



HOW TO MAKE

Requests

TO TEACH YOUR KIDS HOW
TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

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Introduction

Your kids are born into a complex world. Making their way through the world is going to require a deep understanding of what it means to collaborate, negotiate and make and manage their commitments. How does this relate to the family? It's highly probable at some stage of their working life they will work in a team, lead a team and have some responsibility for what a team achieves.



Teamwork starts at home. Leadership starts at home. The skills required to be a team player and potentially a leader is not trivial. They're born into a world where organisations and small business rely on people working and

collaborating independently to get things done, where leadership is highly valued and sought after and a world where enjoyment at work is starting to be seen as the future. All this translates into people and their ability to adapt and respond to changing circumstances.

The home is the very first team environment your child is exposed to. It is here your children begin to understand the value they can bring to the world. They begin to observe their worth and they learn how to get along with others, and it's here where they become part of something bigger than themselves. It's not smooth sailing but neither is working life. It's not meant to be simple, but I would personally like to think that it's meant to be an enjoyable and challenging learning environment, where things that can go wrong do go wrong, where members of the family are forgiven for their mistakes, and learn from one another as they navigate through life together.

But what often happens is not the reality we would hope for. Conflict and disagreements turn into turmoil, assumptions treated as facts are the catalyst for many misunderstandings and highly charged emotional moments result in deep-seated moods of resentment and anxiousness, where family members resign themselves to a life that "isn't fair". As much as nothing can ever be perfect, the above scenario doesn't have to happen.

Paint the Picture

You come home after a busy day. As you walk through the door, put your bag down and take off your shoes, you ask your child to take their shoes off, unpack their lunch box or do their homework. You're tired. Your child is tired. If you have a pet, it needs attention and if you don't, at the very least, your kids need attention! Your mobile rings, the washing on the line is now wet due to the unanticipated rain. Crap! The kids have dropped their bags in the doorway and ran outside (or to turn on the TV) without any regard for their bag dropping. You've told them over and over again not to

do that, but today, your request has been ignored, in a long line of ignoring. This isn't playing fair!

In that moment when everything seems so exhausting, when you don't feel as though you have any more energy to give to anyone, what do you do? You want them to be responsible adults one day, so they can hold down a job or a career and get along with other members of teams. Even sport requires a one-team approach. When they finally get to their 20's you want them to have learnt how to get along, how to share responsibilities, how to make and manage commitments and in the meantime live rich and happy lives. But they have to start somewhere. Leadership starts at home and you're it! You're the leader of your family, and whether you share that responsibility with someone else or not, you certainly do hold the key to setting up an environment where learning and development is possible.

The intention of this eBook is to help you develop a deeper understanding of what's going on when your kids:

- Don't follow instructions
- Forget even simple daily tasks
- Carry on seemingly without a second thought
- Unhappily do what they're asked

AND...

Teach your kids to speak up, share and responsibility, and many times resign themselves to just having to get on with things as you ask them to.

You'll learn practices that you will now be able to insightfully personalise to your unique situation. You'll have the insight to find different ways to get you all through the busy times. You'll learn ways to take action with patience and understanding when it feels like you're about to lose control.

PART ONE

Communicating in a Busy World



Communicating with your kids is an ever-changing landscape. We go through so many ebbs and flows in the effort to understand them, to help them, to discipline them fairly and to prepare them to be resilient, well adapted adults, who take responsibility for their actions.

For the modern day family life has become extremely busy and often very complex as we attempt to navigate through the multitude of daily commitments. Sometimes we simply cope, and other times we experience sheer joy. The dynamics of family life and our interactions and relationships are not trivial. Because life has become so busy and complex if we don't learn to relate well, families suffer because we simply cannot manage to keep up. Your kids will grow up in a world where relating and connecting is expected in the workplace. The focus on workplaces in the 21st century is people and how they interact. The world has shifted from the industrial age, to the mechanical age, and right now we're in the computer age but there is a growing recognition that interrelating is just as important as the mechanisms we use to support us.

