

# What's Your Plan?

BY LESLIE JOSEL

*Asking this simple question is the key to turning a clueless kid into a capable one.*

Probably the hardest parenting lesson I had to learn was to stop constantly telling my kids what to do. It took a ton of time and patience, neither of which I had in abundant supply when my daughter and son were young. For me, it was much easier to give orders morning, noon and night than to let them figure things out on their own—and because of that, my kids came to rely on me for constant cues. I told them exactly where they had to go, what they needed to do, even what they had to bring.

A typical weekday afternoon in our house sounded like this: “Maddie, find your tap shoes and then grab a snack. We need to leave in 15 minutes.” Then, “Eli, go change into your uniform for fencing. Fill up a water bottle and pack it in your bag with a clean towel. Your ride will be here in five.” Harried, tired, I reiterated directions nonstop and stressed incessantly about the time. One day I hit the wall and just couldn't deal anymore, and I realized they needed to take some ownership. But in order for them to do that, I would need to change my approach.

My new MO involved talking less—or more accurately, directing less—and questioning more. Rather than just react to what I said, my kids had to actually listen to the questions I posed, think about them and then formulate responses. By saying less and asking more, I compelled them to actively engage and participate in what they were doing. I used questions like:



*Future awareness is one of the trickiest concepts to teach and also one of the toughest to learn. It is the essence of true time management.*



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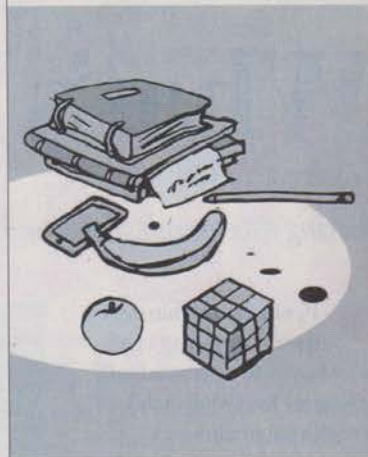
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Family: Parenting



### "What's your plan?"

I love this one, especially because it lends itself to almost any situation. "What's your plan for after school?" "What's your plan for Saturday?" For older teens, you can even ask something super specific, like, "What's your plan for studying for your two tests on Friday when you have soccer on Thursday and won't be home until nine?" The options are many.

The purpose of asking this question in this specific manner is to help your kid begin to develop a sense of time. I always say that for the most part, teens live in two worlds—the "now" and the "not now." They have a very difficult time making the connection that what they have to do later in the day or even later that week, month or year can in fact affect what they need to do right now.

This is called future awareness, and it's one of the trickiest concepts to teach and one of the toughest to learn. It is the essence of true time management. The question is a wonderful, organic way for kids to begin to formulate routines and schedules as well as remember what they need to accomplish in the process.

Keep in mind that you're not just trying to get your kids through middle or high school—the bigger goal is to teach life skills.



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## “How do you see yourself...?”

There are lots of variations on this query, such as, “What do you need to...?” or “How should you...?” Any will work. The purpose is to help your teen begin to build a visual checklist of what needs to be done and how to do it.

Remember, by turning the tables and asking instead of telling, you are requiring your kids to do some of the planning. Don't be discouraged if your initial attempts at questioning result in a lot of shrugs and “I don't know"s. Better yet, expect them. Flip that response on its ear by asking cheerfully, “Well, what do you know?” With time, patience and consistency, this approach will build routines as reliably rote as brushing teeth or wearing a seatbelt in the car, and all of you will be better off.

## Yes, There Will Be a Quiz

Consider this your cheat sheet for raising a more competent kid.

### INSTEAD OF SAYING

Go get your dance shoes, leotard and towel.

Don't forget your backpack, phone, key, money.

Make your bed and put your dirty clothes in the hamper.

### ASK

What goes in your dance bag?

What do you need for school?

