



WHAT TO DO WHEN KIDS TALK BACK!

Talking back, sassy comments and rude gestures by children are a common complaint among parents, and can cause some problems within the family if the behavior is not acknowledged. What can parents and child care providers do to put a stop to this unacceptable behavior? Here are some tips:

Be Aware of What Language is Used Around your Child

What kind of talk occurs around your child? How much sarcasm, fighting and inappropriate language is he exposed to? Children modeling their parents and if you are exhibiting undesirable behaviors, then your child is sure to repeat them. If you know your home is not the place your child is picking up these behaviors, pay attention to his other environments, such as how daycare providers speak to each other, and how relatives speak to each other. If you notice one of your child's surrounding is where the bad behaviors is stemming from, you may have to change the environment.

Notice Your Child's Feelings

Often when a child talks back, he's really expressing is anger, frustration, fear, or hurt. Talking back **guarantees you will pay attention**, and negative attention is better than none. Talking back is more common during times of transition, such as a new baby in the house, change in a parent's work schedule or something going on in school. Your child may feel ignored or abandoned and resort to back talk just to get you to pay attention because your child doesn't know what else to do. This is a sign of a lagging skill, not of manipulation. Young children do not manipulate, they "work" the outcome of what they have experienced. If they see that their parents change the rules when they tantrum, push back etc...they learn that this is what they have to do to get what they want. We want our children to learn what to do when they don't get what they want and learn frustration tolerance. As difficult as it may be to experience a tantrum or emotional escalation, giving in teaches the wrong lesson – kids learn that being upset or disappointed is an emotion that they can't handle.

Pay Attention to Your Child's Self-esteem, Sense of Powerless and Level of Comfort

Does the youngster feel powerless or not listened to? Does he seem out of control? Is it possible that the back-talk occurs because the child has found that it is the most effective way to get an adult to listen to him and to get what he wants? Again, if this is the case, tackling these issues first may resolve the problem.

Establish Expected Behavior and Give Alternatives

Teach kids that talking about it not allowed and give alternatives for what saying are allowed. Simply say: "Talking that way is not allowed" and provide an example with the appropriate way to say the statement. Remain firm and direct. Consistency is key to changing behaviors – let all care givers know that this is an expectation. Give the child an alternative, polite way to use language. Again, consistency is important.

Teach Consequences

This important lesson must be understood by a back-talking child. Adults can simply say: "I am not going to talk with you or listen while you have this tone with me. Once you change how you talk with me, then I will be glad to listen." Parents and caregivers should always follow through with listening and paying attention once the child does change his tone. Let the child know that you want to talk about the upsetting incident and understand but, you will NOT do it until appropriate communication is demonstrated. Be nurturing and empathetic – your child would do differently if your child knew how to do differently. Again, this is a lagging skill or copying what has been observed by watching parents, movies, videos etc...

Teach Proper Communications Methods

Sometimes, a child really doesn't know how to properly ask for things or to communicate. In an appropriate setting and time (and not when a child has just challenged an adult with back-talk), calmly help your child rephrase what was just said to a more appropriate response. **Reward your child's ability to properly communicate with positive reinforcement. Behavior will NOT change unless the child is "caught" demonstrating the desired behavior. What you pay attention to is what will be reinforced.** However, be sure that they understand that simply asking respectfully still does not necessarily mean they will achieve the outcome they are requesting. Praise your child's good behaviors. You may say "I really like the way you said you asked for two more minutes on the iPad but it is time for dinner."

Teach your Child How to Handle Disappointment and Failure

Many times talking back comes from a child feeling disappointed or angry. Teach your child ways to voice disappointment or displeasure without talking back to an adult. Encourage your child to vocalize frustration and feelings of sadness and not bottle these feelings up so later explode with an attitude.

Role Play Scenarios

Reinforce that inappropriate reactions/behaviors should always be followed by an apology and an attempt to again relay the communication in a non-"sassy" tone. Role-play with your child alternative ways to speak in certain situations and make it fun and silly. Children are more inclined to participate in silly games and will remember the games when it is time to communicate properly. When an apology does not seem authentic such as "Sooooory", have your child make amends by doing something kind for the person who was hurt by the child's words. This is usually very helpful in situations with siblings. Making amends by having the child do something nice for the hurt sibling such as doing a chore for the sibling, giving up a turn or time with a video game for the other person etc....

Practice and intentionally model in front of your child talking calmly when you are upset. **Most importantly as in all behaviors "catch" them doing the expected behavior, notice it, praise them specifically for what they did and call attention to it.** This is behavior modification – letting them what **TO do**, not what **NOT to do**. Kids will and want to do well. **Remember: children with attention issues and impulsivity will struggle more with this than other children because of difficulties with filtering and inhibiting impulses. These children need even more patience and compassion.**