On Listening

Listening to your kids is an art in **interpreting** how they perceive and interpret their world. Their reality is their reality. Their senses are highly tuned to learning and they learn from their environment. The different communities and social situations they are exposed to are as complex as the home.



What this means for them, is that their listening is attuned to many different and often confusing messages. What they learn at home is going to be challenged at some point.

For parents this means they're not necessarily attuned to your concerns all the time. They have their own concerns and their learning to work things out. Much of the time they do this on their own without involving you in their thoughts and their concerns. This is a process of making meaning out of life, which means that their not necessarily always listening the way you think they are. They make meaning from what they experience in their environment (school, home, church, sport). The words you speak, the words you **don't** speak, the things you do, your tone of voice, your gestures and your posture all matter to them from their own interpretation of the world as they see it through their lens.

Helping them to play fair all while not being seen as pushovers is a skill in itself. You want them to follow your instructions for getting things done and behaving in certain ways, yet you know as a parent that when they step out into the world they're going to be faced with complexities that require them to go beyond compliance.

Your child's internal chatter

You can be speaking and thinking your child is listening (or should be listening) but in our complex, loud and judgmental world that is almost impossible. There is so much going on in their little lives and they're so busy listening to their thoughts, and their thoughts, is how they learn.

Your internal chatter

Of course there must be cooperation for a family to function well, especially in really busy households where everyone has multiple commitments. I have no doubt that because the pace at which the world has changed so much in the last decade or so, even if you are a stay at home mum, dad or carer you

are incredibly busy. Kids are involved in a lot more activities and it's likely you have a number of your own personal commitments. You are a busy person. Life doesn't stop for busy people.

Aside from the busyness of life our world is full of judgments for how we "should" behave as adults, as parents, which includes how we "should" bring up our kids. The time we spend with them is always up for question. These relentless judgments lead to more complex learning and thinking about ourselves as people, how we fit into the world and our own personal judgments of ourselves. All of these complexities sit in your internal chatter, and your internal chatter drives your emotions and your emotions drive your actions.

This is a very simple way of explaining how humans interact and learn to be with the world. This is not trivial and it's much more complex than this eBook allows. The resulting concern is that we have an enormous amount of messages coming into our sensory system every day. Is there any wonder we are overwhelmed?

Your internal chatter takes in information that you care about.

Stop for a moment and reflect on that. If you care about the things you listen to daily, how do you take in that information?

Here are a few examples just on parenting...

- *How "should" I discipline*
- *What time "should" they go to bed?*
- *"Should" I let them walk to and from school?"*
- *What extra curricular activities "should" they do?*
- *Which school should they attend?*
- *What clothes "should" they wear?*

- *How much “should” I spend on their birthday/Christmas?*
- *“Should” I let them have a party every year?*
- *Who “should” they hang out with?*
- *What social behaviour “should” I expect?*
- *What chores “should” they be doing and what age “should” I expect them to...?*

And this is only a few of the thoughts we have about parenting! What about the judgments about whether to own your own home, and whether (or not) you “should” have a career? What are the Jones’s doing? “Should” we do that too?

You will notice how I’ve put “should” in inverted comas. *Alan Seiler from Newfield Institute* says this is the language of obligation, along with ought, must, need to and other obligatory words that tell us if we’re not doing something a certain way or at all we “should” be!

The conclusions you come up with in those questions are judgments and opinions, and you act on them. Sometimes there’s so much chatter we don’t even know we’re acting on the expectations of society. What’s even more insidious is that we often treat them as facts – judgments about how we should do things as a fact, the truth. And the result is how we use the things we treat as facts to parent, to live and to continually judge and measure our performance as well as the performance of our kids.

Not one size fits all unique families

All of this internal chatter influences how we communicate in the home which includes how we negotiate what works in our unique circumstances to get things done and to enjoy life. You can’t possibly work in exactly the

same way as another family because you're not made up of the same people with the same family backgrounds and experiences.

