



**Step-by-Step
Guide**

Managing Persistent Conflict with Kids

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Step-by-Step Guide to Managing Persistent Conflict with Your Kids

How do you handle persistently unacceptable behaviour? What do you do if you feel you have tried everything, and you still can't get your child to cooperate? A situation such as this may require a fresh approach, one where you *work together* with your child to find the solution.

When your child is consistently challenging, you may feel like engaging with them is the last thing you want to do. Your instincts might be telling you that you should come down harder and stricter to *make* them behave. But in my experience, this approach rarely works. Instead, it can result in your kids losing respect for you and a disconnection developing within your family.

1: Find out why

If your child is perpetually defiant, it's essential to work out why. As a first step, talk the issue through with them to work out how they feel about it, and why they believe they are behaving the way they are. Together, try to work out what is driving them to misbehave and what they need from the situation in order for their behaviour to change.

Perhaps they feel insecure, worried that a sibling is the favourite or afraid that they can't meet your expectations. Are they lonely, scared or having problems with friends or at school? Are they hurting about a family breakup or bereavement? Perhaps they have low self-esteem or have had their confidence knocked in some way. Maybe they struggle with authority and feel angry at the prospect of being told what to do.

There are so many reasons that can cause a child to misbehave. But by taking the time to understand what they are feeling, and the emotions and thought processes that are driving their behaviours, you are far more likely to find a resolution.

During this step, it's essential to allow them to speak freely, to get everything off their chest. Resist the temptation to interrupt or argue with what they are saying. Instead, listen, acknowledge that this is their perspective and make sure they feel heard and understood.

2: Your turn to speak

Once you have spent time understanding the situation from your child's point of view, explain that they now need to hear you out too. Before you begin, ask them to listen without interrupting, in the same way that you listened to them.

Explain how the situation makes you feel and what your needs are. Try to use 'I-phrases' rather than 'You-messages'. For example, you could say, "I need some help keeping the house clean because it's too much for *me* to do on my own". This is a far more productive approach than attacking your child with, "You're so lazy...*you* never help out... *you're* so selfish!"

You-messages are highly confrontational and judgemental. If you go on the attack and merely use this opportunity to rant at your child about everything they are doing wrong, you are unlikely to make much progress. Your child will simply stop listening, their barriers will stay up, and little will change. Instead, your aim is to help your child recognise that you are a person too, with feelings and needs just the same as them. Help them to empathise and to try to understand the situation from your perspective. You will only achieve this by staying calm and patient.

3: Brainstorm solutions together

Now it's time to work together to write down all the possible solutions you can both think of. Before you start, agree not to pass judgement or comment on any ideas that either of you might suggest. Just brainstorm and get them all down on paper.

4: Finalise your list and negotiate

Finally, work through your list together, crossing out any ideas that either of you don't like. This can be challenging as you are likely to have different opinions on how the situation should be dealt with. But it's crucial to find some middle ground here: you will probably both need to compromise.

Avoid the temptation to exert your ultimate control as the parent here – the key is to work with your child to find a solution you can both work with. If you resort to dictating how things will be, you may well end up back at square one. If instead, your child feels listened to and believes you value their opinion, they are far more likely to work with you to solve the problem.

5: Put your plan into action

Once you have decided on a solution that you are both happy with, put it into action. It's vital to agree that you will both do your best to make it work and stick to your plan.

Undertake that if either of you makes a mistake and veers off course, you won't shout at each other. Instead, agree that a gentle reminder can be given by the other to get things back on track.

6: Review

Decide on a time to get together to review your progress – perhaps in a week. Be sure not to overlook this step. If things have improved, make a point of acknowledging that and celebrate your achievement. This will help you both realise that you can work together to overcome problems and that you can trust this process should you need it again in the future.

If it hasn't worked, sit down again to work out why and adjust your strategy as necessary. If you stick with it, continue to strive to understand each other's point of view while always showing love, patience and compassion, you will eventually succeed.

A final thought..

Negotiating in this way can be very effective in breaking the deadlock in family conflicts, but it's not easy, particularly for an intuitively strict parent. We have to let go of the idea that as parents, we are always right, know all the answers and that the child's behaviour is merely a problem that we need to fix. We have to stop worrying about losing power over our child by giving up control.

It takes a significant shift in mindset to believe that together, you can reach a mutually acceptable resolution. But if you take the time to share your feelings with our child and acknowledge theirs, this can be achieved. In adopting this approach, you will teach your kids that they neither have to dominate or be dominated by you. They will also learn valuable skills in dealing with conflict both at home and in the wider world.

I have found this approach to be really helpful when dealing with conflict within my own family. I hope you will too.

If you would like further help on how to keep your cool and raise happy, respectful kids, please take a look at my book, *The Peaceful Parent*. It's packed with practical advice and proven techniques to help you stay calm when your kids press your buttons, and create the happy, connected family you always hoped for.

Nadine x