

## **BUILDING COOPERATION**

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**Start Simple.** It is best to begin with simple requests that virtually guarantee cooperation (e.g., "Please get out the ice cream"; "Can you turn on the stereo?") This builds a positive attitude and creates an atmosphere of cooperation.

**Keep It Short.** Children overreact to requests because they perceive the task as too difficult or time consuming. When you are trying to gain an atmosphere of cooperation, emphasize requests that can be met in a minute or less.

**Don't Overwhelm.** ADHD children get more feedback and direction than other children. Please prioritize your requests and perhaps avoid demands that might lead to noncompliance (only initially).

**Limit Your Requests.** Consider limiting the number of requests that you make of your child (except for ones involving safety or kindness to others). A parent and child can set a cooperation goal (e.g., listening to mom or dad 20 times in a day). Once the child has met that goal, they are allowed to "pass" on other requests. This is a novel and fun way of rewarding cooperation that also helps increase parental awareness of how much they ask of their children.

**Let the Routines Rule.** If we establish the proper routines and habits, we should not have to ask our children to do as many things. Children who get in the habit of clearing the table or feeding the dog are cooperating automatically without having to be asked by mom or dad. Without routines and habits, we will need to prompt children to meet their responsibilities and this increases the chance for noncompliance.

**Be Clear.** Try and be very specific about what your child needs to do and why. A clear time line and schedule helps make it clear what is expected and when.

**Consider the Timing.** Children cooperate better when they are not hungry or tired and when they are benefiting from their medication. They are less likely to comply when they are in the middle of something enjoyable. Time your requests to maximize your chances of cooperation.

**First Things First.** Time many of your requests so that they occur just before something your son or daughter wants to do. A child is much more likely to pick up 3 or 4 things in the family room just before their favorite show. They will clean out the papers in the car when they need a ride to a friend's house.

**Be Positive.** Even noncompliant children have moments where they cooperate. Please look for those moments, however small, and provide your child with a positive comment or rewarding "connection" (see below).

**"Reward" Cooperation of Others.** Noncompliant children will sometimes respond more positively when they see other youngsters being praised and rewarded for their cooperation.

**Be a Role Model.** Adults can model cooperation and positive attitudes by making requests of each other in front of their children. Parents do ask things of each other, but rarely at a level recognized by children.

**Form a Team.** Children sometimes cooperate better when they are working with someone rather than alone. If you offer to help with the task, you promote a "can do" attitude that is rewarded by help from mom or dad. Beware that some children try and let their parents do all the work; match your work to the effort of your child. Some parents offer to do two or three times the amount that their son or daughter does, with the child setting the pace.

**Teach Perspective.** It is easier to cooperate when you have a positive perspective. ADHD children, in particular, need to learn how to think about things that they need to do. Teaching the right perspective is more important than the cooperation itself.

**Break Down the "Barriers."** There are a number of psychological barriers that limit a child's willingness and ability to cooperate (see also the Barriers to Cooperation Handout). Try and make your requests so as to minimize these barriers. Children, who get overwhelmed by their perception that the task is too great, may cooperate better when they hear that it is only a minute of their time. Youngsters who struggle with the idea that they will miss out on their fun, cooperate better when they are reassured that they won't miss out on their playtime (e.g. "I know your show is coming on, but we will be done before it starts", "Don't worry, I am taping the show so you can watch it later."). If we can address the barriers in making the request, we increase our chances of cooperation.

**Talk Aloud.** Children need to hear their parents and teachers think out loud. They need to hear how you motivate yourself to do the things that you need to do. They need to learn the constructive perspective you take about the things you are asked to do.

**Get the Child's Perspective.** It helps to get a child's perspective. Get their view about the things that they are asked to do. Be proactive, don't discuss requests when they are made (this is a wonderful avoidance tactic!); use some other opportunity (such as when you are riding in the car together).

**Understand the Connection.** We need to teach children why their cooperation is important. Cooperation saves time and frees up parents to do more for their family and with their children. It creates a positive mood which makes it more likely for parents to say "yes" to their youngsters. A cooperative and responsible child has more privileges and opportunities.

**Make the Connection.** It is actually very simple to teach children why their cooperation is successful. Any approach which credits children with the time they save parents or family when they cooperate should work nicely. The time they earn directly translates into fun opportunities (see the attached handout for more details).

**Reward with a Cooperation Pass.** One of the most powerful rewards for cooperation is the opportunity to "pass" on a parent's request or the chance to have mom or dad do a chore for them.

**Use Monopoly Money.** One of the best systems involves the use of monopoly money. When a request is made that a child perceives as unfair or too difficult or inconvenient, we respond by asking him how much it will cost us. The child names their monopoly money price. We can choose to pay that price or do the chore ourselves for the same amount of money. The monopoly money is saved and spent on some fun activity. The power of this system is not in the reward but in a child explaining why a certain amount of monopoly money is needed. It clarifies their perspective and helps us compare one situation with another ("Wait a minute, yesterday it only cost \$10 to have you take out the garbage, today you want \$200." . . . "The garbage smells today!").

**Make a Statement.** Sometimes a simple statement is preferable to giving a command or making a request. Rather than asking a child to put their toys away and come to dinner, a parent can simply say "dinner is on the table."

**Avoid the Power Struggle.** There are a number of strategies for responding to a noncompliant child's behavior (the Responding to Noncompliance Handout) that do not include warning, threatening or bullying. We are trying to build an attitude of cooperation and a pattern of positive behavior that does not rely upon negative consequences. If we use threats or punishments to obtain a child's cooperation, we may find ourselves resorting to that method of parenting more and more.

**Cooperation is a Set of Skills.** Children are not oppositional because they are lazy or mean or selfish. They have problems cooperating for a reason, usually because they lack the set of skills necessary to accept requests positively and follow through. Helping oppositional children is a matter of teaching them the necessary skills, not simply a matter of discipline.

### **For Further Reading**

*The Confident Child: Emotional Coaching for the Crucial Decade -- Ages Five to Fifteen*, Terri Apter, Ph.D., W. W. Norton Publishers, 1997

*The Challenging Child: A Guide for Parents of Exceptionally Strong-Willed Children*, Mitch Golant, Ph.D., and Donna G. Corwin, Berkley Books, 1995

*Parenting the Strong-Willed Child*, Rex Forehand, Ph.D., and Nicholas Long, Ph.D. Contemporary Books, 1986

*Raising Your Spirited Child: A Guide for Parents Whose Child More*, Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, Harper Perennial, 1991

*Kid Cooperation: How to Stop Yelling, Nagging and Pleading and Get Kids to Cooperate*, Elizabeth Pantley, New Harbinger Publications, 1996