

## **Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

### *Use Fewer Words to Get Children's Attention*

**I**F YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO LISTEN, try using fewer words. When a child misbehaves, our instinct is to find words, lots of them, to convince him to respond differently. “Why would you do that?” “We talked about this.” “You know it’s against the rules.” These are the kind of words that sound like static to children, and they learn to tune them out.

Research shows that the human brain can only process four “chunks” of information at once in active memory. This amounts to about 30 seconds of verbiage. Advertisers spend millions of dollars every year coming up with short slogans that consumers can remember, like Volkswagen’s *Think Small* and Nike’s *Just Do It*. Imagine the concentrated creativity that went into coming up with these concise messages. Succinct phrases can work for you.

In the Nurtured Heart Approach, children are often re-directed by one word – “Pause” or “Reset.” Recently I saw some preschool children throwing hula hoops toward each other in an unsafe way. I could have explained all the reasons why the activity could be dangerous, that hoops are for rolling, not throwing, but saying “Pause” was the most effective way of halting the activity. At times when they weren’t breaking the rules, they had learned that they would be asked to pause when they needed to change their behavior.

As a reminder that when it comes to words, less is often more, ask a friend to try to convince you to do something with as many persuasive arguments as possible. After 30 seconds, you will tune out.

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