

TOOLS FOR FOLLOW-THROUGH - PART II

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Last month we discussed three tools to use with children to help with follow-through. The purpose of using these tools with children is to create a respectful family environment for children and adults. The idea is to create that environment for **both** children and adults. To do so it is important to be kind at the same time as being firm.

Children really want to know that we mean what we say, and will only say what we mean. This helps them feel safe and in control vs. feeling controlled because our behavior is predictable. When they can predict how we react then they can manage their reactions and emotions consistently.

Thinking through limits before we set them is really important to being able to follow through. For instance, a mistake that I made was when I told my 3 year-old that I would leave him at the house if he didn't put his shoes on. I was bluffing, as you can imagine. I did not think this through to insure that I could follow through, and I bet you can guess his reaction: "OK, Dad, I'll stay here." Woops!

So, if we're kind and firm, consistent, and to what we say we will do, we will help develop trust and mutual respect with our children. Here are three more tools for setting kind and firm limits with children that maintains their dignity and sanity and yours:

1. Create special signals with your child ahead of time. This is especially helpful in public situations. You can set up a signal of putting your hand on their shoulder if they are interrupting you, which conveys "*I love you and hear you but I'm going to finish my conversation before we talk.*"
2. Use 10 words or less when making a request. In response to an objection either say nothing and stay present, or simply repeat the exact same request with no change in tone.
3. If your child is doing something that they shouldn't and you both know that fact, then simply make eye contact, say nothing, and wait for them to make their own correction. *Note: it's really important that you are certain that your child and you both know why you are making silent eye contact; otherwise this could be confusing or intimidating. The principal is to be kind and firm at the same time.*

In workshops with parents we call these tools "Alternatives to Nagging". So, next time you feel yourself ready to launch into reminding, coaxing, nagging or complaining, try one of these tools, and see if it fits.