

" 7 Effective Things to Say To Get Cooperation"

"Why can't I just get some Cooperation around here?" What frustrated parent hasn't uttered that complaint at sometime or other?

"Cooperation" --it's a word we all use when we want *someone-else* to do what we want them to do. What if the "speaker" and the "listener" are not hearing the same meaning with that word?

It's possible that the very word "Cooperation" (and the way parents usually mean it) actually undermines achieving true joint involvement --especially with a kid. The actual definition implies that *both* parties are going to get what they *each* want...it's supposed to be a "co-" thing. So when we tell our children some version of "I want a little cooperation around here", the real message they might hear is "I want you to do what I want you to do". Kids often hear a demand (not a request) and expect a positive outcome for the parent (but not for the kid)...it doesn't seem like a "co-op" at all!

So, let's start with a new way of looking at the motivation behind true "cooperation". Let's first make an assumption that people (all people, including kids) do what they WANT to do...because it will get them what they want.

What makes people do what they do?

People are motivated for a variety of reasons...but those reasons usually fall into one of two categories: 1) to get something they want or 2) to avoid something they don't want.

	Behavior achieves a "positive" outcome	Behavior avoids a "negative" outcome
Expected outcome	To get a positive <i>result or outcome</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earn a paycheck • Get praise for a job well done or • Receive a "treat" or a reward 	To avoid a negative <i>result or outcome</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Won't overdraw bank account • Won't get nagged at or argued with • Won't get bad grades
Internal motivation (intrinsic)	To experience <i>feeling "good"</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realize a sense of satisfaction, • Feel secure and safe • Deserve positive self-esteem 	To avoid <i>feeling "bad"</i> , guilty or wrong <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent parent's disappointment/anger • Won't have to apologize or explain • Disguise or cover-up mistakes
External motivation (extrinsic)	To establish "I'm a good kid" status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure parent's trust • Earn future confidence • Score "points" with parents, boss or teachers 	To avoid immediate punishment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deflect blame to someone-else • Affirm lack of competence thereby avoiding parent's high expectations • Sidestep consequence with subterfuge • Argue that punishment is "unfair"

If kids only do what they WANT to do (to get something or to avoid something), parents would be wise to investigate what motivates their unique children. Do your children typically thrive on the good stuff or are they consistently avoiding the bad stuff? And...Is there a way that we can motivate them to want to do what we want them to?

The difference between "Praise" and "Encouragement"

Lots of parents hope that "praise" is the ticket. The outcome of praise is based upon what the parent says and has little do to with what's going on with the kid. It works well with kids who already have a positive self-image. But it can demoralize a child who is unsure of himself. For example: We might think we motivate our kids when we say "Good job" ...but it will not land well if the kid KNOWS that his/her job was substandard. Instead of

promoting more of a particular behavior, the child might actually develop a distrust of his/her parent's standards. It's possible that an undeserved "Good job" actually discourages a child from demonstrating competence.

Praise is *speaker-centered* as opposed to being *listener-focused*. It is about judgments and opinions. It promotes *extrinsic* (or external) motivation. And it suggests that the value of a person's performance is dependent upon the evaluation by someone-else --a parent, teacher or boss. But praise may not be consistent and the evaluation standard may be fickle. Sometimes good behavior gets praised...sometimes it doesn't. The result or outcome depends on another person's reaction or opinion (which a child cannot control or predict).

If a kid's behavior depends upon our Praise, what happens when we're not present to deliver it? Will kids clean their rooms if we aren't there to tell them "good job" or to nag if it isn't done? Will kids do their homework if we don't press them? Will kids be kind to other children if we aren't physically available to discipline their misbehavior? Will kids develop a strong moral code of conduct if we aren't present to enforce it?

Encouragement on the other hand is about the "listener". Encouragement bolsters a person's *intrinsic* (or internal) motivation. The root of the word "encouragement" is *courage*...it has to do with personal bravery, stamina and intention. Encouragement builds an internalized support system, rationale and belief structure. Kids who are internally motivated will do what they do because they WANT to...not because someone else is pressing them with positive or negative external consequences.

