

# Parenting Tips

## What To Do When Your Child Talks Back

“I can't wait to grow up so I can move out of this house!” a typical 10-year old declares while arguing about cleaning up his room. Sound familiar? Talking back is a normal part of growing up, but that doesn't make it any easier to deal with.

What can parents do to deal with a child who talks back? Parents' responses determine the outcome of their interaction with their children. When parents remain calm, their children are more likely to calm down too. However, parents often talk back, saying things like “Don't you talk back to me!” This inhibits communication and teaches the wrong lesson.

Parents can do many things to discourage talking back, including setting clear limits and explaining the behavior that they expect of their children. Praising children when they behave well and don't talk back is a powerful way to reinforce good behavior.

Kids learn by example; they will learn to handle their own strong emotions when they see their parents doing the same. An emotional parent might announce, “I'm so upset I need to be alone to calm down!” Using words teaches kids to take control of their anger.

It's important to consider the context in which children talk back and to identify patterns. For example, are children tired or overstimulated when they talk back? Parents also should be proactive in their interventions. If the hour or so after school seems to be a prime time for back talk, kids should be encouraged to take some downtime when they get home. Don't over-schedule children, and be sure to spend time with them.

Often, kids talk back because they want attention. When parents don't rise to the bait, they discourage back talk. A “non-response” is often more effective than engaging in a verbal battle.

Giving children transition time between activities prepares kids for what's coming up and prevents back talk. As an example, telling kids that “Dinner will be served in 10 minutes” gives them time to think about the transition. Then, when dinner is ready, they will be less likely to resist and talk back.

Creative outlets also can help children express their anger. Here are a few ideas:

- Kids can draw a picture or bounce a ball to release their strong feelings.
- Sticker charts and special incentives often are effective in motivating kids to behave well. Reward children with extra playtime or a trip to the park. If the talking back persists, parents can impose a consequence, such as no TV that afternoon.
- When older children talk back, parents can encourage a dialogue by asking them how they think the problem can be resolved.

Listening is a critical part of communicating, and it's important for parents to show their kids that they are listening. For example, a parent might say, "It sounds like you're frustrated with me," to let the child know that the parent empathizes.

The shows kids watch on TV can influence their talking back. Many popular TV shows with kids feature children who talk back, but in a situation comedy, the back talk is funny and has no consequences. Parents should actively monitor the shows their kids watch.

Remember that talking back is normal. It's up to parents to avoid power struggles and to help children change negative behaviors.

Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh offers Positive Parenting classes and other parenting workshops. For more information, call the Community Education Department at 412-692-7105. [Current classes](#) are listed on this Web site