



Behavior Management Series–Issue #16

Why Children Never Seem To Listen To The Teacher

Academic Possibilities: When academics are boring or too difficult for a child, he will have a tendency to start thinking about other things. He may tune out, daydream or lose any sense of focus because of the boredom or difficulty involved with academic work. In the process, these types of children only appear to listen at certain times in class.

Environmental Possibilities: Some children may not listen because they are very preoccupied with the problems that are happening at home. Also, another possible reason is that they never listen to anything their parents say, and carry that attitude over into school.

Intellectual Possibilities: Children with limited intellectual abilities may have problems focusing and concentrating. Either of these can give off the appearance that listening is not taking place on the part of the child.

Language Possibilities: If children do not understand the language, then why should they bother listening? Many children with language comprehension problems will not listen to what is going on in the classroom not because they are rebellious but rather because they do not understand what is being said or how to respond to the situation at hand.

Medical Possibilities: Children who have auditory problems will most likely have difficulties listening. They may be hard of hearing and actually require classification in special education.

Perceptual Possibilities: Children who have a perceptual problem with auditory discrimination may not hear things the way others do. After a while, when they keep doing things wrong or they give up and stop listening all together to what is being said around them.

Psychological Possibilities: Children who have high levels of depression, anxiety or low self-esteem may have serious problems listening to what is going on around them. They are so consumed with their own psychological problems that trying to listen to what is happening is almost impossible. All of their mental energy is being used to try and survive everyday life. Therefore, they have great difficulties listening because they have no mental ability to do so.

Social Possibilities: Some children do not listen to what the teacher is saying because they are listening to what others are saying. These children are so concerned with what is happening socially, that they do not listen to the teacher for academic purposes. They are so wrapped up in their social lives, that listening to important school assignments and lectures is not a top priority.

What To Do When This Happens

- After contacting the parents and informing them of your concerns, request that the child's hearing be checked to make sure this is not the primary cause of the lack of understanding.
- Contact the school psychologist to determine if there are any extenuating circumstances that might be creating tension. Tension reduces the available space for memory and concentration which could have a direct effect upon listening to what is going on.
- Contact the speech/language therapist and ask him to screen the child. It is possible that even though the hearing is fine, he may have any of a number of auditory processing problems.
- Determine whether or not the child's inability to listen is based on opposition and defiance rather than any type of language or medical problem. If you believe it is more of a psychological problem, establish certain positive reinforcement or consequences for following or not following directions. If the child then follows through, compliment and reward him with verbal praise. If he does not, enforce an appropriate and fair consequence.
- Move the child to the front of the classroom so that no extraneous stimuli bother him. By doing so, you have a greater chance that he will pay attention to you rather than focusing on other people, places or things.
- Stand in front of the student whenever you have something of importance to say. Be sure to maintain a clear visual path from the child to you so that the child can both see and hear what you are saying.
- If the problem persists to the point where it is affecting the child's everyday functioning, his situation should be brought up to the Child Study Team in the school so that his situation be appropriately evaluated.

Why Children Lie

Academic Factors: Lying is often a cover-up for academic inadequacies. Children who fear being seen as academically inadequate by either their teacher or more importantly peers, will make all sorts of excuses and lie to protect their fragile state of inadequacy.

Environmental Factors: Lying may be the result of severe avoidance of parental reactions sometimes brought about by excessive expectations which the child feels he cannot meet. Further, abuse, comparisons or competition with siblings may also contribute to lying.

Intellectual Factors: Same motive as Academic

Language Factors: Same motive as Academic

Medical Factors: NA

Perceptual Factors: Same motive as Academic

Psychological Factors: Lying can either be the result of high levels of anxiety or a pathological (ingrained) part of a child's personality. The latter is more serious and may require professional intervention. This level occurs when the child cannot differentiate between lying and reality, and truly believes in what he is saying even though reality presents a very different picture. Other

children may lie impulsively to avoid the reaction of the moment. In these cases, the children do not consider consequences but may feel guilt afterwards.

Social Factors: Children may often lie to gain status with a social group. Feeling inadequate or insignificant and wanting to be accepted may cause them to greatly exaggerate or lie about certain things in their life (i.e. parent's jobs, level of economic status, trips, experiences, possessions).