When a child's behavior results from Encouragement, he/she responds based upon an internal belief system. The feedback for behavior is self-driven and persists even when the parent is NOT immediately present. A child will be kind to other children because

kindness *feels* right to do. A child does chores or homework or participates in family activities because it *feels* better to do them than to not. The motivation is pressed by the child's perception of what will be gained or lost *personally* as a consequence of his/her behavior.

What does "Encouragement" have to do with "Cooperation"?

Cooperation can only truly be achieved when both parties are *internally* motivated to participate....both parties must be confident that the outcome will be in each individual's self-interest. The level of personal motivation and involvement is directly related to a person's belief that the outcome will be worth the effort. Coming at this comparison from the other side: discouraged children may do what you force them to do, but they **CAN'T** "COOPERATE"...if the definition of "cooperate" depends upon a *confidence* that a certain behavior will insure a personal positive outcome. Therefore, if we want "cooperation", we need to promote and foster a positive *internal* motivation for kids whereby our children envision and achieve benefit to do what we want them to do.

An Encouraged Child is more likely to be a "Cooperative" Child. For kids to do what we want them to do willingly, we need to help them find a benefit (a positive internal reason) to do it.

So what can you say to Encourage Your Child to "Cooperate"? Read on...

Seven (7) Phrases of Encouragement

Everyone has a unique way of talking with their children, using unique words and phrases. Therefore, keep in mind that these specific phrases are EXAMPLES--don't feel beholden to use these exact phrases word-for-word. Instead, try them out and amend them until they become your own genuine and natural expressions.

1) "I'm so glad you're working with me on this [project, chore, assignment, etc]."

This kind of phrase promotes positive feelings within the child. You (as the parent) are delivering a warm-fuzzy sensation to your child by sharing your positive reaction to his/her assistance. Kids like pleasing their parents--it's similar to giving you a gift that they're certain you want. Yum!

If our intention is to get children to work *with* us (i.e. to "cooperate"), we need to make the outcome of their participation positive--for them. The immediate feeling that this phrase promotes is a sense of equal partnership. It suggests that working together is a positive experience and that you have confidence in your child's participation--and that you appreciate it. Who wouldn't want to repeat a behavior if the result feels good?

2) "Doesn't it feel good when the job is done? Now we can ...[. .describe the benefit of completion of the job..]"

The first part of this message suggests that *completion* of a job stimulates a sense of personal accomplishment and deserved pride. It states a family belief that defines the family culture. This portion carries the same weight as statements like: "In our family we always..." or "In our family we never..." or "Our family believes...". The statements

emphasize a common belief in a family value or behavior that reinforces a child's sense of belonging in your particular family. A child that feels secure and included, will want more of that feeling and will act to get it.

The second part of this phrase promotes the notion that a positive outcome or personal reward naturally results from the behavior. All kids (even if they won't admit it) want to align with their parents' values. By disclosing that YOU feel good when you do a job well, your child will begin to automatically internalize that value...that it's a common goal in your family to do something so that you'll feel good about it. This phrase encourages because it suggests an "internal benefit" (i.e. it feels good) and demonstrates a cause/effect relationship.

3) "I really appreciate that you have stuck with the [project, chore, and assignment]. It wasn't easy but you did it!"

This is a relative of "praise" but it has an underlying message that encourages. It suggests that you recognize that your child has internal strength and persistence--a CAN DO attitude. It also reflects your confidence that he/she has the ability to succeed. And as an added bonus it is a direct compliment (OK, "praise"!) as it quietly implies your pride in your child's personal fortitude as well as his/her behavior.

4) "Wow, you must be really proud of yourself!"

