

3 Ways to Get Peace With Your Children

Children are a work in process. Ask any parent. One of the most difficult things for parents to understand is that children do not always take instruction well, especially when they perceive inconsistencies between what adults say and what they do. Most children are extremely sensitive to inconsistency and will see it (understandably) as a justification for their own wrong actions.

So if you're wondering how you can encourage your children to respect requests, this article may enlighten even the most conscious of parents.

It wasn't long ago that my youngest was asking over and over again for the same item at the grocery store, and even after I let her know it wasn't on the shopping list, the pleading continued. Instead of rushing through the store and ignoring the growing impatience inside of me, I stopped and thought to myself, what behavior am I modeling right now to her. So I slowed down, bent down on my knee, provided a hug and took the time to listen and acknowledge her complaint. Even though the behavior still continued on that trip, over time I began recognizing that the more impatient I grew, the worse her behavior became.

If the child is old enough (according to brain science, the ability to think of others before yourself generally begins kicking in around 8 years of age), talking them through the reasons why a decision is made is critical in modeling self-regulation in their own thinking. Emotions are contagious, even from a child to a parent, so it's important to slow down and remember you are the adult and they are children who don't understand. It is our responsibility to teach and model the love of Christ as much as our tired brains can.

As children grow, they begin to understand the difference between what they are told to do and what the adults around them do. Children naturally love consistency, but they have a low tolerance for chaos (even though they may create some on their own). Christian parents who want to raise children who do the right things would be wise to make sure they are modeling these behaviors for their children.

3 Principles for Consistency

1. Decide on rules and consequences ahead of time.

Believe it or not, children need discipline. Consistent discipline over time helps children and reduces anxiety because the outcome is predictable. Take some time to think through what consequences you can live with doling out, and your anxiety will be reduced. Children who don't know whether there will be consequences every time they break a rule will test adults more frequently and misbehave more often, simply because they haven't been taught what to expect.

Sometimes it is difficult to follow through. Parents find themselves making excuses for rule-breaking because they don't want to be the "bad guy," but this teaches your children to blame others or circumstances for their behavior. Parents should work together to make these decisions so that children can't use one parent against the other.

2. Follow your own rules.

If you teach your children to always be honest, but then lie about their age to save a few dollars on amusement park admission, they will learn that you think it is OK to lie in certain situations. Although following your own rules may be inconvenient at times, your actions are speaking just as loudly as your words, if not more so. Of course, parents

won't follow every rule they impose on their children (such as bedtime), but kids will understand that you hold yourself to the same moral standard to which you hold them when you follow your own moral rules and guidelines.

Build a strong family with consistent modeling and discipline.

3. Don't be afraid to apologize.

Inevitably, as parents, you will make mistakes in discipline, or model an action in front of your child that you don't want them to imitate. Many parents think that admitting a mistake will make their children think less of them, but think of the message it sends to a child when they see a parent do something wrong and not admit to it or make it right. Being able to say that you were wrong teaches your children that doing the right thing is more important than being or appearing right, and it makes them more likely to admit to it and apologize when they do something wrong as well.

Christian parents must consistently emulate God in all that they do, if they expect their children to live a life of faith, trust and purity. That includes what parents watch on TV, what they read and how they act.

A great movie that demonstrates what the outcome may be when consistency is not present in a home is, *The Ultimate Gift*.
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