



PEN Notes: Fact Sheet #21

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Stopping the Backtalk

Few behavioral problems challenge and frustrate parents, caregivers, and teachers more than verbal rudeness in children of any age. Reinforced by the wise-cracking of kids on TV and in the movies, backtalk has become too common among today's youngsters. But there is nothing cute in backtalk. It gets in the way of real communication between parents and kids and prevents kids from having to face the real issues at hand.

Recognizing backtalk:

Recognizing backtalk means more than simply identifying it. It means acknowledging backtalk as a form of communication you do not like. The communication can consist of no words (rolling the eyes and sighing), few words ("yeah, right," or the ever-popular "Whatever"), or an extended angry outburst that gathers intensity as it goes along.

Distinguishing between backtalk and respectful disagreement:

Parents can learn to distinguish between backtalk and respectful disagreement. Assertive communication is respectful while backtalk is never respectful. Backtalk includes not only disrespectful words, but a disrespectful tone and disrespectful body language as well.

(Source: Ricker and Crowder, Backtalk. 4 Steps to Ending Rude Behavior in Your Kids. Simon and Schuster, 1998.)



Why backtalk needs to be stopped:



Remarks like "Big deal" and "Make me" get in the way of real communication and can be damaging to a child's social and intellectual development. Backtalk can ruin a person's chances for a productive, happy life, because a child who gets away with it at home will undoubtedly try backtalking outside the home, losing respect of friends, friends' parents, teachers, and later, employers. At home, a child's backtalk might be overlooked by parents who don't know how else to deal with the behavior. At school, he/she could become known as a difficult child that adults and other children avoid. Later, on the job, his backtalk could keep him from getting and keeping promotions.

(Source: Ricker and Crowder, 1998.)

It is the parents' responsibility to make the home a "Backtalk-Free Zone".

"A parent's task of training the heart and mind toward good involves many things. It involves rules and precepts - the do's and don'ts of life with others. It involves explicit training in good habits. And it involves the example of adults who, through their daily behavior, show children they take it seriously. If we want our children to possess the traits of character we most admire...we need to teach them what those traits are and why they deserve both admiration and allegiance. It is never too early to begin the task."

(Source: Bennett, William J., *The Children's Book of Virtues*, Simon and Schuster, 1995)

How to end rude behavior in your children:

- Recognize the backtalk. Here is a test: if it hurts you, embarrasses you, annoys you, or leaves you feeling helpless, it's backtalk.
- Choose the right consequence for the behavior. Any backtalk or rude behavior automatically means that the child will not do what she wants or has planned to do—such as go to soccer practice or to a dance lesson.
- Carry out the consequence. In a calm voice, tell the child that his behavior amounts to backtalk, that it is not acceptable, and that the child will not be doing what he had planned.
- Separate yourself from the argument. The trick here is to get on with what you were doing while the backtalker continues protesting. The more quickly you appear to switch your interest from the backtalker to another topic in your life, the more subdued your backtalker will be.



(Source: Ricker and Crowder, 1998)