Too much talk

When parents yabber, yabber, yabber… It’s so easy to do. It’s so hard to stop. Some of us are addicted to it. We want our child to do something or behave in a certain way, so we feel we must explain, reason with, explain again, negotiate, nag, lecture, remind, cajole, put another spin on it and say it again. Yes, many of us struggle in the ‘over talk’ department.

This is what it can look like

• Mum is telling three-year-old Ben why he cannot bite his baby brother. This is the eighth time she has explained this to him in the past two days.
• Dad is reminding little Samantha why she must not get out of bed anymore. He is being very patient but his voice is getting tighter and his colour is changing. This is the 13th time he has put her back to bed in the last 20 minutes.
• Mum is refereeing a fight again. Sisters aged four and five are squabbling over the dress-ups and who gets to wear the pink jewellery. Mum is explaining the rules again but has already decided that tomorrow she is going out to buy some more pink jewellery!
• Dad is extremely cross with three-year-old Brad who has thrown his dinner on the floor and is in a full-blown tantrum. He does not hear his Dad right now but Dad needs to tell him off. Dad is telling him that he is sick and tired of all the fuss over food and from now on he isn’t getting any choice and if he doesn’t eat it – that’s fine. (He said all that yesterday).

Reactions

Something interesting takes place inside children when they are on the receiving end of too much talk. Sadly, it doesn’t have the desired effect of gaining more cooperation. In fact, it often goes the other way. Children subjected to a lot of talk will experience a range of feelings. They vary from:

Being bored
They know the reasons why they must do something because they have been explained before. They are hearing information that they already know.

Getting resentful
Their dignity is not being left intact. Every child wants to feel capable of remembering and acting on the information they have been given. If someone continues to remind them and re-explain things again and again, they can feel resentful at the lack of trust and belief in their abilities.

Feeling powerless
The more a child is subjected to hearing us ramble on, the less confident they feel.

Being outwardly angry
Some children feel intense anger and may even be inspired to fight you back by doing the same thing again and again to get some of their power back.

Being inwardly angry
Some children respond this way. Your words can sweep over a child and if they do not know how to respond – they may withdraw into their shell and quietly, but stubbornly, resist you.
Why do we do it?
I think we over-talk to our kids because we don’t feel confident in our position and we are trying to convince ourselves, more than our child. There is the sense of, “If I say this often enough, I will believe it and so will my child.” We believe hearing it often enough will show our child how important it is to do what we say. And, to our credit, we want to give our children a fair chance. That means repeating the instruction, rephrasing it, saying it in a slightly different way in case the message was missed. That way we feel we are giving our children the very best chance of cooperating.

Some of us talk a lot as a way of gaining time while we decide what to do next and some of us do it to calm ourselves down.

Over-talk is not our best parenting tool and if we can resist the temptation to do it, we can gain a whole lot more enjoyment and cooperation from our families.

What to do instead of lecturing, reminding and fussing
Take the example of Dad going over the bedtime rules again with Samantha. As generous as Dad is being with his time and patience, the result is that Samantha is feeling less and less convinced that Dad knows what he is doing.

Dad, you may say just once what the bedtime rule is. “Samantha, goodnight, honey. Sleep tight. Stay in bed.” If she gets out – no talk, no rule reminders, and no engagement. Don’t be interesting. Put her back to bed. Keep calm. Keep quiet. Keep pleasant. And keep it up as many times as necessary.

Children respond to our confidence and calm. And they like it when they know this is the deal and there is no fuss attached to it. It keeps it simple, fair, uncomplicated and respectful. And we all like to be treated this way. Next time you are heading down the ‘too much talk’ track; stop, breathe in and allow yourself a few words, a calm delivery and a simple consequence.

Some of us talk as a way of gaining time to decide what to do next.

At a glance

- We want our children to do something for the right reasons, and simply because we have asked them to. Spicing up every request to get action is exhausting and ultimately unsustainable.
- Use consequences calmly. These are different to threats because they have been discussed prior to a challenge. You simply follow through with a consequence – no fanfare, extra warnings or prompts. Act confidently and calmly.
- Inspire your children to behave: Instead of talking on and on about what you don’t want your children to do, use words that invite cooperation and let them know you believe in them.
- At The Parenting Place we believe ‘family is everything’ so we’ve created a series of 45 Hot Tips brochures to help you make the most of your parenting journey. They’re grouped into four categories: Early Years, Middle Years, Tweens and Teens, and General Parenting.

General Parenting topics include:

- Communication
- Family meal times
- Feeling guilty?
- How am I doing?
- How to talk to kids
- Media diet
- Parenting alone
- Parenting from a united front
- Simple parenting strategies
- Talking about money
- Too much talk
- What money can’t buy
- 5 keys to blended family success

At the parentingplace.com or The Parenting Place, 300 Great South Road, Greenlane in Auckland, 0800 53 56 59.

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