

Gag Your Nagging

How to gain family cooperation and harmony

By Patricia Morgan

“For the last time, will you do what I ask?” Does this sound familiar? Many of us walking the halls of our homes, workplaces or shopping malls feel weary, helpless, frustrated, stressed, used, abused and resentful in our relationships. Yet, more improved connections and cooperation can be learned and put into action. I know this because, not only was I once a first rate nagger, but for over fifteen years I have facilitated people in turning their nags into clearer and more effective messages. In that time I have collected over 600 real, live nags. Here is a small sample:

- Are you listening to me?
- Don't talk with your mouth full.
- Keep your elbows off the table.
- Did you do your homework?
- Why can't you get along?
- Can't you ever put anything back?
- How many times do I have to tell you?
- Will you please do as you're told?
- Did you wash your hands?
- Stop your whining.
- Will you hurry up?
- Don't yell.
- No talking back.
- Be nice.
- I'm tired of asking you.
- You are driving me crazy.
- I am fed up with the mess around here.

Nagging our children, our spouse or anyone, for that matter can create brick walls and damage trust. Embedded in nags are demoralizing messages--“I believe you are incompetent without me nattering in your ear,” or “I see you as irresponsible and that is why I take over what is your responsibility.” If nothing else nagging teaches others how to grab our attention. When they goof off we reward them with our undivided focus. Nags can be harmful to us, as well. We can feel less and less competent and effective in our roles as we continue to be caught in useless efforts to achieve our

goals. Of course, we need to and have a right to express our wants and desires. Suggestions on how to better communicate follow:

Change your Own Behavior:

Decrease:

1. Repeating yourself
2. Yelling
3. Criticizing
4. Blaming
5. Threatening
6. Moralizing
7. Begging
8. Asking questions you don't really want answered
9. Belittling or name calling. "Lazy," "stupid," "selfish" and "brat" are unacceptable.

If this list looks familiar and you are asking, "What the heck is left for me to say or do?" you are a smart cookie for reading this articles. Here we go in answering that question.

Increase:

1. Acknowledging effort, whenever possible.
2. Making win-win agreements as often as possible.
3. Giving choices wherever possible.
4. Making rules clear with fair consequences.
5. Following through on established consequences. Hold yourself accountable to your end of agreements.
6. Staying honest with your feelings, describing how other people's behavior impacts you and your expectations.
7. Containing your words so that others will not tune you out. Avoid creating a lecturette.
8. Talking about behaviors. Focus on behaviors. Aim to invite or influence new behaviors.
9. Letting go of changing a child's personality.
10. Using the Grandmother Law of "After you have done your homework you may . . ."
11. Carefully choosing your timing. Solving problems are best done in neutrally emotional spaces and times.
12. Establishing soft eye contact; preferably at eye level.

13. Adding some humour when appropriate. Write a note such as, “Fido will cry if you don’t feed him.”
14. Breathing and smiling.

Patricia Morgan is a counselor and speaker who helps parents and others lighten their load and brighten their outlook. She has authored *Love Her As She Is: Lessons from a Daughter Stolen by Addictions*, *She Said: A Tapestry of Women’s Quotes* and four upbeat booklets