

# *Nagging Isn't Necessary: How to Improve a Child's Behavior Without It*

By W. R. Cummings



Sometimes we convince ourselves that the only way we can get our kids to do anything is to ask them over and over and over again.

In other words... nagging.

Here's the thing about nagging, though. Every time you do it, you teach your kid(s) that you'll do it the next time, too.

Why would I obey the first time if mom/dad is going to remind me again in two minutes?

I don't need to follow instructions right now because mom/dad isn't serious, yet. I only have to do what I'm asked once mom/dad is so frustrated that they're yelling. (And once mom/dad yells, I can roll my eyes about how they've lost their cool while I'm as cool as a cucumber.)

All of these situations [above] leave the child in control of when and how they obey. A child's actions are always their own choice (we cannot—AND SHOULD NOT—force their hands to do anything), but we can use positive and negative reinforcements to motivate them into following instructions the first time they're told.

Think about it. If you were a ten-year-old kid, sitting on the couch watching TV, and your mom told you to take the trash out, you wouldn't want to do it.

In your mind, you'd weigh the risk versus the reward of getting up right that moment. You'd think something like this:

If I get up now, I'll have to stop watching in the middle of this scene to go to something I hate. I might even get more tasks added on because my mom will be so happy it was easy to get me to take the trash out.

But if I keep sitting here, I won't lose anything. My mom will ask me again in three minutes to take the trash out, I won't have a consequence yet, and I'll get to finish this scene of the show. And the more I let her know how inconvenient the task is, the less likely she'll be to want to fight me again on asking for another task.

Win, win.

So here I sit.

However, imagine this scenario, thought-out by a kid who isn't used to being nagged.

My mom just asked me to take the trash out. What are my risks versus my rewards of obeying?

Well, if I do it right away, my mom will smile and tell me thank you. She'll probably let me go back to my show because I got up right away.

If I don't do it right away, my mom will take away my TV privileges for the rest of the day, no questions asked. I won't get a warning, I won't get a reminder. Whatever I was doing when I refused to follow instructions will be the thing I lose all day.

I could throw a fit about that, but then she'll take away a toy. Probably my Legos.

"Coming, Mom!"

It seems like common sense, but when we're in it, it's SO HARD to follow through with.

The thing is, the way that we respond to our kids' behaviors this time, is what they think about next time the same situation comes up.

We're putting in the work now so that it's easier next time.

When you feel like you're being unfair because you don't give your kiddo a "warning shot," so to speak, remember that you're teaching them that what you ask is an expectation, not a suggestion. It'll only take once or twice for them to figure out that there aren't any warnings anymore, and then they'll start listening the first time.

Don't lose your emotional cool or fall into the trap of nagging, just because they've learned how to push the envelope.

When they say you're being unfair, know that they're trying to get what they want. They're not being truthful. They're desperate to keep things the way they are, but for the sake of your family, you probably need them to be different.

And for the sake of your child(ren) growing up and being able to follow a boss's instructions the first time, you need to instill that skill in them before they leave home.

When your kiddo claims they forgot what you told them, use the opportunity to teach them about listening the first time. Remind them of what you instructed, but still give them the consequence for not listening.

Like I said, it'll only take once or twice.

Nagging is much more exhausting for you than it is for your kids/students. You're the one doing all of the emotional work, and it's just not necessary. Don't let yourself do it!

If you start feeling the urge to nag, ask yourself, "Did I already give them my expectations? If so, what should their consequence be every single time they don't follow instructions? Is that a fair consequence? How can I be firm about that?"

And then follow through! You can do it, parents.

Source: <https://blogs.psychcentral.com/childhood-behavioral/2018/02/nagging-isnt-necessary-how-to-improve-a-childs-behavior-without-it/>