

ParentZone Pods – Episode 4: Getting our children to listen

[0:09] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Welcome to ParentZone Pods at Anglicare Victoria, we've been working with parents to support their experience for over 20 years. Parenting is the toughest and most important job you'll ever have. Hi, I'm Laurie. And with me is Anita.

[0:24] Anita Weber

Hi Laurie!

[0:25] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

And we appear in group facilitators at ParentZone. This podcast reflects our work with parents and the many conversations we have had over the years.

[0:34] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

ParentZone acknowledge and pay our respect to the traditional custodians of this land we are recording on today, both the Wurundjeri and the Boon wurrung people of the Kulin nations, we also pay our respects to elder's past, present, and future.

[0:52] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

In this episode, we're going to be talking about how we can get our child to listen to us. Many parents come to us frustrated because their children do not listen to them. And what they're really asking us is "How do I get my child to listen to me when I want them to do something?" Of course, there is the possibility that there may be something wrong with their hearing. But if they can hear you open a lolly bag, or breaking off a piece of chocolate from another room, it is safe to assume they can hear quite well. So we're going to be talking about a few different things today to help parents really get their children to listen to them. The first thing is how do we give our children clear instructions so that they can follow what we're trying to say? Then we're going to talk about how we can get our children to cooperate with us. And thirdly, how can we use assertive communication without resorting to yelling at our children, which we often end up doing when they haven't listened to us. So, Anita, how do we actually get our children to listen to us?

[1:53] Anita Weber

Well, I'm going to start Laurie with, do we actually make it easy for them to listen to us? You know, the responsibility and challenges of parenting can be overwhelming. We're always trying to get our children to do things that we want them to do. We're concerned about how they behave, and making sure that they behave in ways that are acceptable to us and to society. And you know, a lot of the time our kids don't actually care about the things that we care about. So it seems like we're always in conflict. We seem to be telling them what to do, stopping them from doing what they want, and ignoring their feelings about it all the time.

[2:29] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

And I guess we do this without even realising it, don't we? We're kind of running on autopilot. We've got our own agenda that we need to, you know, we got to get through shopping, we've got to get through everything in the day, we probably don't sit back to actually think, what are the children's needs and wants at the stage? Which is hard.

[2:44] Anita Weber

No, no we don't. We're so busy that we've got so many things to do that we just need to get them done and we need our kids to comply.

[2:51] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Yes. So how do we actually give clear instructions to our children?

[2:55] Anita Weber

the first thing we need to do is make sure we've got their full attention. Get close to them, don't yell across the room, you know, make eye contact, perhaps touch them to get their attention away from what they're looking at. You know, look for the signs, if they're engrossed in an activity, wait until they're not so, not so engrossed. Wait until they're ready. Make sure that they're actually looking at you, when you give the instruction or ask the questions, you know, you really need to start with the basics, which is making sure you've got their attention. And if you feel that they haven't heard you, instead of repeating yourself, go back and make sure you've got their full attention.

[3:36] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Yeah, that's such a simple thing. But such a good thing to do isn't it? Actually go to the room, get down to their level, try to get their attention in some way - touch their arm, look at them in the eyes. Because I think you're right, and I'm guilty of this myself, I will, you know, scream across the room, "Dinner's ready!" You know, and expect them to come straightaway, but I don't know what they've been doing in their rooms. And it's quite easy for them to ignore me at that stage.

[4:02] Anita Weber

And part of it too, is you know, like if we yell frequently, it loses its power. It's not an attention getter, because they know that they can ignore it because it's not, you know, like, it's not an urgent thing. If they hear it all the time.

[4:16] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

I guess they're waiting for that third yell and then like, Okay, now Mum means business I need to come out instead of, we really what we want is for them to listen the first time around. Alright, so once you've got their full attention, what's the next step?

[4:28] Anita Weber

So when you're giving the instructions, use a warm tone of voice you know, you don't want your children to be thinking that they're in trouble, they've done something wrong, they're not going to meet your expectations. So you know, be warm, inviting, friendly, positive. If our children think they are going to get into trouble or are in trouble, then they lose that ability to listen clearly. And the next step is to make sure that those instructions are really clear and understood well. So ask your child to repeat them back to you. Make sure they understand what you expect of them.

[5:03] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Yeah, and I guess that makes a lot of sense in terms of, if it's a three year old as well, isn't it because they might need a lot of very explicit instructions, and maybe one or two steps.