What To Do When This Happens

- Before taking any action, obtain all the information about the situation at hand. You do not want to jump to any conclusions or make false accusations without being at least reasonably sure that what has occurred constitutes lying.
- If you believe that the child has lied, do not address the situation in front of any other child or adult. This will avoid embarrassing the child. If you do it in front of anyone, you increase the chances of the child continuing to lie because he will not want to be “publicly humiliated”.
- If you are reasonably sure that lying has taken place, do not use entrapment. This means that you do not try to trick the student into admitting what he has said.
- Be very diplomatic and direct in confronting the child with what you know to be the facts. Explain the situation in a clear, convincing, and straight forward approach without any form of yelling or screaming. Be firm in what you say and show the student that you are serious.
- After explaining your point of view, ask the child if he now wants to rethink what was said. Don't put him on the spot at that moment if he says nothing in response. Tell him that “We will talk about this again sometime today when you are ready but we will definitely talk about it today.”
- If the child admits to lying, say that you appreciate the honesty, and then tell him what the consequences of the behavior will be. This should be something already determined by you, and “the punishment should fit the crime.”
- Finally, if the child does not admit to lying, you must then act as if it were true, based on the overwhelming evidence, and enforce the consequences. Tell the child in this case that the evidence indicates that lying did take place and that class rules have been violated.

Why Children Are Not Motivated In School

Academic Possibilities: Many children have great difficulty being motivated to do academic work when the assignments are boring for them. For whatever reason, academics do not thrill the child and thereby leave him unmotivated to strive to be an excellent student.

Environmental Possibilities: Some children will not be motivated in school because there are many problems at home. There may be a nasty divorce battle between the parents, possible neglect or abuse or simply just an disorganized and out of control household. These conflicts are much more powerful than learning spelling or social studies and it makes them lose interest in school in general.

Intellectual Possibilities: For some children, their limited intelligence can hinder their motivational level in school. In the same light, those children with very high intelligence (e.g.; gifted children) may also have great difficulty being motivated in school because they become

rapidly bored in a classroom designed for average children. In both cases, the lack of motivation in school inevitably leads to disinterest in school.

Language Possibilities: When students have difficulty understanding a language, they can have a hard time with their class work. Because it can take them much longer to read a passage or understand a lecture, they can become rapidly frustrated and give up. This then leads them to become increasingly unmotivated in the topics being taught.

Medical Possibilities: Some children may not be motivated in school because they have serious medical problems which they are facing. For example, a child with kidney troubles or an impending surgery may lack motivation for school not because it is boring but rather because his entire focus is on the medical seriousness of the condition.

Perceptual Possibilities: When children see the world differently from others, there can be a great frustration in trying to complete class work. Attempting to handle academic work but consistently not being able to succeed can become a serious problem for them. After a while, the frustrations can become overwhelming, thereby leading to becoming totally unmotivated due to the repeated failure experiences.

Psychological Possibilities: Some children will have no motivation in school because of depression and anxiety. When things are not going well for children, they will not have the energy to focus on what may be important. If they are worried or scared about various things in their lives, they will lose motivation as a whole because they do not have the mental strength to become interested in anything.

Social Possibilities: Some children are not motivated to do school work because they are completely wrapped up in their social lives. They cannot do math or social studies not because of its difficulties but rather because they have so many other social concerns to care about in their lives. All of these social issues begin to take preference over academic work, leading to a complete lack of motivation about academics.

What To Do When This Happens

- Remember that a child who is not motivated in classroom activities is behaving in this manner for some reason. Since motivation is a direct function of available energy, then a lack of motivation can only mean some energy drain on the part of the child. Where this may be coming from needs to be explored. Therefore, attempting to force him into various situations may only create tremendous conflict, anxiety, and tension.
- Meet with the school psychologist to determine whether there are any extenuating circumstances for the lack of motivation (i.e. home issues, trauma, previous academic failure).
- Understand that in order for a child to become motivated, he must feel confident in the classroom. Confidence is a process that is built over a period of time. The child who does not participate needs a foundation of successful experiences as well as the appropriate social tools in order to be an active participant in the classroom.
- Meet with child on a one to one basis in a comfortable setting. Explain to the child that you are aware of the difficulty he has in both academic and/or social situations and that you want to help.

