

Why Repeating Yourself Doesn't Work

And What to Do Because Repeating Yourself Doesn't Work

"Put on your shoes." "Your shoes." "Put on your shoes!"

"I SAID PUT ON YOUR SHOES!"

It's a familiar scene - repeated one way or another most days in most homes. That slow simmer of frustration when a simple request seems to vanish into the ether, met with the selective deafness that only a child can truly master.

It's easy to assume they're deliberately ignoring us, their minds mysteriously attuned to the siren call of "ice cream" or "treats" while remaining impervious to any mention of footwear, schoolbags, lunchboxes, or the wet towel on the carpet.

But before we write them off as defiant or inattentive, let's consider a different perspective. What if the communication breakdown isn't entirely their fault? What if we, as parents, are inadvertently contributing to the disconnect?

Most of us see communication as a simple process:

1. We say it. We keep it short and simple so it's easy to understand.
2. They hear it. (And then they act).

But communication, especially with children, is far more nuanced.

Imagine this: your request to "put on your shoes" is just the opening move. Your child then needs to decode your message, understand what you're asking, and provide feedback – a nod, a verbal response, or the actual act of moving towards those elusive shoes. And we, in turn, need to be attuned to their feedback, ensuring our message has landed as intended.

Perhaps the bigger issue is this: just because we did send the message and it was received, there are no guarantees that our child will act. Timing matters. What they're doing, how they're feeling, and what their agenda is are all factors that impact whether they act, regardless of how loud and clear the message was.

If your child is "not listening" it's time to shift strategy and engage in a more mindful, collaborative approach to communication.

Here's how to transform those frustrating moments into opportunities for connection:

1. Make sure you have their attention before you start speaking. This might (but doesn't have to) involve:

- A personalised invitation: Say their name gently but firmly, signaling that you're about to say something important.
- Pressing pause: Give them a moment to disengage from their current activity and shift their focus to you. Eye contact is the signal you need to know they're connected to you.
- A gentle touch: A light hand (or tap) on the shoulder can be a powerful way to draw their attention without startling them.

2. Speak Their Language. Remember, you're communicating with a child. Adjust your language and delivery accordingly:

- One thing at a time: Avoid overwhelming them with a barrage of instructions. Focus on one specific request at a time.
- Keep it concise: Use clear, simple language, and keep your sentences short.
- Make it fun: Inject some playfulness into the request. Can they put their shoes on "super fast" or with "extra-sneaky ninja moves"?
- Engage their thinking: Instead of simply giving directives, ask questions like, "What do you need to do before we leave?"

3. Confirm Understanding. Don't just assume they've understood. Take a moment to confirm:

- Playback time: Ask them to repeat back what you've asked them to do.
- Timeline check: Ask, "When will you put your shoes on?" or "What are you going to do first?"

4. Read the Nonverbal Cues. Pay attention to their body language and facial expressions. Are they confused? Overwhelmed? Resistant? Adjust your approach accordingly.

5. Validate Their Feelings. If they're struggling to comply, acknowledge their feelings. "Don't you just wish you could play/read all day? I know it's hard to stop playing right now, but we need to leave soon."

6. Practice Patience. Remember, children are still developing their self-regulation skills. Be patient, understanding, and offer gentle reminders **when** needed.

7. Create a Culture of Respectful Communication. Encourage open and honest communication in your **family**. Create a safe space for everyone to express their thoughts and feelings. Children are imitators. **They** need you to be a model of appropriate communication.

8. Remember the Power of Connection. Sometimes, the most effective way to get through to a child is to connect with them on an emotional level. Take a moment to engage with them, offer a hug, or simply acknowledge their feelings.

9. Do it with Them. When all else fails (or sometimes well before anything fails), be involved together. Solidarity and companionship are often the secrets to making things work.

Even with the most effective communication strategies, there will be days when your child's selective hearing seems to reach world-class levels. But by shifting our approach from one of frustration and repetition to one of connection and collaboration, we can transform those frustrating moments into opportunities for growth, understanding, and deeper connection with our children.



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