# **Correcting Behavior in a Child Who Won't Listen**

**Source:** verywellfamily.com

As a parent, it can be really frustrating when your child appears not to be listening, or worse yet, seems to outright ignore you. You may wonder what you're doing wrong or if your child is particularly rebellious. But the truth is there are a number of reasons why kids don't listen, including they just haven't developed this skill yet.

Regardless of the challenges you're experiencing when it comes to your child's listening skills, it helps to understand a few of the reasons behind their inability to listen. It's also beneficial to have a few strategies up your sleeve that will help you build better listening skills in your kids.

## **Why Children Don't Listen**

Getting a reluctant child to listen can be overwhelming at times for parents. It's common to view [listening behaviors](https://www.verywellfamily.com/ways-deal-childs-defiance-non-compliance-1094947) in terms of respect: "If my child won't listen and pay attention, but rather seems distracted all the time, it is a sign of disrespect."

So, while it may feel like disrespect, it's probably about something much more basic. Sometimes kids struggle to listen because your messages are too long or you're coming off as critical or complaining.Listening also can be challenging if your messages are complicated or [inconsistent](https://www.verywellfamily.com/why-does-consistency-matter-in-parenting-4135227).

Sometimes failing to listen or displaying an inability to focus is even tied to something else like hearing loss, an auditory processing issue, or mental health disorder.

But more often than not, failing to listen effectively is more about your child's social development than about anything else. As early as the toddler years, some children may deliberately misbehave to see how parents and caregivers react.

Even knowing that a child's inability to listen is most likely developmental, it still can be unnerving when you feel like playtime, the television, or [video games](https://www.verywellfamily.com/aggressive-behavior-and-video-games-1094980) are more important than what you have to say.

## **How to Get Kids to Listen**

When it comes to teaching kids to be good listeners, it's important to be patient and consistent in your approach. Learning this skill takes time, especially for young children. To help your child become a better listener, here are some strategies you can try.

### **Consider Timing**

Parents often want to talk and be listened to immediately when they bring up a topic. But it can be helpful to make sure that you are choosing a time when the child is ready to listen. Right in the middle of a game or during another conversation might not be as effective as a little bit later.

Try something like, "I can see you are busy right now; will there be a break in a few minutes when we can talk?" Doing so, shows you respect your child's time, something they may model in their own lives after consistently seeing it in you.

### **Use Repetition**

One thing you can do when the kids are distracted during a conversation is to ask them to repeat what was said so that you know that the message was received.

Teaching your child this foundational skill is the first step in teaching them to be good listeners at home, with others, and at school. So, when you do have your communication time, ask them to tell you what they heard.

Telling it back to you will also make the message easier for younger children to remember. Try not to scold them if they struggle, but patiently repeat what was said. Eventually, this skill will become second nature to them. Parents should practice active listening to help reinforce these skills in their children.

### **Offer a Choice**

When giving your child a directive or asking them to do something, one helpful technique is to give them a choice. Doing so empowers kids and makes them feel like they have some control over their lives.

For instance, instead of saying put on your pajamas, ask them if they want to wear the red pajamas or the blue pajamas. Anytime you can give your child a choice, you should. Then, when it's time for the directives where there is only one alternative, they will be more likely to listen.

### **Try Gentle Physical Touch**

Coming into a room to talk with a child can be enhanced if you place your hand on their arm, wrap an arm around them, or gently squeeze their shoulders. Children tend to learn in different ways, and when you use both verbal messages and appropriate touch, you can get their attention a little better.

Physical touch that is not as gentle can be a real negative when trying to communicate. Make sure that your touching strategy is gentle, thought out, and communicates love and respect.

### **Be Consistent**

Kids learn best when the messages they receive are consistent. So make sure your expectations regarding listening behavior are clearly and consistently communicated.Your child should know what is expected and be working toward becoming a more active listener.

While it's important to be patient, you don't want to give your child mixed signals about the importance of listening. By consistently interacting with them and communicating your expectations, you will eventually begin to see positive changes in their listening skills.

### **Reward Good Listening**

Be creative about reinforcing your child's listening skills when they get it right. Praise your child when the display good listening skills or use small rewards in order to encourage good listening.

For instance, if you want your child to stop watching television and join you at the dinner table, you might allow them to have another 15 minutes of TV after dinner or before bedtime if they come right away without complaining. Offering an easy [reward](https://www.verywellfamily.com/how-to-create-a-reward-system-for-kids-that-works-1094752) or incentive can help their listening behavior improve.

### **Model Good Communication Skills**

Modeling good family communication patterns and active listening can do several things to encourage your child to listen. First, you show them respect when you make time to listen to their concerns, and it's easier for them to show respect back when they feel respected.

They will mimic your listening behaviors as they learn more about interpersonal communications. Take the time to talk when they are ready and they will be more likely to respond to you when you need them to listen.

## **A Word From Verywell**

Family communication can be one of the toughest issues parents have to deal with. Teaching your child to become a good listener takes time, patience, and consistency. If you put in the effort, though, your kids will become active listeners and good communicators—a skill that will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

If you feel like there is something hindering your child from becoming a good listener, such as an inability to focus or a hearing issue, talk to your doctor about your concerns. They can evaluate your child and offer solutions including working with a mental health professional if it's warranted.