

Parent Magic!



We want our children to behave. We want to keep our cool. We want a peaceful, loving family life. How do we achieve these goals? Through trial and error? Hit and miss? Luck? Unlikely. Through knowledge and skill? YES! Parents who use good skills have a magic power to create more peace in their homes. Let's examine some of the most potent magic skills:

Ask helpful questions.

The most important discipline goal we have as a parent is not to make our kids behave. Rather, it is to help our kids develop into confident, self-disciplined people. We can help children learn to listen to their "inner voice" and help them develop self-discipline by asking helpful questions. What makes this work is not just the type of questions, but the delivery: thoughtful and free from anger and criticism. When we yell, blame, and accuse, our kids focus on our anger and do not learn from the experience. When we guide our children by using helpful questions we point them in the right direction.

What's not helpful?

- Why did you do that?
- What's the matter with you?
- How many times do I . . .
- Why can't you ever. . .

What are helpful questions?

- How do you feel about that?
- What will you do now?
- How do you think she feels?
- How can we solve this?

After you ask the question, sit back quietly and listen. You may be delighted to see your child solving his or her own problem. Parents become frustrated with their children for not listening to them. Often listening is not the problem – understanding is the problem! Instead of saying, "Be good!" Be very specific: "Please sit still and use a quiet voice." Instead of, "This bedroom is a disaster area." It's more effective to be clear and specific, "Before lunch today, please put your clothes in the closet, books on the shelf and dishes in the kitchen."

Just the facts, please.

Parents clutter their communication with unnecessary and hurtful phrases. "You always... You never... You make me... You are such a..." Make an effort to state only the facts, so instead of bellowing, "How many times do I have to tell you to turn that music down. It's too loud. Why do you always ignore me?" Try this, "John, please turn the music down, or shut it off."

Follow through. Pick your battles. And when you pick one – win it!

Parents often make a request and then back off when the child becomes difficult. In the example above, if John doesn't turn down the music, how many parents would mumble, complain, yell, or nag about it? It is important in the parent-child relationship for you to win your battles. You can calmly walk into John's room, turn off his radio yourself, look him in the eye and say, "I expect you to listen to me." If John is a real stinker, you can take the radio with you and tell him he can have it back, along with another chance, tomorrow.

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of "Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting."

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