



HIGH 5 COMMUNICATION RESOURCES

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SPEECH + LANGUAGE THERAPY • INFANT + TODDLER ENRICHMENT • FEEDING THERAPY

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Your Mission: Tell Your Child What You DO Want Them To Do in 2-3 Word Phrase (a.k.a. “positive language”)

Why?

While it is obvious to adults, young children are not able to make the logical connection that when they are told not to do something, what they actually should do is the opposite. For example, the directions, “Don’t kick me!” can be very confusing to a child. However, “Please keep your feet on the floor” tells the child exactly what the expectation is and how he can change what he is doing. Young children may only understand the last couple words of a phrase, so when you say something like “Stop throwing the ball,” they may just be hearing “throw the ball!”

Using positive language also empowers a child to make an appropriate choice on his own, which can boost his self-esteem. When you are specific in your directions by telling your child exactly what he can do and when, it is easier for him to comply and he is more likely to cooperate with the request.

How: 3 easy steps ☺

Step 1: Verbal Command

- Replace “don’t” with “do.” Tell your child what you WANT them to do, not what you don’t want them to do.
- Use as short of phrase as possible, with goal of 2-3 words. Repeat the most important 2-3 words of longer phrases.

Step 2: Help Your Child Follow Your Direction on the FIRST or SECOND command!

- At first, this may involve you PHYSICALLY HELPING your child comply. For example, help them pet the dog gently if they were pulling their fur, or help them keep their hands still if they were smushing their food all over the highchair tray.
- After they understand the direction better, this may look like modeling the behavior. For example, if the command was “Hands off”, you may just need to put your own hands up in the air. Or if the command was “Be gentle,” you may just need to model gentle petting on the back of your own hand.
- Note: if you wait to “help” your child “listen” until the 5th or 8th or 13th time you’ve said it, they are really just learning that they don’t have to listen the first time.

Step 3: LOTS and LOTS of SPECIFIC positive reinforcement! Get specific about what they did correctly (rather than “great job”)

- Examples: “Woohoo! I love how you’re petting gently!” “Yay, that was a great bite!” “Yaaaaay, what a great way to share your toy!” “Woohoo, I love how your hands are off the plant!”
- Note: give the verbal reinforcement EVEN IF you had to help them follow directions! This is how you get their “buy in” – if they get positively reinforced EVERY TIME they follow directions (even with your help), they will want to keep doing it!

Examples:

Instead of this...	Say this...
Don't kick!	<p>Step 1: “Keep your legs down. Legs down.”</p> <p>Step 2: <i>(Help by holding legs on floor)</i></p> <p>Step 3: “Yay! You are keeping your legs on the ground! Great job!”</p>
Don't pull the cat's hair!	<p>Step 1: “Let go of his hair. Let go. Be gentle.”</p> <p>Step 2: <i>(Show child how to pet gently OR do hand-over-hand to help them be more gentle)</i></p> <p>Step 3: “Woohoo! You are being gentle! I love how you’re being gentle!”</p>
Don't throw your food!	<p>Step 1: “It looks like you're all done. You could sign “all done.” Keep your food on the tray.”</p> <p>Step 2: <i>(Sign “all done” and help child make sign if they will tolerate it. You may need to cover up the food to help keep him from throwing it)</i></p> <p>Step 3: “Keep your food on the tray. Let's keep it on the tray” OR “I love how you kept your food on the tray!” OR “I love how you signed ALL DONE!”</p>
Don't touch the TV/fireplace/oven/cactus	<p>Step 1: “Hands off. Keep your hands off. Hands off.”</p> <p>Step 2: <i>(Help child take hands off of object. If she persists after several tries, help child move away from object and say something like, “It looks like you're having a hard time listening. Let's find something else to play with. Find something else to play with. How about this plane?”)</i></p> <p>Step 3: “I love how you have your hands off the xx!”</p>
Don't run away from me!	<p>Step 1: “Stay here please. I need you to stay here to stay safe. Stay here.”</p> <p>Step 2: <i>(Get your child and if they still have a hard time: “It looks like you're having a hard time staying here, so I'm going to help you stay here.”)</i></p> <p>Step 3: “I love how you're staying here with me! That's great.”</p>
Don't stop eating!	<p>Step 1: “Keep going! I love these carrots. Let's have some more! I'm going to take a big bite!”</p> <p>Step 2: <i>(Take a bite of your carrots and make a big show of how delicious they are)</i></p> <p>Step 3: “Wow! You're touching/licking/biting/eating your carrots! I love that!”</p>