

How You Can Send the Wrong Signals to Your Kids

I like things clean. Specifically, clutter kills me.

There's nothing that's worse for me than trying to walk across a room and having to watch my step. One of my biggest reoccurring challenges greets me at the front door. We have a basket that houses our kids most often used shoes. It's there so we can move quickly when we are on the go without having to do a massive shoe search.

As adamant and consistent as I am in reminding our kids to put their shoes in the basket, it seems like it is unlearnable. The living room is typically littered with shoes like a driving range green is filled with golf balls.

One night before bed as we were doing our nightly cleanup, I became fed up with the shoes. I said, "You guys have to start putting your shoes away. I'm tired of seeing them all over the floor." That's when my son said, "Dad, how come you get to leave your shoes in the middle of the room and we don't?" He enforced his argument by pointing to my shoes. There they were, a hypocritical pair of leather violators.

Even worse, I realized at that moment that I leave them there all the time. I wanted to reply, "Because I'm an adult. I can do what I want!" But I was violating my own rules and expecting my kids to maintain a standard I was failing to reach. What is a hypocrite dad? I was and needed to change. I started to notice other areas where I was being hypocritical. Here are my top areas where I have sent the wrong signals to my kids.

1. Yelling at my kids because they are being too loud or fighting – There's something about loud noise that gives me anxiety. Ironically and hypocritically, that anxiety often

comes out of me loudly. I am a repeat offender at this one, particularly in the car. While I do need to raise my voice so they hear me, I tend to continue yelling long after I have gotten their full attention. It's tough after that to teach them how to resolve their issues calmly. As I have changed my approach, I've noticed that when I am controlled with a lower voice they are more apt to listen and obey.

2. Spanking my kids for hitting. I know this one can be controversial. There are many views on spanking and good arguments both for and against. We have used this method of discipline in our house and I am not against it. However, I did this once when my son had hit his sister and it felt a little off. I do believe that there is a big difference between hitting and disciplinary spanking and I think kids can tell that difference. However, I personally found it hard to tell him that we don't hit one another afterward. I ended up only using it for the worst non-hitting offenses and have even moved away from it altogether.

3. My messy room. This one is similar to the shoe one. Every night, I have my kids clean their rooms. One night, I went in to see if my son had cleaned his and saw several things were not in their place. I made him come back in and finish the job. Then I took the opportunity to teach about doing things with excellence and the consequences of cutting corners. After we finished, I passed by my own bedroom which looked like a tornado hit it with my stuff. My wife's side looked great. I later showed my son that I needed to follow my own advice.

4. Being a sore loser. My son is super competitive and when he loses, he throws a fit. I have had a number of conversations about it being OK to be competitive and wanting to win. It's fine to be a little upset after losing, I would tell him; but, it's important to be a good sport and maintain a proper perspective. Then I noticed my response to my favorite football team losing on Sundays which this year has been a lot. I was so emotionally involved, it would ruin my entire

day and that would affect the rest of the family.

These have been humbling revelations. If I don't model what I am saying, I will lose the trust of my kids. I have been honest with them and apologized when I have missed the mark. I've given them permission to call me out when they feel like I am not being consistent. Fortunately, they have been gracious with me—probably more gracious than I have been with them, which once again, has me thinking.

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