

Language Support

Children can find it difficult when demands are placed on them, taking away their control. By altering the way, we communicate and the language we use can reduce the risk of the child becoming dysregulated. Using requests and inviting language gives the child a sense of control and choice.

Advice and Recommendations

Avoid non-negotiable words/demanding language. This gives the impression that a decision has been made for him and taken away his control. Avoid words such as, “**no**”, “**need**”, “**must/must not**”, “**will/won’t**”, “**can’t**”, “**now**”

Opening requests/Indirect invitations

1. I wish I knew someone who could help me with ...
2. Oh, look at that, now it's time to do....
3. Do you want to do A or B first?
4. Who's left this here?
5. You choose, what should I do next? (Sous chef, assistant etc)
6. 'It would be great if we could get this done today...shall we do it in the hall or the library? 'Oh this looks a bit tricky...perhaps you might be able to help?'

What to say instead of NO

1. Let's.....
2. Please instead.
3. Why don't we.....
4. In our class we
5. Thank you for.....
6. Please show me.....
7. Tell me the better choice.....
8. When you do this instead it helps you/me/us.....
9. Our rule is
10. Sure, as soon as we.....then we can.....
11. Here are your choices.....
12. Rather than....., please.....
13. I know/can see you feel, but
14. Let's see if we can do it this way next time (model)
15. When I have..... then we can.....

Praise

1. Wow, what a beautiful/colourful/tall/great.... (Praise the object not the child)
2.has tried really hard today to..... (To another key adult/parent)
3. I'm so glad I had help..... (*Said within earshot of child*)
4. *This table looks so tidy!*
5. *I'm so pleased we could..... together.*
6. Try to make them feel useful which also helps to maintain emotional well-being – e.g. “It would be really helpful if you could.....”.

Additional Strategies

- **Use indirect commands to disguise demands and make them fun** – Try challenges e.g., “Bet I can get my coat on before you!” or “Can you show me.....”.
- **Pretend you don’t know / get it wrong and ask them to teach you** – e.g., Mis-read words in books, or ask them to show you how to do a certain task that you want them to do.
- **Offer limited choices to give the child a sense of control & autonomy** – e.g. “Do you want to have a bath or a shower tonight?” followed by “would you like to have your shower at 6.00pm or 7.00pm?” Be prepared to negotiate e.g., your child may say that they will have a shower at 6.30pm to retain a sense of control. N.B. offering too many choices or open-ended choices can increase a child’s anxiety. Or use the ‘when... then’ philosophy – e.g., “when I have done my boring housework, then we can bake some cakes”.
- **Voice control** – Use a calm, even tone of voice, especially when they are demand avoiding. If you convey anxiety, stress or anger in your tone of voice your child will pick up on this, their anxiety will increase and their tolerance for demands will decrease.
- **Indirect praise** – Praise may be perceived as a demand or an expectation to perform at the same level again. It can be helpful to give a child indirect praise e.g., talk to a relative about something good your child has done while they are in earshot – may be more easily accepted than directly praising them. Praise the object instead of the child e.g., “what an amazing picture, the colours are beautiful” instead of “you have drawn a wonderful picture”.
- **Use role play and props** – Sometimes it can be easier and less direct to attempt communication with your child through toys and props e.g., using a cuddly toy e.g., “Teddy has asked if we can go to the shops today and if he can have an ice-cream?”. Another option can be constructing a conversation within earshot “I wonder if Ryan would like to go to the park on Saturday”. As children grow older this could involve text messages, Facebook messages, leaving notes around the house and so on.
- **Model desirable behaviour** – Reinforce acceptable, desirable and alternative behaviour in your own actions, but don’t instruct your child to do the same. It can be more productive to let them observe without the expectation that they should do this also e.g. “I feel so stressed and angry right now, so I am going to lie down in a quiet room and listen to some music to help me calm down”.
- **Gamification-** Using characters of interest can help depersonalise demands, as you are not personally asking them to do something. For example, X has a high interest in Giganotosaurus from Netflix, try to find a character voice you can use to make requests. Or you could find a toy or puppet to represent the character, saying: Giganotosaurus would like us to join in at circle time for 2 minutes! Can Giganotosaurus help me put two bricks away?

Useful Links:



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