

# Lighthearted, Subversive, and Really Cool Ways to Improve Your Children's Behavior at Home and Have Fun, IV



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As readers of my previous lighthearted interventions know, I believe that parents can manage children's behavior much of the time without bringing out the big guns. This new batch of suggestions reflects my abiding belief in the power of humor and of activities that fix your message in memory better than spoken words ever could.

## Asked and Answered

When you make an unpopular decision, does your youngster ask why repeatedly, dispute your explanations, and use other delaying tactics until you scream "Because I said so! "? If this description fits, it may be time for a change in procedure. Tell your child that from now on, you will follow the rules used by lawyers in court.

Each time you issue a directive, your child will be entitled to ask why--just once. You will offer the explanation, and thereafter, if your child repeats the question, you will simply say, "Asked and answered." This phrase is opposing counsel's objection when the examining attorney utters a question to which the witness has already responded.

You can tell your child that you expect compliance once the explanation has been given. Where particularly important rulings are concerned, you may want to allow for one (1) appeal (one chance for your child to restate her case showing why you should decide in her favor). You can explain this policy, and you can decide when circumstances warrant the exercise of this right to appeal.

## Endless Loop

This intervention is designed for parents and other adults who find themselves saying the same thing over and over again without seeing results and without feeling heard. You will need a cassette tape and a tape recorder or dictating machine. A stereo system with good sound quality is ideal but not essential for playback.

On the tape you will record the message you find yourself repeating ad nauseam. Take "It's time to do your homework" as an example. Say it into the microphone again and again. Vary your inflection; syncopate the beat. Add a tune if you feel so inclined. Ham it up: "Do, do, do, do, do-dee-da-do your home, home, home aha work." (And so forth.) Once you have made your tape, you will deliver the message live and in person just once. If it isn't heard the first time, put the tape in the machine, hit "play," and adjust the volume.

## King for a Day, Queen for a Day

This intervention builds on the doghouse and negotiating skills discussed elsewhere in my posts. The idea is that when someone in the family breaks a household rule, you as the parent act as facilitator to ensure that everyone is heard, an apology is made, and the offender makes amends. So, for example, if the problem is that one child has invaded a sibling's territory and has "borrowed" a prized possession without first asking permission, the offender would need to compensate the victim for the injury.

There are many forms of compensation, but one that I like involves having the offender do work for the victim. The offender might have to make beds, wash dishes, clean the bathroom, or carry out the garbage for a few hours or a day if these are chores that the victim usually performs.

Alternatively, the victim could enjoy special privileges for a few hours or a day—decide what video or television shows the family will watch one evening, what foods will be served for dinner, what games will be played, or where the family will take a weekend outing. A homemade crown and scepter may help reinforce the point.

## Oofing the Grumps

When your child pouts, humor can help dispel the tension and lighten things up. "You look grumpy right now," you might say. "Let's see if we can do something about that." Walk up to your child and stand close enough, face to face, for a hug. Put your arms around his waist, then raise them a few inches, and join your hands together. Squeeze him in short bursts as if you were pressing air out of his stomach. He will grunt or say "Oof!"

After you have done this a few times, you and he both should be laughing at the silliness of it. On other occasions when you see him sulking about something minor, try saying, "You look grumpy. Would you like me to oof you?" Chances are, the very idea will bring a smile to both your faces.

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