

NAGGING DOESN'T REALLY WORK — UNLESS ITS PURPOSE IS TO ANNOY SOMEONE. YET, IT'S ALL TOO EASY TO FIND YOURSELF DOING IT. HOW TO GET YOUR FAMILY TO COOPERATE WITHOUT A SINGLE NAG

# No Nagging Necessary

RC STEIF



"Mommy, can I get that? Pleeeeease can I get that? Can I? Can I?"

That won't work on you, you *know*. Yet, nagging often seems like the only solution when you're having one of those days — starting with the kid with his head under his pillow, alarm clock blaring, all the way to the dirty plates left on the dinner table, yet again.

*Well, you think, they didn't*

*do it the first time I asked; of course I need to repeat myself, probably a little louder too.* But that rarely accomplishes the goal — and even if it does, what's the cost?

The good news is, you don't have to live this way. Here are practical approaches to eight common nagging "black holes" so you can eradicate that disturbing habit for good.

**Stop slurping! Sit up straight! Why are you chewing in my ears?**



**Help kids kick unpleasant habits with colors, using the Red and Green Learning System. Follow these six steps:**

1. Label behaviors as red (negative) or green (positive), and call them by the color. Thus, "slurping" is red; "drinking quietly" is green.
2. Take pictures of the child posing in both negative *and* positive stances (e.g., a picture of a wide mouth with hand-drawn lines to symbolize loud chewing and a picture of a closed mouth to symbolize no sound effects).
3. Model the red and green behaviors, so your child knows what you mean.
4. Have the child practice the red and green behaviors, so he can compare the two and pick up on differences. Also, make sure he knows how to do the green behavior properly.
5. Reinforce green behaviors. For instance, reward with immediate praise and a tangible treat. (Think small: a sticker, nickel, etc.)
6. Turn to corrections or consequences, as a last resort (e.g., take the drink away from a slurping child for one minute). Discuss consequences with your child in advance, so he knows to aim for the reward, and what to expect should he continue the red behavior.

*Devora Samet, MS, a social skills specialist and founder of Social Learning Institute, works in schools and homes, and trains therapists, shadows, and parents to implement effective social and behavioral programs. She's developed games, tools, and programs to help children master a variety of social skills.*

**How many times did I ask you to get off the phone? I need it *right now!***

Ask your child how she'd like you to deal with the phone conflict. A designated time to "own" the phone or a simple five-minute advance warning system may be enough.

If she's still on the phone after you've followed through with the agreed-upon strategy, simply walk over to your child, meet her eye, and hold out your hand, or tap your watch. She'll know what you want; there's no need to repeat the mantra.

## TIP

A phone really is a lifeline for teenagers; you don't want your child feeling that she's denied adequate access. If the phone battle is raging nightly, consider getting another line or a kosher cell. Kosher outlets are key to combat the many troublesome outlets available today. Since schmoozing or doing homework on the phone is a wholesome activity, it's worthwhile to put money and effort into making the phone easily accessible.

*Simi Yellen has been positively transforming homes through her teleconference parenting classes and private consultations for well over a decade. Her series entitled Raise the Bar Parenting empowers parents to raise respectful, responsible, and cooperative children.*

The bus is coming in 20 minutes! Hurry! I don't want you skipping breakfast again!



what worked for me

### Ditch the Dawdling

Though they'd wake early, Miri's two elementary-aged children would dawdle through their morning routine, often having to leave the house before finishing breakfast.

"It drove me nuts," Miri says.

"They had enough time, but simply weren't eating! I was nagging and nudging on a daily basis, feeling terrible all the while about starting their day that way. Since I have a reward system for cleanup, and I don't want to overdo the rewards, I thought of a 'cause and effect' type of motivator. Whoever's breakfast plate is clean on time can:

1. choose and prepare his/her own snack (as opposed to me deciding what the day's snack will be), and
2. play with a special toy or engage in a special activity reserved for this time."

Want kids to eat? Play into their tastes. Come up with three or four easy, healthy breakfasts they like. Your goal is to include some protein, whole-grain carbs, and a little healthy fat – like oatmeal and milk; a low-sugar yogurt with granola; apple with peanut butter; a mix of nuts and dried fruit; or eggs and whole wheat toast.

Keep the ingredients on hand and let the kids decide what to have each morning. Oh, and it's okay to let them finish up on the bus once in a while, too.

Don't be afraid to leave breakfast prep up to them; if they make it, maybe they'll actually eat it. Even young children can do simple prep like put a slice of bread in a toaster. Frame it as a privilege of being older, not as a chore.

Shira Isenberg, RD, MPH, is a registered dietitian and Family First health writer.

### TIP

According to the Division of Responsibility in Feeding (a rule created by children's feeding expert, dietitian Elyn Satter), it's the parents' job to provide wholesome foods and it's the kids' job to decide how much (or even if) they'll eat. Do your part to provide healthy food, make the environment conducive to eating (such as making sure they get up early enough to have enough time), and try to relax a little – hungry kids typically do eat.



Put that back! We don't need everything we see in the supermarket; we have enough junk at home.



### TIP

The supermarket offers an excellent opportunity to help children learn essential life skills like prioritizing and taking responsibility for choices they make. Additionally, teaching children about financial responsibility from a young age will spill over to other areas of maturity and *middos* development.

Give your child a set amount of money (his own "budget") to complete a shopping task: picking out Shabbos nosh, for example, or choosing what goes in the birthday goodie bags.

