreline?"

When they return, the children report what they saw.

Sarah: "Mother! I saw some rocks covered by the water. There were also rocks sticking up out of the water. There were lots of tiny black bugs on the dry rocks. I hit the rocks with a stick and it made the bugs dance."

Tom: "I saw some grass and mud. The mud is red, like clay."

Mother: "Tom, can you describe the grass?"

Tom: "I didn't look closely at the grass."

Mother: "Perhaps you should inspect the grass more closely?"

Mother sends Tom back to inspect the grass and then report back.

Tom: "The grass is prickly. It might be Bermuda grass, like the kind we have at home."

Voice Mail

Summary

An often hilarious game to see how close you can keep the final message to the original as it is whispered from one player to the next.

Skills Reinforced

Listen attentively

Improve memory skills

Appropriate for Ages

Elementary School

Middle School

Supplies Needed

None

How to Play

Instruct the children to sit in a circle. Have one child think of a message and whisper it to the child sitting on his right. Continue having each child whisper the message to the child on his right until the message is whispered to the child who began. The first child then says the final message out loud as well as the original message.

Typically, children enjoy seeing how different the final message is from the original. Since you are working on improving your children's listening skills, encourage them to see how close they can keep the final message to the original.

Obedience Book Suggestions

Obedience Book Suggestions

Parent Resources

- ★ *The 5 Love Languages of Children* by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell
- ★ *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey
- ★ *Boundaries* by Henry Cloud
- ★ *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish
- ★ *Knights in Training* by Heather Haupt
- ★ *Making Children Mind without Losing Yours* by Kevin Leman
- ★ *Parenting is Heart Work* by Scott Turansky
- ★ *Parenting With Love And Logic* by Foster Cline and Jim Fay
- ★ *Teen-Proofing: Fostering Responsible Decision Making in Your Teenager* by John Rosemond
- ★ *Your Child's Growing Mind* by Jane Healy
- ★ *What Happens When Women Say Yes to God* by Lisa TerKeurst
- ★ *Why I Didn't Rebel* by Rebecca Gregoire Lindenbach

Picture Books

Picture books are a great way to introduce and reinforce concepts for all ages. C.S. Lewis said, "No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally – and often far more – worth reading at the age of fifty and beyond." There are many living picture books that communicate a message very powerfully. Do not underestimate the value of a picture for all ages, toddler through adult.

- ★ *Aesop for Children* by Aesop and Milo Winter
- ★ *The Children's Book of Virtues* by William J. Bennett
- ★ Lamplighter Books
- ★ *Library Lion* by Michelle Knudsen
- ★ *My Child My Princess* by Beth Moore
- ★ *Pink and Say* by Patricia Polacco
- ★ *Tikki Tikki Tembo* retold by Arlene Mosel
- ★ *The True Princess* by Angela Elwell Hunt

Book Suggestions for Ages 12+

- ★ *Do Hard Things* by Alex Harris and Brett Harris
- ★ *Helen's Temper and Its Consequences* by Mrs. George Gladstone
- ★ Lamplighter Books
- ★ *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey
- ★ *What Happens When Women Say Yes to God* by Lisa TerKeurst

Building the Habit of Obedience with Older Children

Older children require a different approach to habit training than their younger siblings. They no longer automatically accept a parent's answer. Instead, they want to do it their way. They do not want to hear a lecture about what they did wrong. They may not even want advice about how to solve their problem.

They are growing up, maturing, and finding their way in this world. And that is a good thing! You may not believe that, especially if you are in the middle of a storm with a disobedient or disrespectful adolescent. It is normal and healthy for your child to separate from you and establish her own identity.

Whether you are beginning obedience training with an older child or reinforcing habits you started building when she was younger, you need to use a different approach during the adolescent years.

Disclaimer

I am not a mental health professional, nor am I a counselor. You should consider seeking professional counseling if you have a child you fear may harm himself, you, or others.

Your adolescent's brain is different.

Around the age of 11, children begin to think more abstractly. They are trying to figure out how they fit into the adult world. What is their place? How should they act? Who should they obey? It can be scary and confusing for them.

Naturally, they begin to question others' authority, especially their parents and wonder if the rules apply to them. Your child may suddenly seem like a different person. And in fact, she probably is! Her brain is maturing and developing at a very rapid pace.

What's in it for them?

I distinctly remember the day my daughter was too big and too strong for me to pick up when she did not want to do what I told her to do. There was no way I was strong enough to pick up the limp, spaghetti-like child in front of me. At that moment, I realized I needed to take a different approach to get her to obey. I could no longer use the same strategies I had in the past, and I could not physically force her to obey.

I do not remember how we got through that difficult situation. The limp child and sudden realization that she was growing up are what stand out in my mind. But after that incident, I began finding ways to point out the rewards of obedience and the dangers of disobedience.

Any time we read books or Bible passages exhibiting these truths, we discussed them and how they might apply in her life. When she wanted certain privileges, such as attending events without me, I pointed out that I was not sure she would obey another adult if she would not obey me. She would not have the privilege of

attending events until she demonstrated the responsibility of obeying me. I found ways to connect what she wanted to what she needed to do to help her realize that obeying was in her best interest.

