



Getting the message across - the skill of giving clear instructions.

A major part of encouraging positive behaviour is learning how to talk to your children. The way you talk teaches your child how to talk to others.

1. Decide which instructions are REALLY important.

When you give your child instructions, ask yourself two questions first.

- Is it really important that my child does this?
- Am I prepared to stop what I am doing immediately and ensure my child does what I have said?

Often, the instructions we give our children are not *that* important. Also, we are often unable to follow through and impose some of the rules that have been set. Try cutting down on the smaller instructions and focus on the bigger ones that you really want to implement

2. Get the child's attention

Before giving your child directions, get down to his eye level and get his eye contact. There is no point giving an instruction to the back of a child's head while he is watching television.

3. Stay brief and simple

Too much talking is a mistake. Keep your instructions brief, otherwise the child will 'switch off'.

4. Be Specific

Instructions such as 'Be good' and 'Be careful' are vague. Try to be as specific as you can:-

- Instead of 'tidy up', try 'put your cars in the box please'.
- Instead of 'be good', try 'play ball with your sister while I'm getting dinner'.

5. Avoid 'don't' instructions

- Instead of 'don't run, try 'please walk'.
- Instead of 'don't pick your nose', try 'please use a handkerchief'.

6. Avoid shouting matches

The louder your child shouts, the softer you need to respond. Let your child rant and rave while you quietly say 'I understand' or 'Can I help?' Shouting back at a child is like fighting fire with fire. It is only going to make everyone angry.

7. Give your child time

Make sure that you give your child sufficient time to process instructions. Leave a longer gap than you usually would, as it takes more time than you would expect to process an instruction. Giving more instructions or persuading may cause 'overload'.

8. Save reasoning for later

Reasoning and explanation may not work well with your child in the heat of the moment. Save these for a quiet time after the moment has passed.

9. Avoid question instructions

Between adults, we often give instructions in a question form in order to be polite. If our boss says 'Would you come into my office?' we know that is an 'order', not a request. We confuse children by asking questions which are actually instructions. Parents are surprised when they say to their six year old 'Would you like to have a bath now?' And the child says 'no'.

- Instead of 'Will you pick up your coat', try 'Please pick up your coat.'
- Instead of 'Are you going to turn off the TV?', try 'Turn off the TV please'.

10. Remember to say thank you

If your child has done what you asked, remember to acknowledge this. Just because he is a child does not mean that you should not be polite. He will learn from you. Get into the habit of saying 'thank you', 'that's really helpful',

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'what a big boy you are'. A little praise can make the child far more willing to co-operate!