Instead of grabbing things off the shelf and whining – your nagging trigger – your child will be busy prioritizing, calculating, and starting to differentiate between needs and wants. You'll have what you need in your

shopping cart, he'll feel good about himself, and your relationship will have the boost of positive time together.

Allow younger kids who can't understand real money to "spend" points they've earned from a star chart to "buy" treats or extras. Once children feel they've earned something, they take the task of using it very seriously, and it can take them forever to decide how to part with those points.

By giving your child limited autonomy, she won't be desperate to have everything she sees. You'll be able to focus on your own list, you'll have reduced friction and confrontation, and your child will have learned a priceless life lesson.

Batya Weinberg teaches in several seminars in Jerusalem and lectures widely. She also heads the Mesila organization's international English-speaking educational division. Batya Weinberg has most recently coauthored a financial literacy curriculum for fourth, fifth, and sixth graders titled "MesilaMemos," available to schools through Mesila.

I told you to clean up your room. It's still a disaster!

Choose five tasks that, to you, mark a room as neat. Write them up on a large poster and add pictures or other decorations to make it appealing. If your children can't read yet, draw or cut and paste pictures.

Next, walk kids through the chart, showing them how to complete each task. Where do shoes belong? What kind of hanger is for shirts? How is a bed made? Spend a few days practicing with the goal of incorporating this cleanup session into your daily routine. Offer incentives as needed.

When it's time to clean the room, simply say: "Clean up time; check the list." The connotation here is much more positive, and no nagging is necessary.

Yael Wiesner is a home management consultant. She gives teleconference classes on home organization and time management skills.



## No Nagging Necessary

what worked  
for me

### Staying Together

At *simchahs*, Rachel – a mother of 11 – keeps her children close until after they've wished the *baalei simchah* "Mazel tov."

"Most children and teens are shy when it comes to saying 'Mazel tov' or simply feel awkward with the formality," she says. "I like doing it together with them so that the shyness is mitigated – they don't feel as if they're going it alone. My role modeling also gives them direction on how to proceed. And I can act as a 'buffer' between them and the *baalei simchah*."

"*Baalei simchah* are often distracted or overwhelmed by well-wishers and the event's proceedings, and can easily overlook children, thus discouraging the child from future attempts. When we do it together, that doesn't happen."

### TIP

Shyness is technically a kosher term for anxiety. If you're dealing with a shy (read: anxious) child, be very careful not to use the word shy; that's labeling the child in a way that gives her the license to remain shy and anxious.

Did you tell Aunt Henny "Mazel tov" yet? Don't be shy! Go over there now.

Little Shuly may be wary to approach Aunt Henny because she doesn't know what to say. Give her the language to use by role-playing. Pretend to be Shuly while she plays Aunt Henny, and introduce her to the proper words and body language by acting them out. Then, switch – you be Aunt Henny, and have Shuly wish you "Mazel tov." Practice and praise repeatedly and often; once is usually not enough.

If Shuly is reluctant because she has something against Aunt Henny (say she's shamed Shuly in the past), acknowledge the hurt: "I know that last time you went over to Aunt Henny, she told you that she doesn't like your outfit, and that hurt your feelings." Then, clarify that she doesn't have to stick around to be insulted. This is a good opportunity to teach about boundaries.

—Devora Samet.

Hang up your coat. I said, HANG-UP-YOUR-COAT. And not on the chair!

Children need to be able to hang up their coats easily. Hooks at a child's height are ideal. If that isn't possible, a coat closet should be easily accessible, with hangers within the child's reach, and enough room to hang coats. Overstuffed closets, where coats end up on the floor, or a mud room at the other end of the house, aren't very conducive to a neat home.

Once your home is set up for success, Mommy can use actions instead of words. Simply hand the child his coat, or gently lead him to the closet.

—Simi Yellen

### TIP

Try to be on hand as soon as your child gets home to direct him to the coat closet. Otherwise, he'll get busy with other activities, and it's harder to go back. If you miss it, stick the "hang up" chore into a transition moment – when your child is done with his snack, for example, hand him the coat before he goes off to play.

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what worked for me

**Kids Taking Initiative**

Devorah, a mother of six girls and three boys, has a unique approach to getting her children to help around the house. "Aside from one weekly Shabbos job, my children had no household

responsibilities (though I did expect them to make their own beds and clear their own dinner table settings). As they matured, each one stepped up to the plate, taking responsibilities upon themselves without any intervention on my part."

Does anyone realize that I'm the only one in this house who ever does anything around here? Can't anyone pitch in?

As you do housework, point out what you're doing to your kids. Say, "I picked up four things, and the room looks so much neater." Or, "I'm going to quickly wipe up the spill before the juice gets tracked through the house and I'd have to wash the whole floor."

By modeling good home management habits – and explaining them – children will learn without actually doing the tasks themselves.

You should also assign chores – with their input. Allow them to state preferences for specific chores, as well as the one they absolutely detest. Taking requests into consideration, create a chart with daily, alternating chores for each child. Skip the "detested" chore for the child who rejected it.

When children see that you've taken their wants into consideration, and that your expectations are clear and consistent, they'll usually pitch in with grace.

–Yael Wiesner

**TIP:**

Children should learn the skills needed to run an organized home for their own good. Keeping the house in shape is secondary.

If your child asks for a chore that you wouldn't necessarily do on a daily or weekly basis (like polishing silver), put it down at least once anyway. It'll teach her the skill, and get her excited about helping out.

