

# Parents can use silence as a teaching tool

● ● ● *how to use silence, not be silent with children*

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We all know we express ourselves by using words, intonation changes, body language and gestures. These elements help us convey emotions and thoughts as well as messages. When interacting with young children, the key is to determine how to use the right balance of these features, learning how to modify them depending on the situation.

Silence can be an underrated aspect of communication. While we often resort to spoken words to get our message across, silence can be an equally – if not more – powerful tool to convey these same emotions, thoughts or messages.

For example, when telling a young child not to do something, a parent would opt to say, “Johnny no”. Instead, a parent can use a moment of silence to ensure some eye contact and then say, “Johnny, try this”. In this case, silence will get the child’s attention and once you have it, he can hear what you tell him to do. When a child is told “no”, all they hear is a command that they are inattentive to. They are not provided with alternative behaviours, and as such, no learning takes place.

In another case, when you want to teach a very young child a new word, show the item and wait, using silence for the child to make eye contact. Once the child makes eye contact, this signals that they are ready to hear and say the word of the item.

This process happens very quickly, so silence can be used as a tool used during periods of transition from one task to another. It is done rapidly for it to be effective.

Moreover, when a child is talking and you know they are not structuring their sentence appropriately, wait until they finish, pause gently to get eye contact, and then tell them the sentences emphasizing the word they missed, the tense they misused, or the sounds they mispronounced.

Silence captures a child's attention, giving them the time they need to think and listen. It allows parents to listen attentively to what their child is saying so they can model the appropriate response for their child.

This proves to be a cost-effective method for parent-child interaction when teaching new strategies, vocabulary, or learning how to do good listening.



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