

# Help! My Kids Are Driving Me Crazy!

THE HAPPIEST HOME, BY [SARAH POWERS](#) ON JULY 25, 2014



It's a fact of life. There are times I love being a mom and being around my kids....and well, there are times when, I have to admit, not so much. Here are seven strategies that help me when I'm feeling irritable with my kids:

## 1. DITCH THE GUILT.

It's natural to feel irritated sometimes as a parent. Have you ever worked a job or been in a relationship where you didn't feel annoyed occasionally? I bet when you did, you didn't also beat yourself up about it. And guess what? It's okay to feel grumpy, stressed, sad, or annoyed sometimes too. No guilt. Let's move on.

## 2. TURN THE TABLES (IT'S NOT THEM, IT'S ME).

What's the difference between "my kids are annoying me" and "I'm feeling annoyed today"? It might sound like silly psychobabble, but for me it's an important shift. Taking the focus off of their behavior, which I may or may not choose to do something about (more on that in a minute), allows me to take ownership of what I *can* control: my own attitude and the way I respond to the behavior that's bothering me. It also prompts me to figure out *why* I'm feeling annoyed – is it really that song they keep singing over and over again, or is it because I'm tired, bored, or in need of a snack (again, things within my control to change)?

## 3. SEPARATE "KIND OF ANNOYING" VS. "SUPER ANNOYING" (OR, IDENTIFY THE BEHAVIORS YOU REALLY WANT TO CHANGE).

My almost 5-year-old has discovered a funny noise she can make by squeezing air out of her cheeks slowly. It sounds like a chipmunk. It also grates on my last nerve when she does it in close proximity to me. Around the clock. Every day. On the list of behavior worth correcting, though, this one really isn't that important. I'd rather figure out other ways to get over it myself rather than make a big deal out of it with her (plus, by the time I get her to stop doing it she'll have found a new noise).

My nearly 3-year-old, on the other hand, is in a whiny phase. A super-duper whiny phase. So whiny that even when he's in a good mood every request comes out sounding whiny. That's a behavior that I've decided is worth addressing, because I want him to practice other ways of communicating what he wants.

Some annoying behaviors are worth dealing with, to be sure, and others you can probably let go. For me, separating the two helps me not feel so overwhelmingly annoyed at every little thing, and allows me to do something about the things that matter while letting the rest go.

## 4. WRITE IT DOWN.

*"Remember when Junior wanted to wear his Darth Vader shirt with an Apple (as in iPad) sticker on the front every single day, and we had to make sure it was always clean AND we had to keep a stash of Apple stickers handy or risk a world class wardrobe-related meltdown? Wasn't that cute?"*

It seems impossible, but I know it's true: Today's annoying behaviors (okay, SOME of them) will be tomorrow's funny anecdotes. Have you found some good ways to capture the funny things your kids say and do? I find that when I write things down – in the form of a snarky tweet, a blog post, or a text to a friend who can commiserate – it's a little easier to see the potential humor in the situation, even if at the moment it's making me crazy.

## **5. MAKE A GAME OUT OF IT.**

The other day I had had it UPTOHERE with the aforementioned Mr. Whinypants and his whining. So instead of asking him to rephrase his question in a big-boy voice for the 42-gazillionth time, I tried something different.

“Hey buddy, come here,” I said with a smile. “Can you open the back door for me?”

Curious, he complied. I went on. “Can you take your whiny voice and throw it way over the back fence? All the way across the street and into the field on the other side?” He paused a moment and then made a huge pretend-throwing motion with his little arm.

“Oh, I don’t think you got it over the fence that time. Let’s try again,” I said. So we spent a couple of minutes chucking his whiny voice out into the street, talking about how it might get run over by a truck or eaten by the cows in the field beyond.

Did it stop him from whining the rest of the day? Of course not. But every time he started, we went back to the pretend game we had started. It gave us both something to giggle about and it worked at least as well as – if not better than – what I’d been doing before.

## **6. LOOK FOR THE DEEPER NEED.**

This is a lesson I find myself learning again and again: when my kids are out of sync – grumpy or tantrum-prone, whiny or hyper – there is usually an underlying reason. Maybe a clingy kid needs a little bit more “special time” with mom or dad to feel secure; maybe an older child acting out is worried about something at school. Maybe my squeaky little chipmunk is bored and needs a really engaging project she can feel good about.

In the moment, the behavior may still be annoying, but staying mindful of my kids’ deeper needs always gives me a greater sense of empathy for what they’re going through. And while it may not be a quick-fix for what’s bugging me, it often helps me devise a longer-term strategy that really works.

This applies to us a parents, too, of course. When I’m feeling more irritable than normal, there is usually a bigger reason. Maybe it’s that I’m overtired (check), trying to do too much (check), or just need to change up my routine or get some fresh air (check and check). Easier said than done, I know, but paying attention to my own needs is the best preventive medicine for avoiding parent-meltdowns.

## **7. REASON WITH THEM (OR, DON’T BE AFRAID TO SAY WHAT YOU WANT)**

Sometimes I think parents get the idea that we’re not supposed to let our kids see us frustrated or frazzled. I disagree. I think there’s an opportunity to model some great problem-solving skills if we approach the conversation the right way.

If you let your annoyance level ratchet up to Code Red and explode, “*Why can’t you guys leave me alone for one second? You are driving me crazy today!*”, there are probably going to be some hurt feelings (theirs) and guilt (yours). If, on the other hand, you say something like “*You know what? I’m having a tough time today. I feel tired and a little grumpy, but I want to work on being patient with you guys. I’m going to take a quick break to calm down and then let’s go for a walk,*” it’s a much different story. You’ve shown your kids an example of knowing yourself and identifying your feelings, of communicating a need and looking for a solution.

I know it’s not realistic to avoid ever feeling annoyed as a parent now and then – but I also know that these intense years of parenting young ones won’t last forever. And the more I can learn not to sweat the small stuff, the more I’ll enjoy this time together.

***WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU FEEL IRRITABLE OR ANNOYED?***