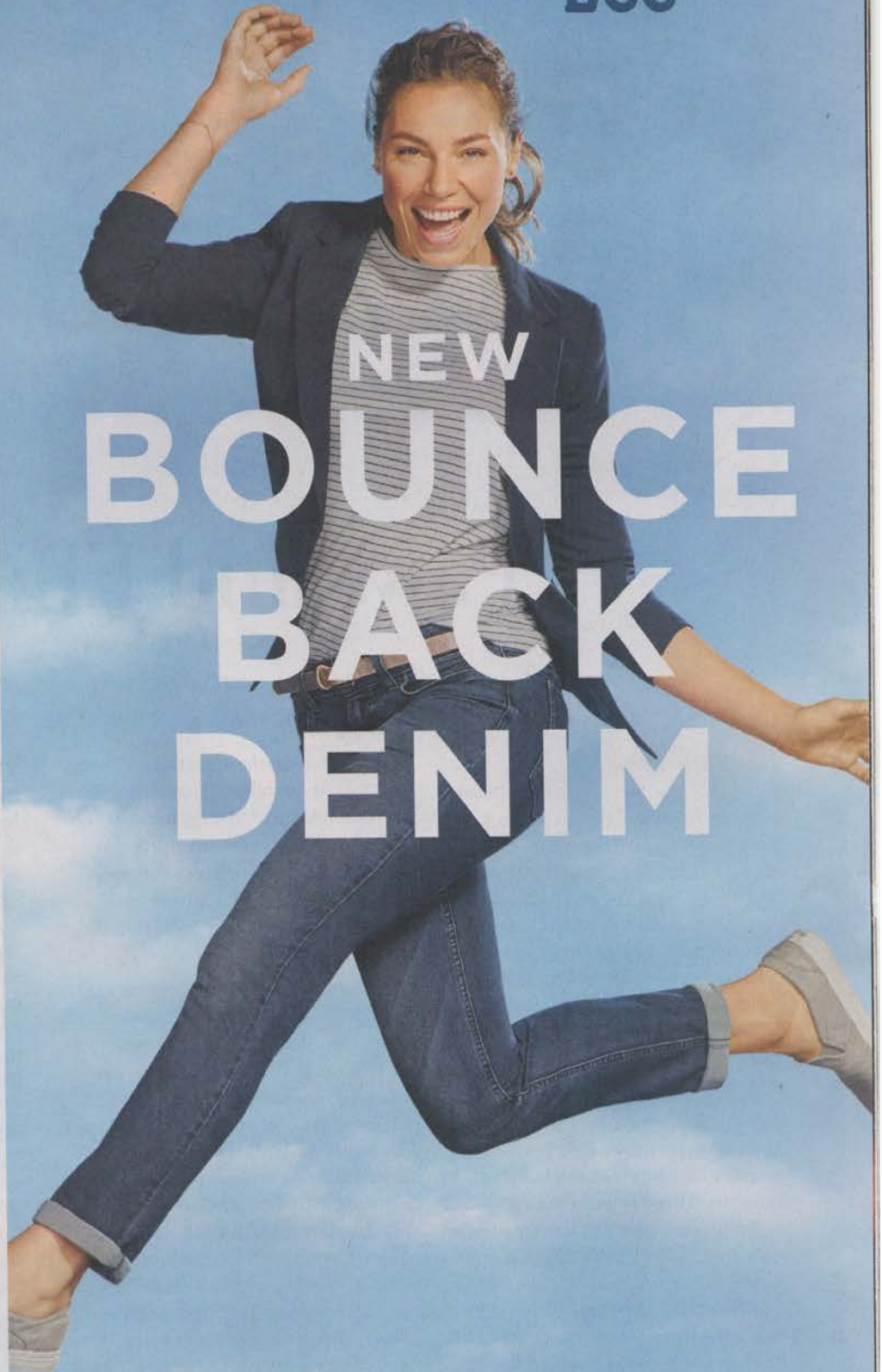
How should your room be left in the morning?

### MEET THE EXPERT

Mom of two Leslie Josel blogs about time management and organization at her company's website, [orderoochaos.com](http://orderoochaos.com).

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