

How Kids Listen to Our Every Deed



How many times have you told your kids to change their clothes, brush their teeth, do their homework/or anything else for that matter?

There is really no right answer because there is really no limit to the number of times we have to ask our kids to do something. For most of us, this is a normal part of our daily lives. We ask, and ask, and ask, and if we are lucky, our kids cooperate after the fourth request or after a loud but otherwise harmless scolding. We complain that our kids never listen to us; we ask other moms how they get their kids to behave, eat their vegetables, or go to sleep. We consult books and Internet sites on better childrearing and discipline and other parenting techniques. Still, our kids just don't listen.

But, they do observe.

While we are yelling at them, they are watching us; while we argue with our wives, they are watching; while we mutter curses under our breath at raging drivers, they are watching; and while we chat with our friends on the phone, they are watching us. If you have toddlers, you are beginning to see this already. You see them carrying on animated conversations on their battery operated toy cell phones. They pace around the house with their heads tilted, their little shoulders straining to hold up the fake phone with the blinking lights.

Yup, our kids are watching our every move, even when they don't listen to one word.

The lessons they learn

The truth is that we shouldn't worry that our children never listen to us. **Instead we should worry that they are always watching us.** It is true. When we tell our kids to pick up their toys, they don't listen. We raise our voices, and they still ignore us. Then, we become irate and yell, and they have a temper tantrum or break down into a fit of tears. But not before they have taken careful note of our actions. In fact, every time we "tell" our kids to do something, we are teaching them a lesson. We are telling them to do one thing, but we are really showing them how to do something else. When we yell at them in anger, we are showing them how to get someone to listen to us. When we throw toys into the toy box or kick toys out of the way as we point our fingers, we are showing them how to display their anger.

Think about when you are driving your kids to school in the morning. A hurried driver cuts you off and you swerve to avoid getting side swiped. "Moron!" you yell, as you correct the wheel. You shrug it off and silently thank Allah that nothing happened. Your kids in the back saw what happened. In these situations, we rarely explain to our kids that the other driver made a mistake by changing lanes without signaling or by turning right just as we crossed a green light. Instead, we show them how to handle such situations: curse and complain.

The lessons we want to teach

It is almost impossible to handle every situation of every day in a manner befitting for teaching our kids lessons. But if we are aware of the opportunities (and the impending dangers) of such situations, we can at least make the most out of many situations. Disciplining our kids is one of the most challenging aspects of each day and, during the course of a day's worth of disciplining, we usually find ourselves yelling, getting angry, and scolding. Later, we usually seek some way to make-up for those angry words or actions. If we could only see ourselves the way our kids probably do, we might learn a thing or two. We can't see ourselves and we can rarely stop ourselves in the midst of heat and anger, but we can prepare ourselves for these moments. If we can decide ahead of time what we want to teach our kids, we can create a sort of game plan for situations. For example, we want our kids to learn that they don't have to yell to be heard. So, the next time you ask your son to pick up his puzzle pieces and get ready for dinner, brace yourself. If you want him to understand that he needs to listen to you and comply, then figure out a way to get him to hear you. Ask him to look at you or get down on your hands and knees and start showing him how to pick up the pieces and put them in the box. Do anything but don't yell or scream.

The lessons we learn

If we make a conscious effort to remember that our children are watching us, it will keep us in check. We will mind our manners, we will speak more soothingly, we will control our emotions, and ultimately we will see that, by our kids watching us, we are beginning to behave the way we want them to behave. In other words, it is a cycle that eventually trains parents and their children towards better behavior and emotional restraint. If we know that our kids are watching our every move, we will be mindful of our behavior and set an example with that behavior. Then, our kids will model that good behavior and essentially everyone wins.

Making promises is one of the issues that cause sticky situations for parents trying to model good behavior. Parents have their own way of making, keeping and breaking promises. Many times parents make promises on a whim and later find out that they didn't or couldn't keep to their word. Sometimes, they even forget altogether that they ever made the promise. How many times have you told your child, "Yes, yes, InshaAllah, I'll get you that thing soon," just to keep your child quiet? The moment the words leave your lips, you should consider that promise cast in stone. A child promised a coveted prize, toy, trip will never forget that promise and will never let you forget it. Actually, quite sadly, many children roll their eyes when they hear their parents say "InshaAllah" for fear that InshaAllah really means "maybe" or "yeah, right" or a plain "no."

Much of our behavior depends on our intentions. If you really mean to get that toy for your son, then assure him that you will. If you don't plan on buying it, then be honest. A dishonest promise might grant you a few minutes of quiet shopping time, but in the end it will lead you further into the depths of your child's distrust. Leading children on with false promises is a guaranteed way to display behavior that your children will never forget and will probably mimic in their own adulthood. In essence, we are designing our children's futures by our own behavior. Why perpetuate behavior in our children that we ourselves should not be harboring? Keeping in mind that our children are not only watching us but learning from us should be reason enough for us to change our behavior before it is cast in the stone of generations to come.