What does obedience mean?

True obedience is obeying out of respect for those in authority over you and with the right heart and attitude. In essence, it is submission to the will of another. This is what God requires of us in our relationship with Him. He loves us deeply and wants the best for us and therefore expects us to obey Him. When we help our child learn to obey for the right reasons, we are helping them build a foundation for lifelong obedience to God.

A word of caution—you should also help your child learn who should and should not be allowed to have authority over her to stay safe. Not everyone has her best interests in mind. There are times we need to disobey human authorities over us to obey God, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer taught us. Look for opportunities to discuss obeying with the right heart perspective and in which circumstances it might be appropriate to obey God instead of human authorities.

Develop your habits.

Training your child to obey is not merely applying a set of rules or using specific techniques to get your child to obey. It is helpful to learn and utilize new techniques, but you also need to change your behavior to create an atmosphere where your child wants to obey and where you can enforce obedience. It is equal parts training your child and training yourself. Continue to improve your consistency as you apply the principles covered in this resource with your older child.

Improve your relationship with your child.

A good relationship with your child opens the door to being a mentor and influencing his life. You can invest in your relationship in many ways, but they can be summarized in three words: time, listen, and fun.

Time. Investing in relationships requires time, so the first step you may need to take is to rearrange your schedule so you can spend more time with your child. You may need to say “No” to some commitments to invest in your relationship with your child.

One year I realized how important it is to invest in relationships, so I chose “relationship” as my word of the year. I wrote it at the top of my daily planner every day. It was a tangible reminder for me to prioritize relationships over most everything else. Before scheduling appointments and activities, I looked at the week’s overall schedule to ensure we had plenty of unstructured time at home and that I had time to be available to my children. I asked myself if the tasks on my to-do list were truly important or merely busywork. At the end of the day, my goal was to answer “Yes” to the following question, “Did I invest in relationships today?”

Listen. Seek to listen to your child and to understand him. Try to empathize with how he feels about situations instead of always offering advice. Be genuine when you ask about his day. He will see through a shallow and half-hearted effort to engage in a conversation. Find ways to spend time alone with your child so you can hear his unique perspective on life that only comes out when others are not around.

Fun. It is easier to build relationships when you are having a good time, especially relationships with adolescents. Seek to find ways to spend time with your child doing what she enjoys. We attend Christian concerts together as a family. I probably would not attend some of the concerts we do if my daughters were not interested in the artists. Listening to their favorite artists with them builds a connection that would be difficult to form without this shared experience. Don't rule out doing something you enjoy that your child has not tried before. She may find a new favorite pastime.

Be a mentor.

Most mentors do not tell you what to do, but you seek out their advice since you respect them. Because of their expertise and the relationship you have established, they have earned the privilege of providing counsel for you. If you are not in a mentoring relationship, I highly encourage you to seek someone to be your mentor. Modeling a mentoring relationship will set an excellent example for your children, and mentors can provide perspective when you are too close to a situation.

To be a mentor for your child, you need to earn her respect. As your daughter matures into a young woman (or your son matures into a young man), it is important to respect her responsibility to make her own decisions and accept the consequences for those choices. As difficult as it will be, it is essential to refrain from telling her what to do as much as possible. It will be a transition period as she learns to assume this responsibility. During this transition, you will, at times, need to be the responsible adult in charge. However, there will be even more opportunities to provide advice instead of directives.

Another way to be a mentor is to walk alongside your child. Provide help when it is requested, and stand back when it is not. When he does not want you to help, it can be challenging not to judge or make comments indicating your displeasure with his decisions. I had to ask my daughters for forgiveness on many occasions when I made judgmental statements to them. As your child sees you are willing to help instead of criticizing, he will be more comfortable coming to you with problems and admitting mistakes.

One night as I was tucking my daughter into bed, she asked if she could tell me something important. I braced myself and told her she could tell me anything. I could see she was struggling with the decision to admit something, so I was patient as she worked up her courage. She said she had not been turning out her lights at night when she was supposed to and was sometimes reading long after her

lights-out time. She had wanted to tell me for about six months but had been afraid. I gently told her I loved her and would always love her regardless of what she did. I also told her I respected her for confessing this to me, and I knew how difficult that must have been. Then I admitted that I had done the same thing as a child, and I don't think I ever confessed it to my parents! I could see a weight lift from her shoulders. Reading past lights-out time does not seem like a big mistake to an adult, and really, it isn't. What is of enormous value is that my daughter overcame her fear that I would overreact. My response communicated that she could come to me with her problems without fear of condemnation. When she makes a mistake in the future, she will be more comfortable coming to me for advice and help.

Find a mentor for your child.

If your relationship with your child is damaged, you may want to seek out a mentor for him to receive guidance from someone he trusts and respects while you focus on improving your relationship. Places to find other mentors for your child include counselors at camp, grandparents, adults at church, youth who are a few years older than your child, teachers, and coaches. Over time, you may also be able to become a mentor for him.

