

# Couch Potato Parenting

Imagine your ten-year-old child walks into the living room shedding his coat. He drops it on the floor or on the couch. You tell him to hang it up. He runs across the room to greet the dog. You tell him again, a little louder. He is distracted by the TV show you are watching and sits down, eyes glued to the tube. "Hang up your coat!" you yell, now furious that the little light of your life never does a damn thing you tell him to do until you roar at full volume.

I know we all wish there was a magic fix for this behavior, but there isn't. And as much as you probably don't want to hear this, it's your behavior that has to change if you want your children to mind you the first time you tell them to do something. You have to get up and physically make your child mind—the first time he ignores you. Don't repeat yourself. Don't yell. Stop being a couch potato parent.

To change this behavior, never (ever, ever) give your child a command unless you are ready, willing, and able to immediately follow through to see that it is done.

It's really quite simple. You tell a child to do something once, then you get up off that couch, gently take that little body to where it needs to go, and assist with the process while saying (in the kindest voice you can muster), "I told you to hang up your coat." And then, even though you helped every step of the way, and contrary to all reason, once the task is done, you thank the little monster for hanging up his coat.

This simple act tells a child that you mean what you say and you will follow through – every single time. Ignoring you will no longer be tolerated. This works, amazingly well, and changes a child's behavior very quickly, but only if you are consistent.

The major lesson here? You allowed this behavior to develop. You taught your child that he only has to mind you when you lose your temper. If you want to change his behavior, you have to change yours.

The key, and the hardest part, is to kill them with patience and kindness. When you get up off that couch and take those little hands in yours to reach for that coat, be gentle and loving. When you say, "Good job hanging up your coat!" say it with a small amount of enthusiasm (not sarcasm). This can be hard to do, especially if your child is physically or verbally resisting. Most of the time they will. You'll hear, "Let me go! I can do it myself!" Ignore this. Just follow through taking those hands, picking up the coat together, holding the coat together, and duck-walking to the closet.

If you use this approach from the beginning, your toddler will learn that Mom and Dad say what they mean, mean what they say, and will always follow through.

### As Much As Possible, Stop Punishing

Do you punish your child for the same behavior over and over and over again? Doesn't that make you wonder if your punishment is working?

Again, lose the couch potato approach, though this issue will require mental pushups rather than a physical response. Whenever you think your child's behavior is worthy of punishment, try to come up with a consequence instead. Here's the hardest part: make the consequence fit the crime.

You tell your child to stop playing with his food and he continues, don't argue or take away privileges. Pick up his plate. Dinner is over. If you tell her to pick up her dolls and she throws a fit, the dolls go into the attic for a week. You get the idea.

Consequences work especially well with older children and

trust issues. For instance, your child spent the night at a friend's house, but she was not where she was supposed to be. You tell her you are disappointed in her, remind her of the rules and drop it. She is going to feel like she got away with it. That is, until the next time she asks to spend the night at a friend's house. You tell her no, the last time she didn't follow the rules. She has no sleepover until further notice. She will demand that you tell her how long this punishment lasts. You tell her this is not a punishment, it is a consequence of her behavior. "Until I feel I can trust you to be where you say you are, you will not be sleeping over at anyone's house." Now the ball is in her court, to win back your trust.

Time outs and loss of privileges may remain your first choice, but the more you stretch your brain power and outmaneuver your child with logic and direct consequences for actions, the more you will prepare your child for the real world and the more they will respect the rules. Again, the key is consistency, patience, and a loving attitude.

Good parenting is a lot like warfare. Be strategic. Know your opponent, and act more than you react. Outmaneuver and anticipate. Always trust your gut instincts. Never make your decisions based on whether or not your kid will like you, make them based on what is best for your child. Start with getting off the couch.