

The Importance of Positive Language

Using positive language empowers children to make appropriate choices on their own and, in turn, boosts their self-esteem. It allows them to focus and learn from the positive behaviours instead of focusing on negative ones, which can often leave them feeling frustrated and confused.

Advice and Recommendations

Here are a few ways that you can reframe typical negative phrases into positive ones:

- Stop running in the house → Please walk in the house, I wouldn't want you to have an accident. If you want to run, let's go in the garden.
- Don't take your sister's toys → Can you please find something else to play with until she's finished with the dolly?
- Stop shouting → Please use your inside voice, there's no need to shout.
- No throwing balls in the house → You can take the ball outside to play if you'd like.
- No hitting → Be gentle please, use your kind hands.
- Stop screaming → Please use your words so I can hear you.
- Don't throw sand → Would you like to fill this bucket with sand?
- Don't even think about running, I'm watching you! → I'm so glad to see you remembering to walk safely down the hall, well done.
- Change your tone and approach. When giving a direction or instruction, get down to the same level as the child. Make eye contact. Try not to let the frustration of the situation come through in your voice. Communicate calmly and clearly.
- Tell the child **"When."** When a child asks to do something that is completely off the table now—such as going to the park—rather than saying "no" or "not now", acknowledge their request and explain when it would be an appropriate time to go. For example: "going to the park sounds like a great idea! When we've finished tidying, then we can go to the park"
- Offer choices. Children like to feel in control of their world. Try offering the child two choices. When they are offered options, they are more likely to comply.
- Give the child time. It is easy to feel frustrated when children do not respond quickly to requests. Remember it can take up to 10 seconds for a child to process what you have just said. Count to 10 in your head, remain calm, and allow time for the child to think about what it is you have said and how they will complete the task at hand.
- Ask a question to help children remember, as they are easily distracted! A child may need a gentle reminder to stay on task. Ask; "What's next?" or "Where are your shoes?" can help them remember what they are doing and draw their attention back to the task at hand.
- Avoid using the phrases *"naughty"*, *"bad"* and labelling a child as such. This can be detrimental to self-esteem and even cause a self-fulfilling prophecy, with a child thinking to themselves *"well they think I'm naughty so there is no need for me to comply with rules or requests"*. Instead,



YOUR WORDS MATTER

try relating the child's behavioural choice to a feeling, for example, if they have hit another child, help them to understand the consequences of their actions by saying "that hurt '*insert child's name*' hitting makes us feel sad." You can even go further and ask the child "what can we do to make '*insert child's name*' feel better? This way, we aren't labelling the child as bad or naughty, but we are helping them to acknowledge what they have done and learn how they can make amends and carry on with their day feeling positive.



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