



Child Development: Interrupting

By Elizabeth Pantley, from *The No-Cry Discipline Solution* (McGraw-Hill 2007)

Whether you're on the phone, busy on your computer, or talking to another adult, it can be frustrating when your children constantly interrupt you. What's surprising to learn is that they do it because they always get a response from you when they do! They've learned that you are willing to stop what you're doing to answer them. Keep in mind that children are so focused on their own needs that they don't realize that you have needs, too. They can learn how to pay more attention to other people's needs as well as their own, which will help control these endless interruptions.

Give lessons and examples

Teach your children how to determine if something warrants an interruption, as they may have a hard time deciphering when interruptions are justified. Discuss examples of when it's okay to interrupt, such as when someone is at the door, or if a sibling is hurt.

Coach proper manners

Teach your child how to wait for a pause in the conversation and to say, "Excuse me." When she remembers to do this, respond positively. If the interruption is of something that should wait, politely inform your child of this.

Don't answer the question.

Many parents admonish kids for interrupting, but in the same breath respond to the child's interrupted request, which just reinforces the habit.

Watch your manners

Parents sometimes jump in so quickly to correct their child's bad manners that they don't realize that the way in which their correction is delivered is itself rude. Use your own good manners to model appropriate communication skills. Pause, look at your child, and say, "I'll be with you in a minute."

Teach "The Squeeze"

Tell your child that if she wants something when you are talking to another adult, she should walk up to you and gently squeeze your arm. You will then squeeze her hand to indicate that you know she is there and will be with her in a minute. At first, respond quickly so your child can see the success of this method. Over time you can wait longer, just give a gentle squeeze every few minutes to remind your child that you remember the request.

Create a busy-box

Put together a box of activities or games that can only be used when you are on the telephone, working at your desk, or talking with an adult. Occasionally refill it with new things or rotate the contents. Be firm about putting them away when you are done. Your child will look forward to your next conversation, which will be interruption free!

Plan ahead

Before you make a phone call or have a visitor, let your child know what to expect. *"I'm going to make a phone call. I'll be a while, so let's get your busy box ready to use while I'm on the phone."*

Give praise when deserved

Catching your child doing the right thing can be the best lesson of all. Praise your child for using good manners, for remembering to say "excuse me," and for interrupting only for a valid reason.

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