

No need to yell

By Viki Rife

"Why don't my kids listen to me?" I complained to another mom as we watched our kids play. Her youngest was the age of my oldest, so she was a number of years ahead of me in mothering experience.

She was thoughtful for a moment. Then she took a deep breath.

"You have to be consistent," she told me gently. "If you tell them there will be consequences for their behavior, you must keep your promise. They must know that you mean what you say."

She had no idea how her statement would affect me. Earlier that day I had told the kids that if they didn't clean up the mess in their rooms we would not go to the play date. But then, as they continued to bicker and not get anything done, I began to regret saying it. I reasoned that punishing them would be punishing me more, because I desperately needed adult conversation.

I couldn't escape the realization that I did not want to make the sacrifices necessary to make sure what I threatened was consistently enforced. No wonder they concluded, "Mom doesn't really mean what she says."

It took time to change my ways. First, I started asking myself whether I was actually willing to live with the consequences I predicted for their behavior. If not, I wouldn't threaten to do it.

Second, I started disciplining myself to follow through. If I said a child would be grounded for a certain amount of time, they were grounded, even if something fun came up that we both had to miss. Whether I felt like it or not, I held firm in a calmer way to what I had already forewarned them would happen.

Change didn't come overnight. But gradually, I found them cooperating more and myself yelling less. I didn't have to end up in a rage to get their attention. They began to believe that I actually meant what I said, without me having to raise my voice.

I'm so glad my friend spoke up. I just wish I had asked the question sooner in my motherhood!