Your role as a parent is to work out what is going to be doable given:

- Your overall schedule
- Your child's extra activities
- Your extra activities
- Your ambitions
- School drop off and pick up times
- How long it takes to get there and get back
- Work or career commitments
- Your child's age - age appropriate ways of helping them learn
- What's important to you and your family

Reflection and Learning

What language of obligation do you hear in your internal chatter and what do you make of it?



On getting things done

I'm not here to tell you how to get things done. I'm here to help you understand how children learn and how you can find unique ways to help them learn to get things done and enjoy the process, and open up spaces for conversations and negotiation when appropriate.

How you go about it is up to you. There will be moments depending on the complexity of the task where you will need to chunk it down and separate out a smaller task from a whole task. We'll get into that in section 2.

On requests

A request is asking someone to follow an instruction to get something done. Essentially you are asking someone to make a commitment to you. A request can be listened to in many different ways:

- As a demand
- As a request
- Something to be taken seriously
- Something not to be taken seriously
- As something that gets in the way of doing something else

The requestee is the person you have asked the request to. For this purpose, let's say your child.

Whether your child carries out your request or not is determined by how they *listen* to the request...

- Do they believe you mean it?
- Do they think they are capable?

- Do they think it's fair?
- Do they think it's their 'job' or their siblings?
- Do they listen to you as angry or frustrated?
- Do they want to please you?
- Do they want to learn a new skill?
- Do they trust you to teach them this new skill?

Your role is to mean what you say, be very certain that the complexity of the request is age, stage and experience (about the request) appropriate, and to help you child learn any new skill associated with the request.

Consider yourself a leader. In this case you are leading your child in learning to be a responsible, resilient and adaptable adult who doesn't always comply, but knows how to communicate clearly and get things done, while at times requesting the help of others.

Reflection and Learning

How does it sit with you to consider yourself a leader? What do make of that word? What would it mean for you to lead your child in this way?



How you make requests determines how your requests will be listened to and carried out. This is why it's important to reflect on your own process of going about getting your kids to do things. If you're stressed, emotional, overwhelmed or busy perhaps you won't make an effective request or perhaps your request will be listened to as a demand. That might work ok while your kids are preteens but heaven help you when they become independent and often willful teenagers. This is why learning about responsibility fairly is an important approach to take. Teenagers are learning to negotiate.

The skill of negotiation is crucial to their social development. As they move into their teenage years you want them to think for themselves and not always to say 'yes' to everything.

Responding to requests

There are four ways we can respond to someone's request. Let's distinguish between each one so you to learn how your request has been heard. There are times when we don't take no for an answer, and negotiation is not on the table. Balancing those times fairly will help your child develop the skills of negotiation.

Four responses to requests (+ 1)

1. *Accept "Yes I'll carry out that request"*
2. *Decline "No I won't carry out that request"*
3. *Counter offer "I can't do it now. I can do it later today. Does that work?"*
4. *Commit to commit later "I'm not sure that I can do it. I'll let you know later"*
5. (+ 1) *Slippery promise (vague responses) "Yeah ok...maybe later"*

A slippery promise can sound like a yes but it's not a definite commitment. Slippery promises can easily be overlooked for a commitment.

Adapted from *Alan Seiler Newfield Institute* – Responses to requests

A request is a commitment

When your child accepts a request they make a commitment (a promise) carry through with something the way it was intended. It now becomes a joint agreement for certain actions to be taken place. But there must be a caution here. Learning is a process. Requests can involve complex skills. Mastering skills can be difficult for some kids. Especially when it requires them to follow several instructions or steps in the process to completing the task.

Keep expectations realistic

They won't do it the way it to your 'adult' standard every time. Follow up and managing expectations is crucial to helping them learn and avoid frustration.

