

Words Matter – Improve Your Communication to Improve Discipline

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What you may be doing / saying	Why this may not work for you	Alternative things to say that may be more helpful
<p><i>Giving vague commands</i> Be good. Behave better. Be nice. You better behave at the restaurant.</p>	<p>Saying “be good” implies they are bad. And, these vague commands require them to guess what it is that you want them to do. (What does “be good” look like?)</p>	<p><i>Set clear expectations in advance</i> about what good behavior is in that context. “At lunch, you’ll need to sit in your chair or my lap and use a quiet voice.” If issues arise, give very <i>clear, concrete instructions</i> for what they should do. “Please sit on your chair now or you can sit in my lap.”</p>
<p><i>Broken Record</i> We’re late, let’s go. Come on, we’re late. Can you just put your shoes on? We’re late, we need to go. Come on!</p>	<p>If you feel like you’re saying the same thing over and over, you should ask yourself: can they hear you? Do they understand what you want them to do? Do they have the skill to do that? What’s stopping them from doing it?</p>	<p><i>Connect to Correct.</i> Make sure you have their attention first, then tell them what the behavior issue is. Go near them, get down to their level, establish eye contact, and use a calm voice. Once you have their attention, then offer clear guidance – say it once – loud and clear!</p>
<p><i>Only telling them what NOT to do</i> Don’t throw that / spill that / hit the dog / slam the door</p>	<p>If you just say what not to do, they have to first stop their impulse, <i>then</i> figure out what they can do instead. Both are hard for young kids to do!</p>	<p><i>Tell them what to do:</i> “Carefully hand that to me. Move your milk so it doesn’t spill. Pet the dog softly. Close the door gently.”</p>
<p><i>Dismissing their feelings</i> I don’t care if you’re mad – we don’t break things. You know we need to leave the park now – crying won’t change that. I know you’re excited, but you need to sit down.</p>	<p>Dismisses their feelings as unimportant. Until the emotion is acknowledged, it may be hard to move past it. Saying “I know you have this feeling, BUT...” doesn’t count as validating, because that “but” implies you don’t care about their feelings.</p>	<p><i>Validate emotions first, then address the behavior or re-state limits.</i> “I know you’re mad. It’s not OK to break things.” “I can see that makes you sad. I get that – I’m sad too. And... it’s still time to leave the park.” “I know you’re excited and it’s hard to stay still. It’s important to sit down so other people can see.”</p>
<p><i>If / then threats – if you do [this bad thing] you’ll get this punishment</i> If you don’t brush your teeth right now, then no bedtime story.</p>	<p>Could imply you <i>expect</i> they’ll do the bad thing. (Kids are good at living up to expectations!) Could imply that you’re looking forward to the punishment.</p>	<p><i>When / then – When you do [this good thing], then we get to do [something mutually enjoyable] together.</i> “When you’re done brushing your teeth, we get to read a bedtime story. If you’re fast enough we get to read two!”</p>
<p><i>Asking questions when you mean to be giving commands.</i> Would you please stop yelling? Are you ready to sit in your car seat?</p>	<p>If you ask it as a question, that implies they can say no, or opt out of what you’re asking them to do.</p>	<p><i>If you’re really offering a choice, make sure they know they can choose either option. If you don’t mean to offer a choice, then give a command not a question.</i> Use a quiet voice. I need you to sit in your car seat now.</p>

Rewrite These Sentences

"Be good at the movie."

"Be nice to her."

"Stop jumping on the couch. Cut it out. No jumping. You know you're not suppose to jump on the couch. Stop it."

"Don't throw your Legos."

"I hate it when you slam the door."

"Don't cry. You know I won't give you more candy."

"I know you're mad that he took your toy, but you can't hit him."

"If you don't help me clean, then you don't get to go to the park."

"Do you want to put on your boots now?"

Homework Assignment – bring back to class.

Name: _____

Sometime in the next week, test this out! When you find an opportunity to change your communication from your normal style to trying out a new communication strategy from this handout, then seize the moment and test this out.

(Please set yourself some reminder to try this – like pin this paper to your refrigerator or bulletin board, create a calendar appointment or task, or set an alarm on your phone that you can snooze till you find a good opportunity to try this.)

Then report on your experience....

What did you do? (i.e. what would you have said in the past in this situation, and what *did* you say instead)

What happened as a result of using this new communication strategy?

What did you notice about how it felt?

What happened with your child?

How might this support a relationship with your child?