[5:13] Anita Weber

With a younger child, if they've not done what you're asking them to do before, or if it's, you know, still relatively new, you need to sit down and show them you need to do with them. I even recommend doing it with kids, you know, doing what you want them to do with them. Right up even teen years, it's also a good opportunity to actually build connections and build on your relationship together. Kids often talk to you more when they're, when they're absorbed in an activity with you. So it's a good opportunity to see. But if we barking waters, and we're sending them off to do things, that they then have to meet our expectations, it doesn't make it easy for the kids. And so yeah, they tend to ignore us.

[5:55] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Yeah and I like what you said at the start about how we don't actually know what they're doing. They could be in the middle of something. And we're sort of saying stop, and I as an adult, I really dislike it when people do that to me. So it's like, how do we make it so that it's not a horrible thing for them to stop, giving them the time? We're saying it in a gentle way, as you said, using that warm voice. Making sure it's a clear instruction, perhaps giving them an extra 5, 10 minutes if that's what they require, before they come out if that's what we're asking of them. Yeah. Okay, and what next? What other tips have you got?

[6:28] Anita Weber

Invite their cooperation. And what I mean by that is, is to actually ask them to help you and give them choices. You're setting a boundary, you're saying, look, the dishes need to be done, you and I are going to do them? Do you want to wash? Or do you want to dry, you're setting an expectation that the task will be done, you're actually inviting them to do it with you. And you're allowing them the power of the choice. So you're actually meeting their needs, as well as your own, because you'll get the task done. And they've actually had some agency in doing that.

[7:01] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Yeah, that's brilliant. And it's such a small thing. But it would make such a big difference, I think.

[7:05] Anita Weber

It does. And the difference is in the relationship, the differences in the cooperation, the level of cooperation. And you know, your child hasn't left resenting you because you're getting them to do something that you're not willing to do.

[7:18] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Okay. Now, I know, you mentioned before that we can tell them what they can do or not what they can't do, can you tell us a little bit about that as well.

[7:25] Anita Weber

As I mentioned before, there's so many demands, and parenting can be really overwhelming at times. So we always resort to what we think is the easiest, which is to you know, I'm going to order and you're going to follow. And in many cases, our kids, it doesn't work that way. And it actually ends up taking a lot longer. But if we actually tell kids what they can do in a positive way, or what we expect of them, making it very clear, they can meet our expectations, rather than disappoint us. And that is a huge difference in regards to our relationship and how children feel about themselves, as well as building their self esteem and confidence.

[8:04] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Yeah, good point. So some examples could be, you know, 'walk with me' instead of 'don't run'.

[8:09] Anita Weber

Yeah, you know, and for times where we are worried about their concerns, and we do often back orders, like when we're going for a walk and they're getting too close to the road, or we're off to the park and they ran off. Or we're at the shopping center where it's really crowded, we start resorting to worries, it's because of our fears, that something will happen to them. So we can actually change that around and actually give them the responsibility. We can actually say, 'Look, we're going to the park today. And I need to know that you're safe. Usually I yell at you. But today we're going to try something different, today I want you to look out for me. If you can't see me, I can't see you. And I don't know that you're safe.' I've done that with some kids at a park and he worked brilliantly.

[8:54] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Fantastic. Because you're giving them the power, aren't you?

[8:57] Anita Weber

Yeah, yeah. You know, it's your responsibility to make sure that you're doing the right thing, not my responsibility to make sure you're in the right thing.

[9:05] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Yeah, it shifts it.

[9:06] Anita Weber

It's a subtle difference. Yeah, it's a subtle difference, but it means that we're building the skills of our children. So yeah, and when our children do do what we asked them to do, we need to let them know that we notice, we need to let them know that we appreciate what they're doing. Providing them feedback, helps them know that they're doing the right thing helps them make those decisions for themselves and builds once again, that really positive relationship that we want to have with them.

[9:33] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Yeah, awesome. And actually the other day, my daughter unstacked the dishwasher without me asking, which was amazing. And yes, that was an opportunity for me to say, 'Oh, well, you know, thank you so much. That makes my life so much easier when I get up and the dishes are already taken care of.'

[9:48] Anita Weber

It's really heartwarming, you know, when they do things just to please us without being asked. It's just, it's just beautiful. And then we know we've done our job well.

[9:58] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

So what are the reasons do you why children don't listen to us?

