Go visual to manage kids

If you have a visual learner – and this includes most boys – or a child who likes to think they’re calling the shots, then your reliance solely on verbal messages will mean not everything will get done. And much will be resisted.

Do you use a roster for kids’ jobs?

Do you put two or three things on a list for your children to read each day?

Do you use hand gestures – such as pointing to a bedroom – while you say a child’s name indicating you want them to go to their room?

If so, congratulations! You are using the visual mode to help your kids be organised, cooperative and well behaved.

Most homes are highly verbal in that we rely on our words to ensure things get done. We tend to tell kids what to do through words rather than pictures or hand signals, relay important messages using words and even verbally give kids lists of things to do.

This may appeal to auditory learners and easy kids.

If you have a visual learner – and this includes most boys – or a child who likes to think they are calling the shots, then your reliance solely on verbal messages will mean not everything will get done. And a great deal of what you want to get done will be resisted.

When we go verbal with all our instructions we often teach kids to shut down. As a principle, try to go visual as much as possible and keep your words for conversations, relationship-building and encouragement.

Use visual prompts and reminders

Here are four ways to go visual when you want to ‘manage’ your kids:

1. Construct simple ‘to do’ lists. Help children remember routines by placing three to five important things on charts. Place them where he or she can see them. These can include bedroom cleaning routines, getting ready for school routines, getting ready for bed routines, even chores rosters.

2. Place non-negotiables on signs. My son had a “KEEP OUT!” sign on his bedroom door as a child, indicating in strong terms to his sisters his wish for privacy. Fortress Bedroom is certainly was! Parents can do something similar when circumstances suit. For instance if you have family meetings then place simple rules on signs such as, ‘Talk about one thing at a time’, ‘No interruptions’ and ‘Stick to the point.’ By going visual you indicate that this is important and non-negotiable.

3. Cue kids to behave well. Teachers often use cues to get kids to behave well in class. This prevents interruptions to lessons. Kids are cued to look at them. Look for opportunities to cue kids with hand gestures at home. For instance, point to your eyes to remind a child to make eye contact when talking to an adult. When you want them to clean their teeth and get ready for bed, get your child’s attention, point to the bathroom (using open palms) and look at the ground to avoid eye contact and convey expectation.

4. Write a note. There are times when you can write a little note to your children that may prompt them to think about their behaviour. ‘I’m not sure if you realised it but I felt embarrassed when you back-chatted me in front of Aunty Jenny yesterday.’ This type of written message reduces defensiveness and allows kids to take ideas on board in their own time. We need to do much more of this so kids can reflect on their behaviour.

If I had my time as a parent again, I’d be more aware of using visuals rather than verbals when I managed my kids. It would have made life easier for my kids and also for myself. I tended to go verbal when I didn’t really need to.