

## 5 Steps to ERASE Discord in Your Home



Our children bring us joy for many reasons. We can't help but love them. It doesn't hurt that they have tiny fingers and toes and that they say and do the silliest things. An acquaintance of mine recently posted on Facebook an interaction between her husband and daughter. During a trip to the grocery store, the husband perused the shopping cart and listed aloud the items. Among them were Pop Tarts, Tostitos, and Lucky Charms. "Are we missing anything?" he asked his daughter. She quickly responded, "Our dignity." She's six.

We are constant witnesses to our children's actions and words, so we know just how wise and brilliant they can be. But sometimes the immaturity they exhibit is more annoying than endearing. They are throwing tantrums because they aren't allowed to eat glue or because we won't allow them to play video games into the wee hours of the night. In response to the noise of our children's minor frustrations, we adapt, adjust, and learn to cope, all the while making our best attempt to teach them that it is their responsibility not to become monsters in the world. However, when our kids fail to follow simple directions, it's enough to drive us mad, and we might not always respond in ways conducive to promoting positive change in the home.

### How to get your child to follow directions (without a meltdown!)

You may be relieved to know there are steps you can take as a parent to assist your children with following directions. Especially if your child struggles with his/her attention, language, or memory, this task may seem incredibly daunting. But if you are interested in improving the quality of your life—and possibly the quality of your relationship with your child—remembering the acronym *ERASE* just might do the trick. *You* have the power to ERASE discord from the chalkboard of parenting and usher harmony in to rule the home.

#### 1. Engage

Engage your children by using visual cues and a normal, calm tone of voice. It may take a moment for your child to shift gears and recognize you are making a request. Children, like adults, tend to tune out background noise to better focus on the game or book at hand. Get their attention by minimizing distractions:

- **Say their name.**
- **Tell them to put down the toy or close the book.**
- **Make eye contact.**
- **Point in the direction of the requested task.**

By engaging your child this way, he or she is better prepared to listen and process what you are saying. Also, make it a habit to engage in daily conversation with your child. This will foster open communication and widen the comfort zone, allowing your child to share what's on his mind. Sometimes, children do not follow directions because they suffer from a temporary inner turmoil they can't identify. If frustration, anger, confusion, or sadness have been triggered, silence and/or rebellion can occur. You can help your child name his feelings and give him a chance to talk about those feelings, providing an emotionally safe environment for your child to inhabit. When they feel heard, safe, and loved, children can calm down enough to offer up great solutions to their own problems. This gets everybody back on track and living in harmony once again.

## 2. Reinforce

Reinforce good behavior with words of appreciation. We all know how good it feels to be praised for a job well done. Your child is no different. If he receives positive recognition for following directions, he will be more likely to continue following directions. If you acknowledge when he does something right more than when he does something wrong, he will feel motivated to please. That's human nature. Sometimes we forget it, but remembering to thank and reward your kid for doing his part and for choosing good behavior only empowers him with the knowledge that it feels good to do the right thing.

Another practical solution is to state consequences to be suffered if directions are not followed. We've all seen kids throw tantrums and learn to get what they want because the parent backs down and gives in. This is not the way to encourage good behavior. Children need boundaries, rules, and consequences. Otherwise, they may take over the household, and once they learn they are in charge, the parent can almost never regain control through the healthiest means.

Parenting is the hardest job in the world, next to *good* parenting. And good parenting requires being fair, consistent, and committed to following through. A few easy tricks to try include:

- **Let them come up with some rules.** If they have a hand in creating the system, they may be less likely to buck it.
- **Offer a choice between positive and negative reinforcement.** For example, they can either clean their rooms and get *more* television time, or they can leave their rooms a mess and get *less* television time.

It's up to them to decide how they want to play the game. This allows you to make doing the right thing *their* decision and not yours, ultimately decreasing tension and increasing harmony in the home.

## 3. Avoid

Avoid making demands. Often, because of the daily stressors of work and family life, we try to save time by making demands, thinking our wishes will be fulfilled immediately simply because we say so. However, even children do not like being interrupted to do something someone else deems important. Treating your child's time and space as valuable will go a long way towards getting what you want. If you have already established an environment of respect, compassion, and routine, your child will be more likely to do things for you and perpetuate an atmosphere of love, respect, and obedience.

