

Tightening Your Action Point

Hi, we're Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller and in our books and seminars we present several ideas to enhance your parenting. We have identified a number of practical things that make the parent/child relationship more defined, clear, and ultimately stronger. The suggestions create a better working relationship between parent and child and make the whole job of parenting easier and more enjoyable for both you and your kids.

Every parent/child relationship has hidden rules that determine how each person will relate. Let's just look at one of those rules for a moment. How does your child know when you mean business and it's time to obey? We call this concept an *action point*. Clarifying and defining your action point can be very helpful.

You already have an action point and your children know what it is. How do they know when it's really time to stop playing and put away the toys? You give them cues. Maybe you get out of your chair and move toward them, or you start moving toward the kitchen where that special utensil is kept. Maybe you raise your voice, or use their middle name, or you put your hand on their shoulder. Stop for a moment and think about your own family as you were growing up. How did *you* know when your mom or dad meant business?

The important thing about an action point is that children know when they must obey and they know that they don't have to obey until you get there. Each adult has a different action point. Can Dad get the kids in bed faster than Mom? The rules are a little different depending on who's giving the instruction.

Children respond differently in the classroom, on the playground, or in the home.

Having a tight action point has several benefits. You'll be able to get the job done without wasting energy on nagging and prodding children along. Your children will learn that you mean what you say and that they must obey. Parents who tighten their action point become less frustrated and less angry. What this means though, is that you need to change first if you want your children to respond more quickly. Here are some ideas for tightening your action point.

Observe Your Own Parenting

Take time to determine what cues you are using right now to indicate to your children when they should obey.

Invariably, the first thing that many parents find is that they're using anger to motivate their action point. But anger creates distance in relationships and, although it may get children to do what you want, in the end, you both lose. You may think that your children won't respond *unless* you get angry but this is just further confirmation that you have turned your anger into an action point. It's time to make some changes and learn different, more productive signals.

A wise parent has a basket full of consequences. It might include withholding privileges, extra work, missing out, or taking a break, just to name a few. But how the consequence is given and when it is presented is the issue here. If you've been in the habit of calling your son three or four times before you go get him, then you need to tighten your action point. In essence, you've trained him to respond slowly.

If you're in the habit of announcing that it's time to leave long before you're ready to go, then you've taught your children that they don't really have to get ready. Now, you're going to announce that it's time to go when you're actually ready to leave the house.

Explain The New Rules Of The Game

Have a meeting with each of your children. You may meet with them all, depending on their ages, but meet with them individually. Explain that you have been wrong in teaching them to respond slowly when it's really best for them to learn to respond quickly. From now on you're going to tell them once, then comes the action. In this way you will be teaching them the character quality of obedience.

Why do children need to obey? One reason is so they can learn self-discipline and self control. It's good for *them*—not just for you. God promises to bless them if they learn to obey. If children don't learn to submit and obey, they're going to have a hard time in life. But learning obedience isn't easy. We want to be sensitive and gracious with our children; teaching them to obey is the loving thing to do.

Practice and Be Consistent

Expect prompt obedience. Give children many opportunities to obey as they're learning the new action point. Practice in places and at times when you can work through the process.

Don't practice in the grocery store. We're often asked, "How do you handle disobedience in the grocery store?" Folks, that's not the place to

practice—the grocery store is the final exam. Practice at home and at times when you have the energy to be successful and aren't distracted by other things. Just focus on one thing. Teach children to come when they're called, for example. Spend an afternoon practicing. Sometimes when your child comes, give an instruction, but other times, say, "I just wanted to tell you that I love you" or "I have a treat here I wanted to share with you." These practice sessions take some work but pay off greatly in the end.

It's tempting to let things go and not follow through consistently, but that's self-defeating, making parenting all the more difficult later on. Children respond quickly when the guidelines are clear and the issues are defined. When parents don't clarify the rules of the game, children feel like there aren't any limits. They get discouraged and life gets out of control. That's why it's so important to practice with kids to build good patterns both at home and when you're in public.

In the upcoming parenting seminar we're going to teach you several practical tools like action point that will greatly enhance your family. Furthermore, we'll talk about, and demonstrate through examples, a heart-based approach to parenting that will bring about significant results. We'll show you how to develop a plan for change in 30 days with your kids. We hope you'll join us. You can sign up at www.biblicalpharenting.org. Please feel free to invite a friend too.