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watch after their homework is finished. However, it's worth noting that online distractions can be particularly hard for some children to resist, so if they are constantly neglecting their schoolwork, chores, or even friends and family to get more screen time, then you need to act. We used to have an ongoing battle with my son over his homework, says Miranda. 'He would insist that he needed the computer to research something but

Practise constant reinforcement

The key to eliminating battles, says Richards, is to create a framework for co-operation and reinforce it on a daily basis. Talk through what your child's day will look like with them – where they'll be going, what they'll be doing – and as you talk, encourage them to make decisions with you about when they need to be home, or how much television they can watch after their homework is finished.

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fine, just turn a blind eye. Not only do these small transgressions give them some freedom, they help to show that parents aren't all-powerful. Also, if a child has never been told to do anything, and therefore never taken the risk of asserting themselves, they can run into trouble when they reach adolescence. They won't know how to say no to their friends, or be able to figure out what's right for themselves if they want to break the rules. However, it's worth noting that online distractions can be particularly hard for some children to resist, so if they are constantly neglecting their schoolwork, chores, or even friends and family to get more screen time, then you need to act. We used to have an ongoing battle with my son over his homework, says Miranda. 'He would insist that he needed the computer to research something but

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kindness. 'In any household there is a hierarchy of decisions, and some you can be more flexible about, says Richards. 'It's important to take their individual personality into account, and we have to demonstrate that we trust them, too. If your child does their homework after playing a game on their iPod, rather than before, and their school results are

When it's the right time, relax the rules

Intelligent obedience requires that we make a shift in our demands according to the child's age. Children will begin to demand certain freedoms; to get home five minutes after curfew, or spend time on Facebook before homework. What's the best way to respond to this? With

That was a real eye-opener for me. I had always resolved that I was going to be a laid-back dad when my own children were born, says Matthew. 'I wanted to be someone they could confide in about anything. But then when our oldest boy got into trouble with the police, he phoned my wife's mobile, not mine. She had always been a tougher parent than me – but he saw her as an adult, someone he could trust to sort things out, rather than his fun but basically useless dad. That was a real eye-opener for me.

My parents were very strict with us so it's only for them to push against. I can give them boundaries – even if parents. But children often crave a parent closer in age to our children than our own to think of ourselves as young at heart. of being authoritarian. We much prefer 'parent' and 'friend' are even more blurred, and many people reject the idea In today's culture, the lines between

Many parents so desperately want their child to like them that they are unwilling to block the child's wishes or to create conflict. But the important thing to remember is that this is not about pleasing anyone, it's about getting the child to respect the rules. After all, a child is just as capable of tugging at your heart-strings. His parents say no? He'll say he doesn't love them any more, and as the parents are vulnerable, they'll give in.

Be a parent, not a friend