- Speak with the school psychologist about having the child join a small group for social skills. These types of controlled groups can help the child learn to interact and build skills in a safe and monitored environment to overcome hesitancy.

Why Children Frequently Squint

Academic Possibilities: Academic stress may be behind the tension manifested in squinting especially if the child's problems have been historical.

Environmental Possibilities: Children suffering from environmental stress may vent their tension through bodily movements such as squinting. Such tension brought on by abusive or dysfunctional environments may manifest itself in this type of reaction.

Intellectual Possibilities: Not Applicable

Language Possibilities: Not Applicable

Medical Possibilities: Squinting may be caused by any number of eye problems that should be investigated immediately. Children with undetected eye problems often squint to compensate for their poor vision.

Perceptual Possibilities: Same pattern as Academic.

Psychological Possibilities: Squinting in children may have a psychological origin in such conditions as tic disorders or Tourette Syndrome or be a release for nervous tension.

Social Possibilities: Not Applicable

What To Do When This Happens

- Since squinting may have medical or psychological roots, this is an issue where we strongly recommend that you immediately seek out consultation with the school psychologist, school nurse and the principal for purposes of the child's safety, your liability, the school's liability, and the parent's rights.

Why Children Are Stubborn

Academic Possibilities: Children who fear academic ridicule, failure or peer reaction may be stubborn when it comes to academic assignments. What occurs is an internal panic that arises from a perceived or real sense of failure. This internal panic may be exhibited through stubbornness.

Environmental Possibilities: Children who come from critical homes, homes with exaggerated expectations, loose parenting styles that offer minimal boundaries and guidance or abusive homes may use stubbornness as a means of coping and avoiding reaction. Other children who are immature or infantilized (allowed to maintain immature styles and from becoming independent by parents with neurotic needs) may resort to stubbornness as a result of limited skill development which results in frustration.

Intellectual Possibilities: Children with low intellectual ability may be very rigid and concrete in their thinking. As a result, they may make decisions on issues without seeing the whole picture. Once this occurs, they may not have the insight, ability, skills, or intellect to change their position or see other options.

Language Possibilities: Not Applicable

Medical Possibilities: Not Applicable

Perceptual Possibilities: Not Applicable

Psychological Possibilities: High levels of tension drain away a child's available energy. As a result, rigidity and stubbornness can occur since limited energy limits the child's patience, judgment, and appropriateness of responses. When this occurs, children will "lock in" since they are really not sure what to do, do not feel comfortable with making a choice or decision and so on. Therefore, doing or saying nothing seems safer. When this occurs, these children lack the ability to "back out" diplomatically or appropriately. Instead, they hold their ground in spite of the facts that may work against them.

Social Possibilities: Some children may resort to stubbornness when they do not get their way socially. These children want to be the "king" and when they are not chosen, they resort to stubbornness in a fit of anger.

What To Do When This Happens

- Sit with the child alone with no other students around. Keeping in mind that stubborn behavior is not a sign of strength, but a sign of a fragile ego, do not hesitate establishing yourself as the benevolent authority.
- While you understand that he may have issues that cause him to act this way, and you will help him try to understand them, you will not tolerate this behavior.
- Discuss the seriousness of the situation, and the consequences if it continues.
- Now, try to help the child understand the reasons why he is being stubborn. Try to get him to verbalize what he is feeling or why he does what he does. If he is unable to verbalize or label his feelings you may want to provide him with some labels for what he may be feeling.
- Suggest to this student alternate means of resolving future conflicts. Many students who become stubborn know no other alternative in handling difficult and stressful situations. They need to be educated on other means of response.
- If this is a consistent pattern of behavior on the part of any student, talk to the school psychologist about setting up a meeting with the parent(s). This will provide the parents with what has been happening in the classroom, provide you with getting feedback on issues at home that may be contributing to the situation, and offer parents specific parenting skills which may help all involved.
- Develop a behavioral contract explaining what is expected of this student in the classroom with rewards and punishments for either following or not following through. This contract is something a school psychologist should be well trained in developing.