



Encouraging Good Behaviour

Ever feel you're playing emotional tug-of-war with your kids? Don't worry, there's a way to win the behaviour game.

What games are your kids playing when it comes to behaviour? What games are you playing as a parent? From my experience, they play the 'I'll do whatever you take notice of' game while we play the 'I'm going to make you do it' game. So how do we use their game to our advantage?

I was chatting with a friend the other day and our conversation turned to how tricky it is to be a parent and how you become much wiser to the games kids somehow get you to play. She was telling me a story about how her son, aged three, had learnt a new word. Nothing too bad but not one you'd particularly want to hear coming out of a child's mouth. Anyway, she was recounting how every time he said this word she'd say 'Don't say that word!' and he'd immediately repeat it. On and on it went. Try as she might, she couldn't eliminate the word from his vocabulary.

One day Grandad looked after him for all of an hour and, upon returning home, she heard Grandad say 'Remember, don't tell your mum the words I taught you'. This was met with an instant exclamation of the forbidden words – 'Jimminy Cricket'. Mum immediately caught on and said 'Don't say those words!', which her son gleefully repeated.

Next, she stopped saying anything when he said the undesirable word and, within a month, all was forgotten.

As you can see, Grandad had a clever solution! When he heard his grandson say the cheeky word, he cleverly said nothing and moved on to teach him something else rather than making a fuss. Ah, the power we hold over our kids simply by being selective about when we give them our attention. Parents need to harness this power and use it to their benefit, while being careful not to fall into any games we really don't want to be part of.

It's important to remember that, for children, it doesn't matter if the attention they get from you is good – kisses, cuddles, praise or bad – anger, annoyance. To them, it's simply attention from you, which is what they want. The trick is to pay your children attention when they behave the way you want.