[10:03] Anita Weber

Well, I think we need to try to see the situations more from our children's viewpoint, if we only consider the impact of their behavior on us when they're ignoring us, we're ignoring the impact that we have on them when we backorder. And we interrupt what they're doing. How often do you see and adults stop and drop everything they're doing because we've asked them to, you know, it doesn't happen very often. Because we often say, 'Are you busy? Can I interrupt?' We choose not to use those words with our kids, because we want them to do what we want them to do. But it's really important, it shows consideration and respect for them. And it also models the behavior we want them to take on. So you know, we want them to show us respect, we want them to stop and listen to us when we ask them to, and we first need to acknowledge that they are busy too, and they have busy lives as well. So taking some time to actually understand their point of view, or even just accept their feelings - that they are frustrated and disappointed when they have to stop what they're doing.

[11:05] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Yes, and this is quite a common one when it comes to technology, isn't it? Time to get off the iPad now. So how do we help parents with that?

[11:13] Anita Weber

Sometimes, you know, we make that demand, we might have even been trying all sorts of strategies with the technology, we've spoken to loads of people, and they've said, well, perhaps give them a warning, it's a transition problem. So warn them in 10 minutes time, you need to get off of the technology. But that's really just giving them 10 extra minutes or you know, depending on where you are. And then you know, we tell them off at that time, but then we give them an extra 10 minutes. So now they're up to 20 minutes, that boundary's becoming really negotiable now, so they're ignoring us because they are gonna see how far they can push us. So we need to be clearer, what we want is not for us to be yelling at them

to get them off, and for them to just comply in the end. But what we want is for them to acknowledge and understand that there are limits, and that they actually need to follow those limits, not for us to take on the responsibility and remind them of them constantly. So that's the frustrating part for us. But as parents, one of the things that I always did with my son was ask him, how long is it going to take for him to finish is the same for TV. How long has your television program got to go? They've been watching it for 20 minutes, they don't want to lose the last 10. They'd been playing a game, they might be online with other people. So it's tied up with their social situation. They've got friends, they don't want to let down. How long will it take? Give me an estimate of how long it will take? Then I'll go off and plan dinner and then I'll go off and say, hey, it's nearly dinnertime, are you nearly finished? Getting their cooperation or even another thing I saw recently, I heard a parent told me what they do is ask questions about the game, they find an opportunity to ask questions, what are you doing? How, you know, curiosity questions, what are you doing? And they use that time to connect, and you know, they're connecting. And before long the parents join the child in playing the game. They're feeling good together, they're doing something together. And then oh, well, the game's over. It's time to go and do this now. To acknowledge the feelings of our kids, you know, they are disappointed when they have to give up what they love doing to do something less desirable.

[13:18] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Yes, that's right. Like the dishes.

[13:21] Anita Weber

Yeah. And to do that, we don't want to do that. We're trying to offload it onto our kids.

[13:26] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

That's right. But it's the expectation, isn't it, that we think that they should be obeying us, but it's getting back into their world and realizing they've got things going on to that they wanted to?

[13:35] Anita Weber

Exactly right. And you know, they are going to feel disappointed. It's, it's perfectly acceptable to feel disappointed if you are disappointed. It's perfectly acceptable to be frustrated if you can't get the time required to complete an activity. I mentioned before ask first how long it will be before they are finished. Seek their agreement to fulfill your task as soon as it's over without a fuss. So it's okay. Yeah, you can play for another 10 minutes. But I need you to agree that you're going to do this straightaway. Perhaps set a timer so then it's not you reminding them at the end. It's the timer saying, well, it's time's up. And then you just remind them of the agreement, not of what they're supposed to be doing, but that they agreed to what you asked. And acknowledge their feelings. Just you know, yeah, I know. It's disappointing me. I know, it's frustrating. But you know, this is really important to me. Just because you're giving them empathy and sympathizing with how they are feeling doesn't mean you're actually going to change that boundary or that limit. It's okay to agree with them. Yeah, it is disappointing, but you're not changing your mind and they know it. Because you set that boundary and you got to keep it. Probably the most important thing is as the adult you actually need to remain calm.

[14:49] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Which does the challenge a lot of the time, isn't it?

[14:51] Anita Weber

You know, we get really angry when we want or we think our children are disobeying us or when we think that they're ignoring us. We get triggered and we then lose our ability to think clearly and to plan and to hear, or even just to see what our children are going through. And you know, that's not pleasant for anyone. And that adds to the reason why kids don't follow through, they might feel that they don't meet our expectations, they might feel that all we do is yell at them anyway. So why try hard? So yeah, we need to do it in a different way.