It is easy to get angry, frustrated or to give up and do it yourself, especially when your expectations are high. But that's not going to help them learn and it can impact how you connect to your child. Becoming frustrated and angry can lead to unproductive and wasteful ways of coping such as:

- Complaining to your child that they never do what they're asked
- Telling someone else you're angry with your child
- Nagging your child sometimes over, and over
- Giving in and doing the task yourself – sometimes unhappily
- Letting emotions get in the way of a productive conversation
- Declaring your child as lazy, unhelpful or incapable

- Declaring you'll never ask them to carry out the request again

When you make these private or public declarations you are essentially bringing them into existence.

Your response effects how your kids listen

Your responses are all actions – whether you keep them silent or speak them publicly. Your child will pick up on your frustration and while its normal for parents to get frustrated from time to time, it can change the connect and generally get along in the relationship.

Interpreting requests

Your child internally interprets every response you have. Your responses impact how your child:

- Listens to future requests
- Interprets future requests
- Interprets their capabilities
- Communicates their concerns
- Follows future instructions

It's a normal human emotion to become frustrated, and of course it's important to have expectations, however you don't want frustration or unrealistic expectations it to be your everyday go to. You are the leader and systematically teaching your kids is leading them toward competence. Remember, following and negotiating instructions are skills.

PART TWO

Requesting



Making requests requires teaching skills...

If we remember that carrying out a task can be complex and complex tasks are skills competencies, we can see that teaching is at the very foundation of how we go about making the request.

It can be difficult to have insight into how your child might be feeling if you forget what it was like to learn a skill yourself. Your own personal insight helps you to learn. Therefore, your child's own personal insight helps them to learn. But unless its brought to their awareness, kids don't have the insight to know how they learn best. They won't be able to tell you how you can help them. This is a conversation for you to start with them. Conversations are as important as the skill of learning.

Reflection and Learning

What do you make of the way you learnt when you were growing up? How does internal experiential learning help you learn? How do you learn best now?



Effective requests

When you make a request you are essentially asking them to do something by a particular time according to certain standard. Time and standards add to the complexity of the request. When you want your child to do something you have in mind a particular way of going about it. That is your standard. It might sound something like:

Way one...

- *Can you please unpack your school bag?*
- *Can you do that now please*
- *And can you please take your lunch box to the kitchen*
- *And while you're at it, can you empty the lunch box scraps into the bin*
- *Then can you please put your lunch box into the sink*

If these are your standards they need to be clear. They need to have steps, and the steps need to be taught systematically. There are five steps to that request.

Let's have a look at it another couple of ways...

Way two...

- Unpack your school bag now please, and take your lunch box to the kitchen, empty the scraps into the bin, and put your lunch box in the sink.

Way three...

- Unpack your school bag.
- You can see the difference between all the different ways of asking. Asking effectively is limited by your imagination but the bottom line is that you ask in way that works for your child to develop the skills you are asking them to do.

Factors that affect follow through of a request

1. Age
2. Maturity

3. Whether the request is new
4. Whether out of the blue you add complexity
5. What they have on their mind
6. Their energy
7. How distracted they are at the time
8. Their emotions
9. What sort of a day they've had
10. Whether they believe they can meet your standards



No matter what your request, some children will find them easy to follow through, and for some even the simplest tasks will be a challenge. Some children may only be able to complete each task as you ask them to, while others will follow complex steps just by giving them one overarching instruction such as 'unpack your school bag please'. Keep in mind that the complexity of the skill versus the environmental factors affecting your child.

Keep your expectations realistic and keep your senses alert to any complexities.

Reflection and Learning

What skills can you help your child learn so they follow through?

What fun ways might your child respond to?



10 ways to help your child follow through

As you read through you could reflect and relate each way to simple and more complex tasks that take place in your household.

1. Speak the request, and speak it respectfully

- i. The request doesn't remain in private conversation

Sometimes we can have an expectation that our child does something but they haven't learnt that our expectation is that they do it without having to be asked, or they just don't do it on their own!

ii. The request is not heard as a demand

Children may respond to demands sometimes but demanding can shut down communication. We're always likely to get a better outcome when we ask clearly and patiently. Kids respond to calm direct teaching, and knowing what the expectations are. Use appropriate voice control – be firm if you need to be. Tune into what your child responds positively to and what they don't.

