

# Getting more cooperation from kids

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*Obedience!*

Remember that term.

'Obey your elders' was something many of us as kids were constantly reminded about.

The concept of obedience belongs to a bygone era when kids were seen and not heard and respect was hierarchical (*'respect you elders'*) rather than mutual (*'we respect each other'*).

Obedience has been replaced by the concept of 'cooperation', which takes more skill and effort to attain.

***How do I get my child to cooperate with me is perhaps the biggest challenge for many parents?***

Cooperation is dependent on good will between kids and parents. Kids can withhold their cooperation if they believe that you are not acting in their best interests. They have a built-in radar that will detect when you take short cuts with them.

You can build a spirit of cooperation where 'helping out' and 'doing the right thing' becomes part of your family culture. You need to model cooperative behaviours and expect kids to cooperate with you. Expectations are powerful tools for parents. You get what you expect so expect kids to help out!

Cooperation is usually invited. Your language plays a part in this. "Grandma's coming to visit. What can we do to make her stay enjoyable?" is more effective in eliciting cooperation than telling them what to do. Kids are more likely to stick to decisions when they have had a say in making them.

Families that develop a spirit of cooperation usually have three distinct values that drive their behaviour. These are: ***independence, shared responsibility and mutual respect.*** It's useful to think about how your family compares?

**Cooperation is about strategy as well as intent**

Parents who elicit cooperation use a distinct set of strategies consistently that promote family involvement and responsible behaviour.

Here are four very different strategies that promote cooperation in families:

1. **The Silent Robot:** If you have kids who leave mess around in the public areas of your house then you need to employ the Silent Robot. The Silent Robot picks up toys, clothes and other 'stuff' left lying around the house and places them somewhere that isn't easy to find. This is a low conflict way of teaching kids to pack up after themselves.
2. **Recognition:** Go one step further than catching kids being cooperative. Give them feedback when they are cooperative that describes what they have done and how it impacted on you. "It was great the way you came to the table the first time I asked. It makes my life easier." Parental recognition is a high driver for most kids regardless of age.
3. **Rosters:** Not getting the help you need from kids without constantly nagging or even bribing them? If so, try using a weekly jobs rosters. Rather than asking for help refer kids to the jobs roster when you need some assistance.
4. **Family Roundtable:** This is the **BIG** cooperative family strategy. It takes some effort and some learning to put into practice. But when you use this strategy well you will find that you are more able to develop a sense of 'we' rather than 'me' within their families. Family roundtables (family meetings) are best conducted with primary school-aged kids. They need to be regular and kept separate from mealtimes.

It would be great to think that cooperation happens naturally in families and kids naturally want to help and please you.

This is faulty thinking as groups by their nature need effective leadership to make them gel. Families by nature are tricky groups to lead so it takes some pretty effective leadership to get kids singing from your songbook.

BUT it is your choice of parenting style and the parenting strategies you use make all the difference when it comes to getting cooperation from kids.