

What should you do first when kids interrupt an important conference call?

From Connected Families.org

Outside of the immediate challenge, it's helpful to consider, "What's going on in me? How do I view this? Am I responsible for having a perfect child?"

Feeling shame and embarrassment about your child's behavior during a conference call causes you to react anxiously, which increases your *child's anxiety* and neediness. It may be that a light-hearted "sorry for the delay" to participants is appropriate, but avoid the temptation to repeatedly or emphatically apologize. That's stressful for you *and* your child.

It's also important to thoughtfully consider, "What's it like to be my child when I get on a conference call?"

Having an unavailable parent can be tough on kids' anxiety levels!

Research shows that our brains release oxytocin under stressful conditions, *especially* in social isolation. These elevated oxytocin levels drive an urgency to get help when we feel stressed or anxious. Your child's demands may be a sign of elevated stress levels.

In addition, up until age three or four, a child's worldview generally revolves around himself. That child will probably not be thinking of *your* personal comfort during that important call for work.

Considering all this, it doesn't have to be perfect! Ditch those profuse apologies, take a deep breath, and remember that these are great opportunities to extend God's grace and mercy to yourself, and to your child.

Want to avoid kids interrupting conference calls? Be proactive.

Thoughtful and intentional *connection* can go a long way! *Before your meeting*, prepare by connecting well with your child – even if it is just three minutes. Let them know you are delighted in them. Make meaningful eye contact. Fill their cup! Enable them to be peaceful so they can head off to be independent.

One mom, who is working from home, stated, “I have been trying to connect with my kids through short bursts of focused, joy-filled attention frequently throughout the day. It seems to be helping them to play independently for longer periods of time, which is helping *me* to get things done that I need to.”

It probably *won't* be helpful to just tell kids not to interrupt. It may even cause *more* anxiety! *Coach* them and build skills ahead of time to demonstrate what you want them to do instead. **If you are expecting a certain behavior, but haven't helped your kids both value it and practice it, it's a setup for frustration!**

How can you set your child up for success?

Proactive coaching goes a long way in preventing interruptions:

- Teach your children appropriate ways to ask for attention, like a tap on the arm. Help them practice this new skill by pretending you are on an important call.
- Give special signs (thumbs up/wink) that communicate: “I see you and I care!”
- If they want to show you something, let them know they can put their project or drawing in a pre-designated “waiting spot” until the call is over. Keeping this promise, and attending to it right away when the call is done, will build trust.
- Teach the importance of peaceful waiting. This can be practiced and modeled throughout the ebb and flow of daily life.

Evaluate which proactive strategy works best for your child.

After coaching and practicing, evaluate what works best. Problem-solve based on what you learn from the times when things go better.

Other practical tips that may help:

- Avoid having kids do school work during your calls.
- Keep a bin of toys (new or old favorites) reserved only for when you are on calls. Maybe even have a unique bin for each child.
- Designate special separate spaces for kids during calls.

Set boundaries and expectations *before* the call.

An important part of being proactive is to set boundaries and expectations before the call:

- Ask your child, “What’s important to you when I am on a call?”
- It’s equally important to ask, “What do you think is important to *me*, and to the person I’m talking to, in this meeting?”
- Offer two choices for activities.
- If possible and appropriate, satisfy your child’s curiosity by allowing him to meet the caller.
- Set clear boundaries by putting a sign on the door. One sign read, “Mom is WORKING. Do NOT disturb unless the house is on fire or someone is bleeding. A lot.”
- Another option: Offer incentives! Let them know that if they don’t interrupt, they can make a zoom call to a grandparent or friend. Remind them of this just before the call.

“After all this, my child is STILL interrupting my work calls!”

Even with proactive coaching, your child (or spouse) may *still* interrupt. Sometimes this is going to happen no matter what you do! Remember [this viral video of a parent conference call](#) that did not go as planned?

When it all falls apart and it’s time to correct during the call, remember to try to *decrease* your child’s anxiety, not increase it, so the interaction doesn’t escalate to an outburst in front of your colleagues!

Here are some ideas to let your child know, “I’m for you, not against you,” even when they’ve messed up:

- Offer a quick hug.
- Affirm them for whatever success they had (assuming they have spent at least *some* time trying to play independently.)
- Smile as you offer two clear “You can” choices such as, “You can hold my hand and sit on the floor without talking, or take a toy and lay on my bed til I’m done.”

If the interruptions were clearly not at an acceptable level, afterward you can guide your child to do a do-over. They can practice a respectful arm pat interruption and then

quickly and quietly return to play. This will help them feel more confident about what to do next time.

Encouragement (not shame!), will build their identity of “I’m learning and getting more ‘grown up’ all the time!” And your affection will grow that vital belief, “I am loved no matter what!” Your child’s confidence and security might be the most important accomplishment of your conference call!

Prayer

Father, thank you for helping me juggle so much. Help me to love my kids in the middle of the messes. Comfort me with a sense of your Holy Spirit coming alongside me with wisdom and mercy in these difficult times. In Jesus name, Amen.