

Handling your Children - Summer 2005

The Jewish News

If you find you are always nagging the kids, the problem may lie in the way you are trying to get your message across.

How many times do we ask our children to do something on an almost daily basis – you need to get dressed or else we will be late for shul; tidy your room; get your books ready for school; stop annoying your brother? The answer is many.

It is incredibly tiring for us, as parents, to constantly ask our children to do things that are either for their own good or for the benefit of ourselves. We hate to hear ourselves nagging but sometimes we just can't stop. Some children have to be told to do something more than once as they are often preoccupied with other thoughts and not focused on what we are saying.

So why don't they take any notice of what we are saying? Is it because they don't understand what we are asking them to do or is it that they do not know why we are asking them to do it?

- Not understanding what we are asking: An example of this is when we ask a child to stop fooling around. The child may not understand exactly what we want them to stop. There could be many interpretations – stop pulling faces, joking, being silly. By being more descriptive the child would understand the exact thing we want them to do.
- Not understanding why we are asking: Give children a reason for our request so they are more inclined to carry out the action. Asking a child to get their books ready for school before they go to sleep may mean that it does not get done, but explaining that as a result they will not have to get up early in the morning to do it and you won't have to nag them may be the motivation they need. Children respond better to requests if they know why they have to do it and they can see the benefit of what it is you are asking them to do.

Another example of this happened to me a few weeks ago. The mother of a child I was seeing told her son to wait in the car so she could chat to me after the session.

He refused and, after telling him twice, she threatened him with a ban so he got in the car. Five minutes later he got out to see what we were talking about. Slightly embarrassed and not knowing what to do next she told him to wait in the car again, then she said to me, "What else can I do?" I suggested, "You could have told him that we were talking about the session and asked him if he wanted to join in the conversation. If he didn't want to join in you could have given him two options – to stand and listen quietly, or to wait in the car".

We tried it the next time and it worked. Explanation can tell the whole story and make our children clearer about our direction.