

Get Your Toddler to Cooperate!

by Elizabeth Pantley, Author of *Kid Cooperation* and *Perfect Parenting*

Toddlers and preschoolers require finesse to gain their cooperation, because they have not yet reached the age at which they can see and understand the whole picture, so simply explaining what you want doesn't always work. Robert Scotellaro is quoted in *The Funny Side of Parenthood* as saying, "Reasoning with a two-year-old is about as productive as changing seats on the Titanic." (He must have had a two-year-old at the time.)

You can get around this frustrating state of affairs by changing your approach. Let's look at two situations – first the typical (Titanic) way:

Parent: David! Time to change your diaper.

David: No! (As he runs off)

Parent: Come on honey. It's time to leave, I need to change you.

David: (Giggles and hides behind sofa)

Parent: David, this isn't funny. It's getting late. Come here.

David: (Doesn't hear a word. Sits down to do a puzzle.)

Parent: Come here! (Gets up and approaches David)

David: (Giggles and runs)

Parent: (Picking up David) Now lie here. Stop squirming! Lie still. Will you stop this!
(As parent turns to pick up a new diaper, a little bare bottom is running away)

I'm sure you've all been there. Oh, and by the way, David is *my* son. And this was an actual scene recorded in his baby book. Like you, I got very tired of this. And then I discovered a better way:

Parent: (Picking up diaper and holding it like a puppet, making it talk in a silly, squeaky voice)
Hi David! I'm Dilly Diaper! Come here and play with me!

David: (Running over to Diaper) Hi Dilly!

Parent as Diaper: You're such a nice boy. Will you give me a kiss?

David: Yes. (Gives diaper a kiss)

Parent as Diaper: How 'bout a nice hug?

David: (Giggles and hugs Diaper)

Parent as Diaper: Lie right here next to me. Right here. Yup. Can I go on you? Oh yes?!
Goody goody goody! (The diaper chats with David while he's being changed. Then it says, Oh, David! Listen, I hear your shoes calling you – David! David!

The most amazing thing about this trick is that it works over and over and over and over. You'll keep thinking, "He's not honestly going to fall for this again?" But he will! Probably the nicest by-product of this method is that it gets you in a good mood and you have a little fun time with your child.

When you've got a toddler this technique is a pure lifesaver. When my son David was little I used this all the time. (I then used it with my youngest child, Coletan, and it worked just as well.) Remembering back to one day, when David was almost three, we were waiting in a long line at the grocery store and I was making my hand talk to him. It was asking him questions about the items in the cart. Suddenly, he hugged my hand, looked up at me and said, "Mommy, I love for you to pretend this hand is talking."

Another parent reported that she called her toddler to the table for dinner a number of times, when he calmly looked up at her, chubby hands on padded hips and said, "Mommy, why don't you have my dinner call to me?"

And suddenly, the peas on his plate came to life and called out to him; he ran over to join the family at the dinner table.

A variation on this technique, that also works very well, is to capitalize on a young child's vivid imagination as a way to thwart negative emotions. Pretend to find a trail of caterpillars on the way to the store, hop to the car like a bunny, or pretend a carrot gives you magic powers as you eat it.

It's delightful to see how a potentially negative situation can be turned into a fun experience by changing a child's focus to fun and fantasy.

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