

What's That Supposed to Mean?

3/9/23

Lisa here. We hope you've been using the tips from last week's blog to start separating your thoughts from facts. This week, we're talking about another issue that we see frequently- communication. Communication issues arise in all kinds of relationships- families, romantic relationships, friendships, workplace relationships, acquaintances, etc. One problem that causes A LOT of stress is using words that don't accurately convey what you mean. We all do this from time to time, but depending on the situation, it can cause real problems.

Have you ever given your kids instructions and then they don't follow through? One common issue that parents and their children often have is *how* instructions are (or are not) implemented. Picture this: It's Friday evening and you tell your child to make sure that they clean their room tomorrow (Saturday). Saturday morning comes and goes, Saturday afternoon passes and there is ZERO PROGRESS on the room. By dinnertime on Saturday, you are furious that the room is not clean, so you yell, give a lecture, take away electronics, etc. (whatever consequence you give when your kid doesn't do what you told them to do). Then your kid throws a wrench into the whole works- they tell you that they planned to clean their room before they went to bed, and they don't understand why they're in trouble. Now what?



If you're like most of the parents Sarah and I work with, you're not buying this. But let's look at what actually happened. In the above scenario, you told your child to clean up their room *on Saturday*. Your child heard that and made their own plan for how and when they would do that. Is the problem that their plan wasn't great? Nope! The problem was that you did not actually mean that they had all day on Saturday to clean their room. You really wanted them to get up on Saturday morning and clean, not sleep in, play with friends, play video games, take a nap,

eat dinner and *then* clean their room. But that's not what you *said*. You said they needed to clean their room on Saturday. Your words left it wide open for your child to decide when on Saturday to complete the task. You had an implementation plan in mind, did not communicate the plan, but then held your child to the plan you had in your head. Sound familiar?



This type of miscommunication frequently happens between parents and their kids when parents expect kids to be in their head. We all have our own way of doing things. It's easy to expect others to do things the same way, especially when they live in the house with us and see how we do things all the time. It's important to remember that your kids also have their own way of doing things that doesn't always fit with what's in your head.

When you realize one of these miscommunications has happened, you can fix it. Stop for a second to figure out where the communication went wrong. Think about what you actually want the other person to understand and/or do. Then use words that clearly communicate that. Practice using clear and concise language to communicate exactly what you mean. When we don't expect the other person to read between the lines or read our minds, communication becomes a whole lot easier. Try this out with your family and see how much easier it is to be understood.