



Stop that Complaining!

"Why do I have to? I did it last time! It's too hard. You're so mean!" Does it ever occur to you that the kids could do what you ask in about half the time if they quit complaining? Try a few of these ideas to stop the problem:

1. Ignore it.

We give power to a child's complaints by engaging in a lengthy battle over them. The battle itself becomes a valuable tool for a child looking to procrastinate! It's better to let the child know you are going to ignore all complaining, and do just that.

2. Be a broken record.

A variation on the "ignore it" theme, for parents who find it too difficult not to respond to a complaining child, is known as the "broken record" technique. As the name implies, simply continue to repeat your request in a bland, unemotional way each time your child answers with a complaint. Your child is bound to give up after three or four repetitions.

3. Re-state it.

A natural response to a child's complaint is usually an unkind retort. A better choice is to re-phrase the child's comment in an acceptable way. So when your child complains, "Why do I have to clean up! My homework's not even done yet!" you can respond, "What I'd like to hear you say is, 'Dad, could I finish my homework before I clean up?'"

4. Give instructions.

Often, a complaint pops out of a kid's mouth without much thought. The complaint is not being said to start a battle. Give a child the benefit of the doubt and issue a few words of instruction, "I'll be happy to listen to you when you give more thought to your comments." It's possible that your child will think about what's been said and rephrase it more politely.

5. Focus on solutions.

Re-direct your child's energy in a more productive way, "I've heard your problem. What do you think can be done to solve it?" It can be an interesting experience to watch the transformation in a child who suddenly realizes that he has power over his world. In other words, beyond just complaining, he can come up with valid ideas to solve his own problem.

6. Don't give lessons!

Take a look at your behavior and make sure YOU aren't complaining. Do you find yourself picking up after the kids while you complain that they should do it themselves? Do you mumble and gripe as you drive your ever-late child to school? It can be humbling to see that the kids are learning how to complain by listening to you complain! You are their most important teacher.

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