

Language Tips

Directional Language

The way you speak with children is important and in the social behaviour arena the preferred approach is directional language. Directional language focuses the child's attention on what to do rather than what not to do. (e.g., 'Sit quietly' rather than 'Don't talk' / 'Gentle hands' rather than 'No hitting'). When phrasing the direction it is useful to:

- ▽ Know what you want to say before you say it.
- ▽ Gain the child's attention - get on child's level but not in their space.
- ▽ Use language the child understands.
- ▽ Use positive verbs or participles wherever possible.
- ▽ Using succinct descriptions.
- ▽ Use 'do' rather than 'don't'.
- ▽ Focus on what to do rather than what not to do.
- ▽ Keep statements free of moral judgment.
- ▽ Maintain a respectful and matter-of-fact tone.
- ▽ Use a firm, neutral calm voice.
- ▽ Speak slowly and clearly.
- ▽ Use relaxed body language.
- ▽ Include wait time - count 5-10 seconds to yourself when you ask a question or make a request.

Here are some examples of directional language:

- ▽ 'Hands to yourself' rather than, 'Don't grab people'.
- ▽ 'Looking this way, thank you' rather than, 'Don't talk while I'm talking'.
- ▽ 'Hands up to talk' rather than, 'Don't call out'.
- ▽ 'Walking' rather than, 'Don't run'.
- ▽ 'Listening to the teacher, thank you' rather than, 'Don't talk among yourselves'.
- ▽ 'Quiet voices' rather than 'No yelling'.
- ▽ 'Gently hands and feet thanks' rather than, 'Don't touch Kim'.
- ▽ 'Keep the noise down' rather than, 'Shut your mouths now'.
- ▽ 'Pick the paper up from the floor' rather than, 'This floor is a pigsty'.
- ▽ 'Settle down children' rather than, 'Don't scream and push or else'.
- ▽ 'In our group, we take turns' rather than, 'Share that ball now or you are out of the game for the rest of the week'.
- ▽ 'Speak nicely' rather than, 'Don't speak to me in that nasty way.'
- ▽ 'The sand stays down low so it doesn't get in peoples eyes' rather then 'Don't throw sand.'
- ▽ 'Touch gently' rather than, 'Get those hurting hands out of my sight.'
- ▽ 'We take turns on the monkey bars' rather than 'Get off that equipment now or you will be off the equipment forever'.
- ▽ 'Move carefully' rather than 'No pushing.'

What Can You Say When ... Language

'What can you say when ...' phrases are assertive language phrase that you can teach children to say when they are finding social situations difficult. Here are some examples of social situations where 'What can you say when ...' phrases could be helpful:

What can you say when you don't understand

I'm thinking

I don't understand

What to say when someone takes your turn

'It's my turn'

'Give me a turn'

When someone is annoying you

'Leave me alone'

'I am getting mad'

When someone takes something belonging to you

'Give that back'

'That's not yours. That's mine'

Phrases to Help Children Think

When talking with children it is important that you phrase questions in a manner that encourages children to think. Here are a few examples of sentence starters / phrases that promote thinking:

- ▽ What's happening?
- ▽ What do you think the problem is?
- ▽ What do you need to do now?
- ▽ How would you feel if ...
- ▽ How can you find out?
- ▽ What else could you do?
- ▽ How could you do this?
- ▽ How many ways can you ...
- ▽ What did you think about ...
- ▽ What else can you tell us about what happened ...
- ▽ What did you think about that?
- ▽ What questions would you ask of ...
- ▽ Can you think of another way you can do this?