2. Help your child be a listener

How your child listens to your request will determine...

- Whether they follow through
- Whether they do all the steps
- Whether they do it happily or under sufferance

We all know kids sometimes don't listen to you, but they're ALWAYS listening to something...the birds singing, their imaginary friend, the TV character, a song, and all the things that are going on around them. They are constantly distracted or should I say preoccupied with 'stuff'. The nature of being a child is to be preoccupied with stuff because that's how they learn, by listening to all the things in their environment which are interesting, fun, worrying, and that matter to them and their world. Your requests are one cog in the wheel of learning.

If you want your request listened to, make sure...

- Your child can take you seriously
- If you haven't followed through in the past start now!
- You have your child's full attention and ask one request at a time
 - e.g. "turn off the TV now please"



- Once the first request is asked, make the second request
 - e.g. "Go and clean your teeth now please"
- That you play fair with your request
- That you break the tasks into small chunks at first and do it with them
- You are patient and you declare your appreciation for them



Hint: Sometimes you might need to find a quiet time to ask a request so you minimize distraction and increase their chances of being able to listen.

Even if your child has made a commitment to carry out the request, once they realise the complexity they may fall short of completing all the tasks let alone doing it the way you asked! To help them maintain enthusiasm and motivation reward them through each step e.g. "great! You picked all your clothes off the floor, thank you! Good start! OK, what's next?"

3. Trust your child and help your child trust you

Being a part of a family can be fun. Cooperating in a family is a great life skill. Trust your child's ability to learn and develop skills. Trust that they want to

help. If your child regularly makes slippery promises open up a space for conversation to find out what's going on. Trust requires connecting and relating to one another.

Kids are usually pretty sincere. Often their reliability can be questionable but that's usually because there is an environmental factor preventing them from being reliable. If your child is struggling to be reliable go back to the nine factors above that could be getting in the way of them following through. They may need help. They certainly need your love and acceptance when they are unreliable. Being reliable comes with practice as skills develop.

You'll trust them when you...

- Manage your expectations
- Connect positively through conversations
- Teach requests in small chunks and simple steps
- Celebrate little wins
- Thank them for their attempts – sometimes giving it a go is a big step
- Don't expect them to be perfect

They'll trust you when...you put the above into action and they can sense you genuinely want them to learn.

4. Share your understanding

Share your thoughts and concerns genuinely and calmly without criticizing. Use words and phrases your child understands and avoid making sloppy requests when you are tired and frustrated. This of course is the most difficult time to make requests so perhaps it's worth considering not making requests in these particular moments.

You're probably not going to be the best teacher when you're foggy and you've a lot on your mind.

Do this...

- i. Make sure the request is clear in the first instance
- ii. Make sure your child has genuinely committed to following through by listening to the response e.g. You: "Can you do that for me please"
Child: "Yes mummy/daddy" or at least a nod or some acknowledgement

5. Share your reasons

Kids need to understand they're a part of the bigger family picture. That everything that gets done in families relies on the cooperation of others, including themselves. They also need to understand that you are genuinely helping them become independent and that it's important they do some things on their own. Of course if your child is 2 or 3 you want to keep your explanations simple or you'll lose them in the translation. But genuinely saying things like; "I need you to do this so we can..." or; "I need you to do this and then we can..."

6. Keep your standard realistic

- Are your standards appropriate for the age of your child?
- Are your standards getting in the way of fun learning?

Life isn't meant to be difficult. We're meant to enjoy the moments. Life passes us by so quickly and if your child doesn't live up to your expectations it's not going to be too much fun. I'm not suggesting lowering expectations if they are realistic but there are ways that you can gauge whether or not they are too high.

- i. How your child responds

- ii. Which steps in the request they avoid
- iii. What requests do they seem happy to do and what requests do they avoid?

