

"Stop Crying!" and Other Commands that Don't Work

by Kathy Slattengren

Moments of frustration can lead parents to issuing commands that really don't work. Any time we are ordering children to change their behavior we're not likely to succeed. Instead of producing the desired behavioral change, commands often lead to some type of resistance.

For example, when feeling stressed to leave on time, we may yell to our children "Hurry up! It's time to get going!" It can feel good to give commands because it seems like we have more control over a situation when we're shouting commands. However, children often resist being told what to do (interestingly, most adults also do not like being told what to do!).



Since children ultimately control their own behavior, commands like these are usually ineffective:

- "Stop crying!"
- "No more whining."
- "Don't give me that look."
- "Go to sleep right now!"

It is easy to fall into the parenting trap of using commands to try and control children's behavior. However, it is far more effective to tell children what we are going to do instead of what they have to do. Parents might declare "The car is leaving in five minutes." instead of saying "Hurry up!"

Recently I saw a dad trying to change his 18-month-old daughter's diaper while she was crying and struggling to get away. When doing an unappealing task like changing a diaper, it's difficult to have a child who is resisting and making an unpleasant task even more unpleasant.

This dad responded by telling his daughter "Stop crying!" Not only did she not stop crying, her crying intensified. It was easy to relate to his frustration as well as his child's reaction.

In this case, the dad probably would have been more successful by empathizing with his daughter by saying something like "I can see you're really upset. I'm going to change your diaper and then we will leave." By acknowledging her feelings and telling her what he was going to do, he could avoid telling her what she had to do.

Sometimes in the heat of the moment, we don't do our best parenting. It's helpful to reflect on how we wish we would have handled the situation. We are likely to have a second chance in the near future to handle a similar situation in a better way!

Kathy Slattengren is a noted parenting speaker, trainer and founder of Priceless Parenting. [Priceless Parenting](#) provides an [online parenting class](#) which teaches effective discipline techniques for positively dealing with misbehavior.

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