

## Telling vs. Asking

The moral of the story here is don't be the genius. As long as you keep giving the answers and telling kids what they should do, you run the risk that they will not learn to rely on themselves to solve their own problems and make decisions.

Let's say you've got an angry escalating kid on your hands. Here's some response choices:

Why don't you go to your room and cool off?  
You shouldn't be so angry.  
Don't yell.  
Stop it.

What do you think you will do?  
Why are you mad?  
How can you calm yourself?  
Do you want to try any of your coping strategies to help yourself feel better now?

What's the difference? In the left column, who is taking responsibility for fixing feelings and problems? What's going to happen if the child thinks the parent or helping adult is responsible for fixing their problems and feelings? Might they target that caregiver and try to make the caregiver make them okay? Attempt to bully and intimidate until their feeling subside or the caregiver takes some action that gets the child what they want? If you take responsibility for making them okay, they may begin to blame you whenever they are not. Yet it may seem that nothing you tell them makes them okay.

In the right hand column, the responsibility for action, resolution is placed on the person experiencing a problem or emotional response. They are empowered to find and believe that they can figure it out, that they and only they are responsible for what they feel and do. Which do you prefer?

### Getting ready for school:

Get dressed, we have to leave soon.

I am noticing that you are not dressed and we are leaving in 15 minutes. What is your plan?

What do you need to do to be ready for school? The next step would be, after a few days, look at them and wait a moment before heading out the door to see if they can initiate proper action on their own.

Get dressed now! How many times  
Do I have to tell you?



### Cleaning and chores:

Put your dishes in the dishwasher.

What did we decide would happen if you don't put your dishes in the dishwasher?

By asking questions rather than telling answers, an adult can guide the child to doing the work themselves. To believe they can and it's up to them. They can decide. They can figure it out. They have the internal resources to manage their feelings and problems. Are you interested in a quick solution to the problem now, or long-term learning and growing in independence, personal responsibility? Ask them the questions they need to be asking for themselves.

### Self-assessment

Place a check next to which sentences are true for you.

I keep telling them what they should do, to use their coping skills, but they won't listen.

I express confidence they can figure it out, offer empathy and support, reflect so they know I understand what they think and feel.

I remain frustrated that nothing I tell them works.

It's my fault they are upset, it's my job to make them feel better and make the world better for them.

Only they create and can resolve their own feelings.

I can't stand it when they are angry or upset.

I can remain calm and supportive without enabling or blaming when they are angry or upset.

I am responsible for what they do and feel.

They don't do what I tell them to do and I have to tell them over and over again.

I have to do all the noticing and reminding. Then I become resentful and nagging, and they tune me out even more. I do all the thinking for them, their brain is in neutral or checked out.

If you ask, they can start thinking and noticing for themselves.

They are responsible for themselves and their actions.

What is a victim mindset? Would you say that they make you get angry and yell?

Could you be placing yourself in a martyr mindset? What does this mean?

How does the relate to everyday entitlement and narcissism?



How do you model for them? Do you take responsibility for your own actions and feelings, or do you blame them, or ally yourself with them and join in blaming the teacher, the school, the sibling?

Do you like to be told what to do? Are you in the habit of telling others what to do? This behavior does not foster healthy communication; it tears relationships apart.

If you always try to protect them from the realities and injustices, what are you teaching? That they can't take care of themselves? The world should be fair? They are always dependent on you to fix things for them? That they are to be overwhelmed and  
If you keep them comfortable, rather than allowing them to be uncomfortable, you are removing their motivation to try something new, to grow and change. We grow and change when we are uncomfortable, it's the challenge that spurs us to make new and greater efforts. If we are perfectly comfortable and cared for, why work and why change?

By asking rather than telling we are not just teaching responsibility. We are demonstrating respect and trust, fostering confidence and self-esteem, connecting and building our relationship. We are showing faith that the child can notice problems and solve them on their own.

