



Ten Action Steps to More Patient Parenting

By Judy Arnall

It all begins with you - not your children!

Let's say that you are rushing the children out the door to drive them to school before you head to work, and your child forgets to bring his backpack from his bedroom. He runs back upstairs with muddy boots and leaves mud footprints on the carpet. You are late. You are on the verge of yelling about being late, and the mess he has made. Here is how to make better choices to become more patient:

1. Don't say anything in the moment of anger and stress. Don't try to teach a lesson. (That will come later.) Don't threaten a consequence. Don't call your child names or swear. Don't vent about the situation at all. Utter nothing for at least twenty minutes! This takes practice but gets better each time.

2. Close your eyes and breathe. Breathe in and out. In and out. In and out.

3. If you have small children underfoot, make sure they are in a safe place. Put a movie on for them, put them in their cribs or rooms and be sure they are occupied for ten to twenty minutes. It helps if you have a bucket of fun, non-messy, activities for them to do, while you are taking care of yourself. In our rushing-out-the-door situation, they are probably buckled in their car seats. If not, put them there.

4. Tell your children that you need a Time-out. Say, "I'm angry and I'm going to take a time-out." This teaches children that adults take time-outs when they are

angry. We teach this great life skill by modelling it, not by forcing them into time-out as a punishment.

5. Do something while you are angry to dissipate the anger energy. Go and scrub the bathtub. Get a laundry hamper and pick up things lying around. Go into the bathroom and yell into the toilet. Vacuum. Get on the computer and write. (Don't send anything out). Call a friend and cry. Go for a walk if you have older kids that you can leave alone. In this situation, go outside and stomp your feet repeatedly and say to yourself, "I'm so angry, I'm so angry, I'm so angry."

6. Now you can take steps to solve the problem. After a few minutes, the anger energy should be gone. You should be calm now. Go back to the children and if they are old enough, get them to help you deal with the problem. If it is a mess, they can help clean up. If it needs fixing, let them help you take action to rectify the immediate situation. In this case, leave the mess since you are late. Be sure to get the child to help you clean up when you and he are home again.

7. Teach the lesson. Now that you and your children are calm, you can do the parental teaching part. In your calmest voice, formulate your "I-statement." An I-statement has three parts: how you feel, what the behaviour is and the effect on you. Children often don't understand how their behaviour affects your feelings and an I-statement is the language of assertiveness. It gives them the information. Again, you are modelling a life skill that they will pick up for their later relationships. Say, "I feel **upset** (feeling) **when you walk on my carpet with muddy shoes** (behaviour) **because it causes me work to vacuum and clean it** (effect on you)."

8. Shift gears and listen to their response. When you have heard what they have said, respond in a sentence that shows you heard them. Say, "I can see that you don't want to take off her shoes when you are in a hurry to retrieve something." Then, assert your needs again that this is a problem for you. "I don't like muddy shoes dirtying our carpet." He will hear you more because he has been heard.

9. Invite the child to help you problem-solve for next time. Get them involved in solutions and they will be more likely to implement the answer. "What can we do in situations when you have your boots on and yet, you need to get something from your bedroom? It's not okay to walk on the carpet with your footwear. What are some things we could do next time?"

10. Congratulate yourself for taking a calm, cool approach and not flipping your lid! You have also handled an irritating situation and taught your child some valuable life skills such as anger management (time-out), assertiveness (I-statements), and relationship skills (problem-solving). The key to acquiring

patience is constant practice and its good that kids give us all kinds of things to be patient about! Do it again next time!

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