Little wins also encourage and motivate. If they do it, celebrate it. You want to avoid frustration. A frustrated child will shut down or become anxious. Check in: With yourself...how are you going with your expectations?

7. Choose your mood

This is about checking in before you make a request. Make sure...

- Your words are not too sharp
- Your tone is calm
- Your gestures don't give the impression you are angry
- Your child is in the emotional frame of mind to "take in" the request
- (Again) The request is not a demand

When children are tired or frustrated or their day at school hasn't gone so well they just simply won't be in the right mood for following complex instructions let alone simple ones. Be patient and pick your moments. If you get a sense or they tell you they are too tired, renegotiate the terms of the request. Remember you're teaching them to be adults that don't always comply but do play fair.

Their mood + your mood will determine their response so perhaps there are things you could do to make it enjoyable.

Step outside of the situation and see it for what it is in that moment at that time and with all the complexities of the day, the week, the year.

Ways to shift a mood

- Do it together
- Make it fun
- Together come up with who does what
- Flip a coin
- Get **them** to choose the new and more complex skills they want to learn
- Sing your way through the request
- Find a fun word game
- Use this time as a way to talk about your day and state that up front
- Do something fun after its done
- Swap roles e.g. ask them; "What would you do if you were me?"

And remember this...

It's OK to withdraw the request if the situation calls for it

Acknowledge their moods

"I can see you are sad/angry/frustrated right now", what would you get this done?

Give them time or help them calm down by connecting first

Check in with your moods

Noticing your mood is empowering in parenting. It can tell you so much about the day or week and how you respond to things. And it's a wonderful way to start understanding your child's moods. The more

you understand yourself, the more you will have empathy for what your child might be experiencing. That's a skill in leadership!

8. Teach them to counter-offer

Counter offers occur when someone asks a request of another person and the requestee makes an offer different to the one currently on the table. Counter offers should be on the table. Learning to negotiate is a leadership skill. This doesn't mean you have to accept their counter offer.

Responses to counter offer

- Counter offer
- Decline
- Accept

You can decline a counter offer but ultimately this works best when you come up with a way to negotiate it working for both of you. As the adult there will be times that there is no negotiation e.g. cleaning teeth and bedtime. But don't rule it out altogether.

Making and managing requests is not about winning battles it's about tuning in, listening, teaching the skills and picking your moments wisely.

Counter offer game

This is a fun game in teaching your child to develop the skill of making counter offers

Age: 7- 8 > (Depending on maturity and how they've managed to carry out requests in the past)

One: Parent asks request

Two: Child clarifies understanding of request

Three: Parent confirms or clarifies further – including time and standards

Four: Child makes counter offer e.g. “I can’t do that right now but I can do it after lunch...would that be OK?” OR; “I can do that but I’d like help with...would that be OK?”

Five: Parent accepts, declines or re negotiates counter offer

9. Make request from open caring posture and voice tone

Watch your posture, where you stand, your tone and volume of voice. If you’re not in a position to make a request, chances are you’ll be declined or you’ll get a slippery promise. It’s also likely that you child might even listen to the request through a mood of guilt.

Check in on your body. During the next week take notice of: How you are holding your body, how you are breathing e.g. shallow, deep, relaxed.

Reflection and Learning

What shifts would be more helpful? What are some ways you can help your child get motivation to carry out requests in the future?



Teaching your children the skills of following through on instructions and negotiating requests is the art of making and managing your commitments, which essentially is like helping them to keep their promises AND take responsibility for commitments. This is the art of getting along. But it's not the art of compliance. We don't have to make promises, yet we often fall into them by virtue of keeping the peace. Develop strong resilient responsible children through connection and learning together.

Learning is meant to be fun. Strong relationships and connections are born out of moments of difficulties and insight. These are the moments your child will appreciate you, and it's in these moments when they need you the most.

If you have any concerns and you wish to connect feel free to email me. I welcome all interactions.

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All the very best of luck to you



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