

# Hecht: If only kids would listen when parents talk

Pam J. Hecht , Special to WNC Parent Published 6:00 a.m. ET Nov. 26, 2018



(Photo: LightFieldStudios, Getty Images/iStockphoto)

A common mechanical defect among otherwise finely constructed children has to do with their ears. It appears that, sometimes, they don't work right.

It can be a rather annoying glitch.

Strangely, it often occurs during certain situations, such as when it's time to clean up, listen to instructions or otherwise stop whatever they are pleasantly doing.

Luckily, I have a few things in my parent/teacher toolkit for necessary repairs.

In some cases, a change in tone can elicit better hearing. For example, when the first friendly request is met by silence, one may have to resort to a somewhat scary, I'm-not-messing-around-here bark. This type of dictate is particularly useful when fast action is needed, like the other day when we had to hightail it into the school building so as not to become an early supper for a family of very large bears.

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It works equally well when a child starts walking away after dropping a backpack, shoes, or approximately a gazillion game pieces onto the floor, where someone — likely me — will most definitely trip on it and sprain an important body part.

Fortunately, I have the good fortune to work with a talented human megaphone whose booming voice can carry clear over to Tennessee. Needless to say, this skill can come in handy when trying to corral a herd of wild beasts, I mean, kids.

But there are also times when just a tiny whisper is all it takes to get their attention, (if the words are, "I have candy").

For a temporary fix, I might suggest to a child whose listening skills are lacking that perhaps he or she has wax in his or her ears, an ear infection or some mild hearing loss due to an excessive use of ear buds. This is typically followed up by threatening a dreaded trip to the doctor for an obligatory ear exam.

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To encourage better listening, it's best to make eye contact and allow a pause for the direction to sink in so it's harder to ignore. Or, I might cheerfully say, "Knock, knock, is anyone home?" to get a child's full attention. But beware — if you get into the habit of giving directions repeatedly until you are heard, it will take time to retrain the little tykes to listen the first time. A natural consequence after the first nonlistening offense may nip that little habit in the bud.

When called out on their lack of listening, typical kid responses are: "I heard you but then I forgot," "I didn't hear you say that" or "You were talking to me?" What those phrases really mean, in kid code, is; "I heard noise coming out of your mouth but decided that what I was doing or saying was more important than taking time out of my busy schedule to pay attention."

At times, I like to stump such disrespectful scamps by saying, "I listen when you talk so shouldn't you listen when I talk?" This typically results in a dull stare. Even the sharpest kid on the block can't come up with a clever comeback to that kind of logic.

Some parents, during a discussion with the teacher about their children's questionable listening skills, will explain, "He/she can't help it, you know, because of the ADD."

Yes, sometimes there is a physical, developmental or emotional reason for kids not listening. Sometimes, it's because they're just being plain impudent. Sometimes, I think they'd hear better if I texted it.

Hear what I'm saying?

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