



Walk Your Talk

Our children are inundated with demands from the adults in their lives.

At times all those words may sound like a never-ending torrent. I'm reminded of a YouTube video that made the rounds a couple years ago of *The Mom Song*, three minutes of commands sung to the William Tell Overture.

What an exhausting way to parent, especially when there are more effective ways to get the job done.

When we are constantly telling our children what to do, when do they have the time to figure out what they should do?

Most of the problems we have with young children could be resolved if we talked less, and listened more. When we turn the tables around and listen to our words those utterances may sound like nagging, lecturing, begging, ordering, bargaining, bribing, threatening or yelling. It all sounds disrespectful.

As you have probably figured out, using all those words is not a very effective parenting tool. We say our children are uncooperative or disobedient, when in fact the problem is our ineffective parenting skill of talking too much.

Our actions speak louder than our words. After a while our barrage of language sounds like blah-blah-blah to our children. Our children tune us out. But when we model behavior, the "attention, please" light seems to go on. Also, once I learned about mirror neurons, I understood that those around me might mimic my actions based on what was happening in their brains. If the classroom needed to be quieter, I could sit quietly and wait for calm to follow, instead of raising my voice or even saying a word.

We need to learn to make our expectations known with our actions. We should state a request once, then quietly act. "Please don't bang your fork on the table," followed by another bang is in turn followed by the wordless action of the child's setting of silverware being removed from the table. No reminders. No repetition. Action.

We can also confuse a non-negotiable request by making it sound like an option. "Would you please stop banging your fork on the table?" See the difference? The child thinks there is a possibility of continued banging.

An easy to use phrase to help us be clear about our expectations is to preface our request with "It's time to..."

It's time to stop banging your fork on the table.
It's time to go to bed.
It's time to get our shoes on.
It's time to get in the car.
It's time to do the dishes.

You can always put a please on the end. When we talk this way to our children they understand that this is the way life is lived in our house. And if we take their hand and walk with them, we reinforce that idea.

Another "talk less, listen more" tip. Make sure that you are in the same room when you talk to your children. This may seem obvious to most of us, but I'm amazed at how many parents yell instructions across the room or from the kitchen. Make eye contact when you speak. It shows respect. Respect can never be demanded; it can only be given and returned.

Talk less. Listen more. And walk your talk.