This phrase promotes self-pride. If we want our children to develop self-confidence and high self-esteem, it only makes sense to include intermittent infusions of "personal pride" and the fact that your child is entitled to (and actually deserves to) pat himself/herself on the back for positive behavior. This is very different from "I am so proud of you" ...which might suggest the opposite ("I'm disappointed in you") when the kid behaves poorly or makes a mistake at another time. Your pride in him/her is not near as strong or

consistent a motivator as his/her internal intention to behave properly when you're out-of-sight.

5) "Everyone makes mistakes...let's think about how you might do this better next time."

Children often misunderstand the value of mistakes. They are likely to judge a mistake as a moral failing. The purpose of a mistake is to *learn* something new or to practice a more positive or effective behavior. Babies don't walk perfectly the first time they try. The trial-and-error nature of learning something new is the very process that promotes learning the correct way to do something... or the correct way to think about something... or the correct answer to the question.

Another way to look at mistakes is to use them as evidence of what you don't know...**yet**. If you make the right or correct decision (by chance), the next time a similar dilemma arises, you'd have to rely on "chance" rather than experience to choose rightly again and get the outcome you want. By making a mistake, you learn what you need to know to choose rightly next time.

The second part of the phrase provides evidence of your support-- when you offer to work something though *with* your child (as a brainstorming "team"), you're using this opportunity to teach problem-solving skills using the "mistake" as an example. It takes the gravity out of the mistake and makes it useful. This isn't a time to give "advice". Instead, use this opportunity to open a mutual discussion of options and choices...and let the child freely create and evaluate his/her solutions.

Beware, your child may make another mistake in the process by choosing a solution that doesn't work. But take heart-- you'll have another opportunity to learn along with

him/her. You'll both get better at this with practice! And, you'll be expressing your support and confidence in your child.

6) "It seems like a big job, what can you do to break it into smaller steps?"

This phrase is encouraging because you start out by truly "hearing" your child's perception that the task "feels" too big for him AND then you affirm your confidence that he/she can be successful eventually. This phrase proposes a simple problem-solving tool: break the "big" problem down into little do-able steps. You can support, acknowledge and applaud each successful little step on the way to the big outcome success.

It might be easy to say to a child, "You can do that" or "You can figure that out" or "I'm sure you're up to it". However, if a parent expresses these opinions without first acknowledging the child's reservations or concerns, the kid might conjure up a feeling of inadequacy or fear that he/she will disappoint the expectant parent. Therefore, imagining what your child might feel about the job or project, you can reflect his/her concern first, and then offer an encouraging phrase of confidence or guidance.

7) "I really like that you're my kid!" (or "... that you're in my family!" or "...that I get to be with you!" or "...that we spent time together today!")

We make an assumption that kids want to hear "I love you" from their parents--and they do! However, as important as expressing what's sometimes a given (i.e. "I love you"), it is valuable to sprinkle in a few unexpected phrases that might mean *even* more to your child.

Unfortunately, when "I love you" is offered as a reward, a child might come to believe that "love" is related to good behavior only--he might suspect that the love is about *behaving* properly and unrelated to the child *as a person*. And, she might even imagine that if she makes mistakes or behaves badly she won't be loved. Therefore, there is wisdom in

reserving "I love you's" for moments of appreciation of your children unrelated to their behaviors.

How do you know if you're "encouraging" or "discouraging" your child?

The outcome, the willingness of your children's participation and involvement, will be your measuring scale to evaluate your success when encouraging your children. If your children become more "cooperative" and you notice less arguing and resistance with family issues, you'll know that you've expressed "encouraging" notions and your kids have begun internalizing them.

If your children are still resistant or argumentative, you may need to do more detective work to find out why they don't *want* to join with you. Look for possible benefits gained by the resistance and remove those outcomes. Imagine possible benefits to be gained by "cooperation". Try them out and see what happens.

Remember: kids who don't perceive a personal value in doing what *you* want them to do, won't. Discovering how you can both gain what you want is the nugget of wisdom and the key to unlocking an environment of cooperation and family unity.