Even if you have a good relationship with your child, additional mentors are beneficial. Some of these mentors may be a mentor for only a short time. The relationship with others may continue to grow over the years. When your child has other adults investing in his life, he may hear your message reinforced or said in a way he understands better. When my daughter was dealing with a challenging friend situation, she asked for my advice. I gave her some suggestions for handling the situation and encouraged her to talk with a trusted adult at church with whom she had developed a friendship. This adult provided a different perspective that reinforced what my daughter and I had already discussed and offered additional insight into the situation.

Outside mentors also provide accountability for your child. There have been situations when my daughter behaved disrespectfully toward me. When I asked if she would behave that way around her other mentors, she begrudgingly said, "No, of course not." I then reminded her that disrespectful behavior was not acceptable in our home, and I expected her to treat me with the same respect she would give other people.

Provide opportunities to learn.

Your adolescent is learning how to manage emotions and raging hormones. He is learning proper social behaviors. And, he is still learning to think through the consequences of his actions. Have you ever asked your child, "What were you thinking?!" His answer was probably, "I don't know." And he was most likely telling the truth. The ability to think through consequences and not act on impulses is a skill acquired through much practice. Many adults still struggle with this.

We can help our child by providing him with opportunities to practice obeying, showing others respect, and making wise decisions. One way would be to role-play with your child and talk about situations he might encounter. We have used role-playing opportunities to discuss new situations our daughters might encounter and specific character issues with which they struggle. Thinking through their response ahead of time makes it easier to appropriately respond when they face the situation in the future.

Hosting a book club is another way to provide an opportunity for your child to think through challenging situations and hear other perspectives. We hosted a short-term book club when my each of my daughters were twelve or thirteen to read through *Do Hard Things* with a small group of friends. It was a pleasure watching them expand their horizons as they heard each other talk about their struggles and how they might handle certain situations.

You may also consider reading through a book with your child outside of a book club and discussing it with him. When I read and discussed *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* with my daughter, we had difficult conversations we might not otherwise have had. We were able to build a common vocabulary. Now, when faced with a difficult situation, I might ask her to “put herself in her friend’s shoes,” or if what she is proposing is a “win-win situation.” These questions allow me to guide her without telling her what to do.

Allow them to make mistakes.

You cannot and should not protect your child forever. She needs to learn to take responsibility for her decisions and associated consequences. Allowing natural consequences to occur will prepare her for life as an adult. When my daughter first started learning how to manage her time, we discussed the tasks she needed to complete and made a plan for achieving them. With time and practice, she began assuming more responsibility for managing her time. Frequently, she was very successful and completed assignments on time. But there were instances when she had to miss fun activities she was looking forward to attending because she had not finished her work. These times were challenging for both of us but have proven to be good learning experiences.

Children should make mistakes as adolescents when the stakes are lower. It is a balancing act to turn over this responsibility. You will need to show grace to your child and yourself as you both make this transition.

As your child learns to take responsibility for his choices and the consequences that follow, it is essential to remember that his decisions are his responsibility, not yours. You are often affected as a result, which can be an inconvenience, but you should not consider this a failure of yours or a reflection of your character. Instead, use it as an opportunity to help your child mature.

My daughter learned this lesson of taking responsibility for her choices painfully

when she stepped on her phone, and the screen cracked. She was in her bedroom, and we heard a loud crash. We went in to check on her and discovered that a curtain rod had fallen. She was a little shocked but was not injured, so we all went back to our activities. A few minutes later, she came in with an even more shocked look on her face and showed us her phone screen, which was so cracked she could no longer use it safely because of the tiny shards of glass. We asked her what happened and she said she did not know. After some investigation, we determined her phone must have been sitting on the floor. When the curtain rod fell, she stepped on the phone as she moved out of the way. However, she would not own up to this. She insisted she had placed her phone on the bookshelf.

When we felt confident the phone had been on the floor and stepped on, we confronted her gently but firmly as we explained how we all make poor decisions sometimes and how important it is for us to assume responsibility for the consequences. Eventually, she admitted she must have had the phone next to her on the floor and apologized profusely through the tears streaming down her face. I said, "I know you are sorry this happened. And I am sorry you will not be able to use your phone until we can replace the screen. What would be a better choice you could make next time?" After discussing other options of where she could place her phone in the future so it would be safe, we informed her we would investigate getting her screen repaired and that she would need to pay for the repairs. If we could not fix the screen, she would need to replace her phone. Since then, she has been more careful not to leave her phone where she might step on it. She also learned two other valuable lessons. First, she assumed responsibility for her poor decision and the consequences that followed. Second, she knows we love her even when she makes poor decisions.

Be patient.

It will take time to develop your relationship with your child, become his mentor, and find a mentor. Persevere and keep taking the next step in the right direction. Recognize, too, that you may fall back a few steps in your relationship when you make a mistake and need to ask your child for forgiveness.

Persevere. Over time, you will begin to see the fruits of your efforts. If your child is only a year or two from moving out on his own, it may be many years from now before you see the real benefits of investing in your relationship with him, but any effort you make to improve your relationship will be worth it!