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QUICK CONFLICT RESOLUTION IS CRITICAL

When a parent makes a demand of a child or turns down a request, we have a mini-conflict situation. How parents and kids resolve these situations hour after hour and day after day has a huge impact on family life, marriages, mental health and on the ultimate maturity of children as adults.



It is absolutely essential, therefore, that parents learn to efficiently resolve the conflicts that result from saying “No” to a child’s request or from asking a child to do something.

A basic parent/child conflict resolution rule is this: The longer a conflict goes unresolved and the more talking done, the poorer the outcome will be.

Learning to resolve conflicts efficiently means quickly as well as reasonably. In mini-conflict situations kids have four options: cooperation, negotiation, testing and noncompliance. For everyone involved, cooperation or successful negotiations are the best outcomes. Mini-conflicts, though, can quickly become maxi-conflicts. The longer a conflict goes unresolved, the more those involved talk and the angrier they get. When this happens, the chances of cooperation are minimal and the chances of testing and noncompliance are high. Repeat this sequence hundreds of times over the years and you produce miserable families and kids who grow up to be aggravating, immature adults.

NEXT MONTH: How to Resolve Conflict Quickly & Reasonably

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USING 1-2-3 MAGIC WITH SPECIAL NEEDS KIDS

Many parents, educators and mental health professionals find the **1-2-3 Magic** program can be especially useful for parents of special needs children. As long as the children who are being disciplined and motivated have a mental age of two years, **1-2-3 Magic** can provide useful direction for parents of children with learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, hearing impairment, visual impairment and autistic disorders.



The usefulness of the **1-2-3** method has to do with some of the characteristics that children with behavioral and emotional difficulties often share. In particular, these children often suffer from (1) confusion from complex verbal signals and (2) emotional overarousal. How does the **1-2-3** help with these problems?

CONFUSION FROM COMPLEX VERBAL SIGNALS

Parents of behaviorally difficult kids often make the mistake of assuming that the more information they give their children, the more compliance they will get from the kids. In fact, the opposite is often the case. When Mom wants Tommy to stop teasing his sister, for example, the simple warning, "That's 1," is much clearer and more attention-getting than the verbal recitation of the five main reasons why teasing is bad. Parental lectures and nagging not only confuse children, they also irritate them—thus reducing the chances of cooperation.

EMOTIONAL OVERAROUSAL

Simple signals, such as those involved in counting, also seek to elicit compliance from children by intervening with problem behavior before the kids have a chance to become really angry or infuriated. While it is true that no child will ever welcome being counted, a calmly delivered warning in the form of "That's 1" or "That's 2" offers a child a choice: I can shape up now or suffer a consequence. With **1-2-3 Magic** we hope to enable the child to make this choice before his tendency toward emotional over-arousal kicks in. When a parent is able to accomplish this objective, obviously, cooperation will be more likely.

There is another reason why **1-2-3 Magic** is helpful for parents of kids who easily become verbally confused or overly excited. These moms and dads often share these same characteristics with their children! Mom and dad, in other words, can get mixed up by too much talking and they can also get too upset too quickly. When a challenging child is involved, these parent-child similarities can make the task of reasonable discipline almost impossible. Fortunately, **1-2-3 Magic** clearly tells parents what to say, and by its effectiveness the program also helps parents remain in control—not only of their kids but also of themselves.

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