

10 Tips for First Time Obedience

By Kathie Morrissey of *The Character Corner*

When our kids were very young, my husband and I worked hard to teach them the importance of obeying the first time they were told to do something. It took a lot of training, practice, and reminding, but we felt that first time obedience was vital for two reasons: We wanted them to learn to obey the first time, so when God spoke to them they would obey Him without question. And Safety reasons. If they were about to run in front of a car, we couldn't risk them waiting till the 3rd time we said "Stop!" Or if they were about to touch a hot stove, they needed to know that when we said "don't touch!" they should immediately stop.

In reality, if our kids can obey us the 3rd or 4th time we tell them something, they have the ability to obey the FIRST time, so why not require it?

Picture the parents who use the "1, 2, 3" method. Their child has been trained that they don't have to move or obey right away, but can wait till right before Mom or Dad says "3". Repeating your commands or threatening them like this, trains them to disobey.

Children who wait till we have raised our voice, threatened, or told them something several times, do so because they've been "programmed" or trained that way by the parents. We shouldn't get angry with them, since we have unknowingly trained them to wait to obey

So what should you do if your children are in the habit of not obeying the first time you speak to them? Don't get angry, but realize that either they are still young and in training, OR that you have unintentionally trained them to disobey. At that point, it's up to YOU to have the self-discipline to break the habit of repeating instructions. In either instance, patience will be required, as training is still in progress.

1. Sit down and talk to them about the problem. Take the blame, and let them know that God says that children should obey their parents, and that when they wait to do what they are told, it's not obedience. (Obedience is doing what you're told, right away, with a good attitude.)
2. Explain and give examples of right and wrong responses when they are told to do something. Then PRACTICE right responses. This is especially important for younger kids. We would turn it into a game, and clap and praise when they responded right during our practice sessions.
3. Pray with them asking God to help them to obey right away, and to help you, the parent, be consistent, as well.

4. Let them know that for the next few days you will remind them when their response is wrong (disobedient), and ask them to try again. Bad habits take time to change, so we can't just expect them to instantly start responding right, if we have allowed them to wait till the 3rd or 4th time.

5 pillars of Biblical Parenting

5. Consider a character chart, where you give stickers each time you catch them responding right. Positive reinforcement is always my first choice for encouraging changes in behavior. Have a reward when a certain number of stickers have been earned. (Get our FREE character charts!)

6. After a few days of reminding, and practicing the correct behavior, let them know that you now EXPECT them to continue this way without reminders. Set them up for success by giving some easy or fun commands early in the day, then praising the obedience. This will make the other kids eager to try, and also serve as a reminder of what is now expected.

7. Determine an appropriate consequence for disobedience, and let the kids know in advance what it is. Then when they "forget" and don't obey the first time, you can calmly call them aside and talk to them about it, and remind them of the consequence they will receive because of their disobedience.

8. Be consistent, and don't fall back into the old habit of telling them often, or threatening and raising your voice. When you aren't consistent, they learn to take chances. It's not fair to make them wonder each day if you are going to be strict, or if one or two of them might get away with pushing the limits. Consistency will lead to frustration free discipline.

9. Be sure and show grace when needed. If a child is doing very well, but is having a bad day and messes up, determine whether it's out of rebellion, or more of an immaturity issue that needs to be worked on.

10. If you are going through an extra busy time, or for some reason DO find that you have fallen back into the habit of giving orders more than once, or yelling to get the kids to listen, call another family meeting. Admit that you haven't been training them to obey like you should, apologize for your inconsistency, and once again have a few days of training and practice.