As parents, we often can't help ourselves. We react badly because we don't stop to think about the consequences of what we say and how we say it. If you want your child to follow directions, you must avoid nagging, shouting, reasoning, and lecturing. And avoid making threats and giving

ultimatums. These behaviors create more tension in the home and can cause children to tune out completely. Every parent has been the victim of his own impulse to nag because saying a thing ten times might get the job done. Or we try to reason with a child, professing myriad reasons for taking out the trash instead of playing video games. These techniques almost always fail because we are missing the point. Our children will never see things our way *just* because we insist on it.

And I'm pretty sure every child has a built-in selective-listening valve; it automatically shuts off when Mom or Dad uses that certain "voice" or keeps talking and talking and talking. When our children do not follow directions, it may be difficult to stay calm, but the best way to get compliance from your kid is to show him how loving, kind, and respectful you are. This is not to say you should be the proverbial doormat; this is to say you should consider how your words and delivery may have deleterious effects on your home situation. Children respond best to fewer explanations. Keep it short and sweet. Your children are learning how to be people in the world. You are their first and best role model. Your words are louder than you think, and your child is absorbing more about your tone and attitude than about the significance of taking out the trash this very moment.

## 4. Share

**Share your expectations with your children so they understand your standards.** However, do so in a polite, authoritative way. Parents who make demands and instill a sense of fear only alienate their children. These parents may get their kids to do what they want but at the cost of a loving, respectful relationship. And as time goes on, the price of an authoritarian parenting style becomes greater and greater; children who grow up with dictators as parents only aim to distance themselves from home as much as possible.

**Share information with your child and allow your child to practice making decisions about how to act.** Children, even without years of moral education under their belts, often ultimately know what's best and what's right. By being a facilitator of learning and weighing pros and cons with your child, you can help him or her become motivated by a sincere standard of ethics. This will often result in your child doing things before you even have to ask. Taking out the trash will be viewed as the right thing to do since your child will come to see his own role in the household as an integral piece of the housework puzzle. After all, why should Mom and Dad do all the work when everyone in the home benefits from that work? Shouldn't all who benefit show their appreciation by helping out? If you can deliver these ideas without laying down a guilt trip tangled in manipulation, you're well on your way to getting what you want in the short-term as well as over the long-haul.

## 5. Expect

Expect your child to listen and follow directions by speaking in their language. Here are a few strategies to use that can help your child be successful:

- **Break information down into smaller chunks.** Sometimes, long lists of requirements get jumbled, and items on that list may even be forgotten.
- **Slow down.** A rushed delivery of commands can be overwhelming. What may seem to you like an easy, organized request to clean the bedroom, brush the teeth, put on the pajamas, and start the homework may actually seem like a maze of chaos your child can't follow without hitting another wall of, "What am I supposed to do, again?" And when success seems impossible, kids stop trying.
- **Number the tasks.** It's easier to remember four things if the number "four" is emphasized.
- **Limit the number of things on the list.** After the first task has been completed, deliver the next item.

- **Check for understanding.** If your child repeats back to you that he is to clean the room, brush teeth, put on pajamas, and start the homework, he is more likely to remember to complete all of those tasks.
- **Start with a statement, not a question.** Instead of asking your child to do something, tell him to do it. “Will you clean your room?” may open up a vortex to the world of arguments and anger, for your child will certainly tell you the wrong answer.
- **Invest in learning programs that assist with processing speed and attention span.** A specific program that can help is [Fast ForWord](#). This computer application has been shown to improve cognitive skills by creating neural pathways in the brain that promote faster processing speed, better comprehension, and a longer attention span. Fast ForWord is personalized to your child, ultimately working to help your child’s brain make new connections that might otherwise be missed due to potential learning difficulties.

Altogether, these simple strategies for helping your child follow directions promote a system centered on achievement and success rather than forgetting and failure. And when the day is done, you can rest assured that frustrations have been minimized and tensions *ERASEd*. You and your loved ones are learning how to cooperate. Everyone feels a little lighter and a whole lot happier. And perhaps your house is a heck of a lot cleaner. Ah, life never felt so good