

The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

Making Your Point Without Arguing

from the American Counseling Association

We all face problems that crop up again and again. Most of us have probably yelled, "How many times have I told you?" and yet the behavior that drives us crazy continues to occur.

The reason for our frustration may be that we talk when we really ought to be acting. You've heard the expression, "Actions speak louder than words," and in our personal relationships that often can be true.

For example, perhaps there's a toddler in your house who thinks dinnertime is a perfect time to play with his food rather than eat it, no matter how many times you reprimand him. Instead of constantly repeating that command to eat, try smiling at him, removing his plate, and saying calmly, "I see you're done with your dinner."

Will he protest? Most likely, and probably loudly. But the act of having his dinner disappear, along with your explanation of why, is likely to be more effective than simply ordering him to eat.

A similar situation might be if you have a spouse who tends to drink too much at social events. You find it embarrassing and have expressed your displeasure numerous times, all to no avail. Next time, instead of more complaining, simply take action by picking up the car keys, handing him or her ten dollars for that cab ride home, and walking out to your car and driving home.

There are numerous situations, from dealing with a parent who calls daily in order to criticize you, to a teen who refuses to heed family curfew hours, when arguing with the person doesn't result in a change in behavior but probably does give you a headache.

Instead of more arguing, take action. Inform your mother that if she criticizes you again you're going to hang up. Then follow through and do it if she can't stop herself.

See how your teen reacts if instead of arguing with him or her another time, you simply inform them of your planned action (such as withholding an allowance, or cutting off their cell phone), carry it out, then make it clear they brought the action on themselves.

It's important to take action with a positive, calm attitude. Yes, there will be protests, and yes, you will want to explain calmly what is happening and why, but the bottom line is that actions are much harder to ignore than simple words.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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