[15:25] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

You mentioned before about being a role model for our children in terms of how we listen, how do we go about doing that?

[15:33] Anita Weber

Well, as you said, you know, we actually need to be the example that we want to set for them. So we actually need to give them our full attention when they come to us. So does that mean dropping everything? No, it just means I need five minutes, I'm busy doing this first. So you know, you set that boundary for yourself, as much as you allow your children's ad set that boundary for them, I won't be able to give my full attention to you until I finished this. And it'll take me about five minutes. So practice doing that. And when you do give them your attention, when you do give them the time, you actually need to put those devices aside as well. Parents can be just as involved in their social media accounts and phones as children can be. So set that aside, your child's not going to take up too much of your time, you can get back to that later. But you actually need to give them your full attention. You need to be facing them, your whole body language needs to be showing that I'm open to this discussion. And I am willing to talk to you right now. And be non-judgmental and accepting. They can tell us that they hate us or that they're angry with us, we can deal with that, you know, we're the adults remain calm, non judgmental, that's how they feel, they need to be able to express that. And that feeling as all emotions will pass. Because we know in the long run, they actually do love us. So you know, we can ignore some of those things. But we actually, you know, acknowledge their anger in that moment, acknowledge what they're experiencing in that moment, and work with them to overcome those feelings, to sit with those feelings, except those feelings, and problem solve them way out of their challenges. So they need our help. That's why they're angry because they're frustrated or afraid, or they just don't know what they need to do. And they don't want you to back orders at them or tell them off. They just need you to listen. And as parents, one of the trickiest things that we have to do is to actually stop and listen, because quite often we actually hear their problem, we solve it in our heads, we want to jump straight in and tell them what to do. Kids don't want to hear that. In fact, sometimes they've actually come up with their own little solutions in their heads, as they've told us, you know, it's the same as when we go and talk to our friends, we vent. And at the same time, we're venting the solution comes to us and we go, Oh, I think I could do this, what do you think, and we get the advice of our friends. But with our kids, we don't wait for that to happen, we actually jump in and tell them what to do. And they don't, you know, they don't want to hear that they're not going to follow that advice, because it doesn't meet with their own agenda or their own thoughts and feelings on the topic. And they need that opportunity. We need to be more of their guide in that respect, we need to actually hear what they have to say and build up their skills, their ways of thinking about those things.

[18:22] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

Okay, now, the last part that we're going to talk about was how we actually assertively communicate with our child. What of the either the steps or the tips you can give parents for this?

[18:35] Anita Weber

So if we are giving instructions, and we find that, you know, we're doing all the other things, we've made sure that we've got their eye contact, we've made sure they're we've got their attention before they give the instructions, we've actually simplified the instructions so that they can follow them. And that's according to your own child's needs. We've actually provided them with ample opportunities to cooperate with us and to do those things. Instead of resorting to yelling, we actually need to let them know the impact of they're not complying is having on us. So we might tell them, you know, it's really disappointing when nobody comes to the dinner table after I've cooked the meal. It's really disappointing when I go to the laundry to do the washing on my day off and the washings not in the laundry basket. I want you to do this. I want you to do this, because it'll help me. Be assertive, set those limits. You're not saying you

know, you have to do this, you're just saying this is how it impacts on me. This is what I want to have happen instead. It's about me how I feel about it, and what can be done to change the situation.

[19:40] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

So an example that you used as I you know, I get really disappointed when the washing isn't here for me to do. What I would like is for the washing to be here, you know, every Friday night or whatever it is.

[19:51] Anita Weber

Yep, give a time limit. So it's free. Like you don't have to do it every day, although that would be very much appreciated. You've got a timeline. I know you've got your own things to do, you're busy. But this is important as well.

[20:06] Laurie-lee Arrowsmith

So in today's podcast, we've looked at how we can get our children to listen to us. We've talked about how we can role model listening ourselves, and how in order to gain their attention, we kind of need to get down to their level and in their space and a warm way. We give them clear instructions. And then we remain positive and calm ourselves to make sure that that limit is still being set we want to send assertive eye messages but make sure that we do this in a respectful way. If you feel this is hitting home for you, and you'd like to have more information about the groups that we ran at parents own Google Anglicare Parentszone for more information, or check the show notes where you are listening now.