

# RECLAIM YOUR THRONE

Tired of your kids calling the shots all the time? Tired of having your authority questioned? Here's how to regain control

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About a month ago, UK-based Nick Herbert launched an app called ReplyASAP. Once downloaded, the app makes it impossible for kids to ignore their parents' messages. How it works: When a child receives a message from a parent, the app ensures that that message overlays everything else on the screen. It also sounds an alarm (even if the phone is on silent), ringing incessantly until the child sends a reply. A wonderful invention, parents will agree, and one that was, of course, born of necessity — Herbert has a 13-year-old son.

While you probably can't wait to hit download, take a moment to think back to your formative years. Your parents didn't ask you to call them when you got somewhere; they told you to. If you missed a curfew, there would have been consequences — what consequences exactly, you still don't know, because you knew better than to find out. So, when did that power equation change? Why don't our kids listen to us?

Psychotherapist Neeta Shetty explains, "Parents today want to have conversations with

their children, they want to encourage, rather than order them to do things, and that's a good thing. But in most double-income families, parents are also often overwrought by guilt, and so they overcompensate by being too lenient with their children. Striking the right balance is very difficult."

Sure, as evolved parents you don't want to raise your kids to be 'seen and not heard', but that doesn't mean raising overindulged children who argue about everything.

## Never negotiate

Michele Borba, author of *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World* believes parents need to begin by boosting their own self-confidence. "You pay the rent and the phone bill. You are also the one in charge of your child and responsible for his or her well-being. If you're fighting constant battles — whether over food, cell phone curfew, homework — it means that your current parenting style isn't working. Your kid has figured out that you're not serious and will waver."

Pointing out that parenting is not a popularity contest, Borba says, "Don't be afraid to say no. The biggest parenting mistake is inconsistency in our rules or expectations. Children will try to wear us down. Teens will try to push our buttons. But

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when it comes to safety, well-being or values, your job is to not negotiate. The first few times will be tough. But once your child realises you do mean business, your family life will improve."

She recommends taking a few minutes to draw up a battle plan. "Make a list of the few items that you and your partner will REFUSE to negotiate on. Pass it to your child. Then, the next time there is an issue that has to do with one of those points, simply do not negotiate."

### Repercussions trump reasoning

Psychologist Nirali Bhatia who counsels children and teens says that parents often fear that reprimanding their children or denying them something will result in the loss of the camaraderie they share. "But debating the point will get you nowhere. Children are exposed to so much today at such a young age that they're very clever," says Bhatia. Offering the example of teens who forget to inform their parents about where they are — "I forgot I was supposed to send you a message," "My phone battery died," — Bhatia says the family must establish that this is family protocol, and anyone who does not comply will have to face the repercussions. "If Mama is out anywhere, she sends a message; the same is true for Papa too. No one should be seen to be exempt from the rule. The same is true for any rule, be it a 'no mobiles at dinner' rule, or 'no computer after 9 pm.'"



Parents should never do their children's homework for them

Bhatia says teens, in particular, must see this playing out. "In the teenage years, the capacity to reason and understand logic is limited. This is partly because of raging hormones, and also because the part of the brain responsible for cognitive reasoning and logic only develops properly by age 20-22. So, while it's very important to have that dialogue — discuss why you have certain rules in place — it must be made clear that obeying the house rules is not an option."

### Don't do their work for them

Shetty explains that nagging your kids to do their homework or coaxing them to do it, "are, both, wrong approaches. Doing so makes the child less responsible. At a very young age, the child needs to see that their work is their problem — not yours. They have to understand that they must shoulder their own responsibilities," Shetty adds that it's not uncommon for parents, in

their attempt to shield their child from unpleasantness, to do their homework for them, send their assignments/books to school, if they've been forgotten at home or even pay people to construct their children's school projects. "Though the child may fare better than peers briefly, remember you're not doing your child any favours. Let the teacher deal with it if the child does not go in with the homework — allow him or her to suffer the consequences."

Leading psychologist Dr Prerna Kohli adds, "Merely communicating the importance of being responsible might not seal the deal. Tweens and teens are at an age where they are not fond of rules and their lives lack structure. Help them develop structure by ritualising their study time and helping them with task-planning. Draw on their goals to encourage them, and reward good behaviour and adherence to expectations with incentives and surprises."

### Tech support

While technology may seem like your arch nemesis — distracting your child from all that's good — it can work in your favour too. A few of technology's boons:

● **Our Pact:** Download this app on your phones (yours plus those of your children), and with the press of a key (even if you're out at dinner), you can turn your children's smartphones into ordinary cell-phones — no Snapchat, no Instagram, no WiFi, and no reason to stay up past their bedtime.

● **ESET Parental Control:** This app allows you access to what your children are doing online. You can see what they're viewing, the games they play, and you can even block access. You can also use the app to see where your children are at any time, and, like Herbert's app, this one makes it impossible for your children to ignore your messages too.

● **PhoneSheriff:** This is a sure-fire way to keep your children from abusing their smartphone privileges. Aside from allowing parents to access the child's text, internet and call history, the app allows you to check which apps your child has installed and see every photo that's been clicked using that device.

However, Bhatia cautions that, "Any kind of controlling technique, without an explanation for why it's necessary, will not work in the long run. Remember that humans are always going to be smarter than technology, and this generation is born in the tech era, so give them time and they'll find a way to get around the app. Your aim should be to empower your child to make his or her own decisions."

Shetty too stresses the dangers of turning to apps to monitor/control your child's behaviour. "There's a thin line between keeping an eye on your child and stalking him or her. Trust is a crucial building block for a positive parent-child relationship. The last thing you want is to send the child a message that he or she is not trusted — because then they have nothing to lose if they let you down."

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