



How to Ignore Minor Childhood Misbehaviors

1. First, be sure you and your partner agree as to what behaviors are “ignorable.” This procedure will not work if only one of you ignores the behavior but the other does not. Remember, “ignorable” behaviors are like “button pushing”: the child is doing them because they didn’t get their way. Non-ignorable behaviors would be things like noncompliance or aggression. These behaviors should be listed below.

Ignorable Behaviors
(when child wants something)

Non-ignorable Behaviors
(when parent(s) wants something)

2. When the behavior occurs, tell the child in a very matter-of-fact voice “I’m not going to talk to you when you…” and label what the child is doing. You may tell the child this only once. Avoid lecturing or you may reinforce your child’s behavior.
3. Ignoring means: (1) avoiding eye-contact, (2) have a completely neutral expression on your face (think of a “poker face”), (3) not talking or communicating with the child in any way (e.g., deep sighing, groaning); and (4) engaging yourself in another task (e.g., pretending to read a magazine).
4. If the child continues the behavior for a prolonged period of time or if you feel like you are about to “lose it”, tell the child (again very matter-of-fact) “I’ll come back when you not…”, and label the behavior. At this point you should leave the room.
5. If the child follows you into another room, tell the child (again matter-of-fact voice) “If you keep following me, then you will (get timeout, loose a privilege, have to do a chore).” Walk away again and if the child follows be sure to use the consequence immediately. While the consequence is being used, there should be no talking to the child.
6. Wait a few minutes. As soon as the behavior stops go back to your child and be sure to find something to praise. Be genuine in your praise. This last step is crucial. Ignoring rarely works unless: (1) both parents do it, and (2) praise and attention is given to the child for discontinuing the behavior.

Note: It may be necessary to educate extended family members about these procedures. This way these extended family members know what you are doing and do not undermine your efforts. It may also be necessary to “shepherd” siblings away from the child. This way the child that is behaving well gets the attention (instead of the other way around). With older kids, you may want to say “*Can you please say that differently so I can stay?*” Leave if the child does not change his or her demeanor or behavior. (You’ll know within about 10 seconds.) With younger kids, a good prompt may be, “I can’t talk to you unless you use good voice, good face, and good words.”