

## How to Avoid Arguing with Your Kids

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A number of years ago, Nike came up with the slogan “No Fear”. This slogan was displayed on t-shirts and other Nike products. My son had a great shirt that said, “Stronger, Faster, Younger – and I practice while you sleep. No Fear”. I loved that shirt for many reasons, but one of the reasons I loved it was because it taught me a valuable lesson in parenting. My kids were younger, stronger and faster than I was – and probably smarter too. Most parents know that if they try to play one-on-one basketball with their child once he’s reached a certain age, they will lose. They know better than to even try. But these same parents go one-on-one with their kids every day in a cycle of arguing that is often so exhausting that they give up.

Knowing how to argue persuasively is not in and of itself a bad thing. However, some kids use arguing to get out of doing things they don’t want to do and some use it to avoid personal responsibility. You can’t blame kids for arguing, especially when they find that it works. Kids will figure out that if they can wear you down, you’ll often give in.

You don’t want to spend all your time arguing over every little thing. Remember – they are younger, stronger, faster and they can generally outlast you. So how do you avoid the cycle of arguing?

1. Know what unproductive arguing is. I am not talking about honest discussions. It’s important for kids to be able to approach their parents with real issues and requests, to be heard and to have fair discussions. Perhaps a child wants to have a conversation about renegotiating a bedtime or an allowance. I’m not referring to that kind of conversation. I’m referring to the scenario in which you ask your child to do something or explain that she can’t do something and she counters with all the reasons she shouldn’t have to. Often the opening phrase will be something like “That’s not fair...” or “My friend Sarah doesn’t have to do that...” or “Everybody else gets to...” or “You always...” and “You never...” You can certainly set up a time for a fair and reasonable exchange (and if this is a repeated issue you should). In that moment, arguing will probably be unproductive.
2. Don’t engage in an argument. This is where it often goes bad. Your child starts to argue and then you begin to explain all the reasons why the rule or request is reasonable. Pretty soon you are so angry and confused that

your head is spinning. Here is an example: a mom asks her son to take out the trash. He says it's unfair because his two-year old brother never has to do it. If the mother starts explaining that the two-year old is too little to take out the trash, her son has gotten the upper hand. He may be able to extend the argument until she just does it herself because it's easier. And then he's learned a valuable lesson – that he can argue his way out of doing a chore.

3. Recognize if your child has a point; then decide whether it's an argument you wish to avoid engaging in. In the case above, the child knows perfectly well his brother is too young to have the same kinds of chores. He just doesn't want to do it.

4. Use the “broken record” approach. When your child starts to argue, calmly state, “This is not the time for a discussion. This is the time to take out the trash.” Your child will, of course, try to argue. You then need to resist the urge to argue back and simply restate your request. “Please take out the trash.” Don't engage. Repeat your request firmly and calmly. Often a child will be so surprised that you aren't arguing that he will do what you asked because he realizes you aren't going to get sidetracked.

5. Be prepared to back up your request. If you ask several times and your child continues to argue, simply state, “I will ask you one more time to take out the trash. If you **choose to ignore my request** (emphasis on his choice), you will have to go to your room and stay there until **you decide** to take out the trash. It's **your choice**.” Parents should never forget that their job in life is to raise kids who will become responsible adults and to communicate that expectation to their children.

6. Remember that the time to try any new parenting technique is when you have the time and energy to do it right. Don't make a statement you aren't willing to back up. Remember, it is much better to have a few issues you can handle effectively than to make many changes without follow-through.

7. Make sure you say what you mean and mean what you say. Don't take a position on something unless you intend to follow through.

If you would like to arrange a consultation or would like to find out about a parenting workshop, please contact me at [Miriam@miriamkoenig.com](mailto:Miriam@miriamkoenig.com) or at 818-783-4032.