

Say What You Mean Mean What You Say



"I wish you'd get dressed."

"I think you should start on your report."

"It would be nice if you cleaned your room."

"Be good."

Fuzzy statements like these leave kids wondering exactly how they should respond. Kids interpret them at face value, which leads to battles. It helps kids cooperate when parents are very specific with their requests.

Say please

We learned that one in kindergarten! Saying please softens our request and when followed with a specific call to action it can get a kid moving. And adding a "thank you" in closing with your expectation that your request will be followed. *"Please take the trash out before dinner. Thank you."* The added benefit here is that you are modeling the behavior you want your child to learn.

Be specific

When you say, *"Clean your room."* your child hears, *"Shove everything under the bed so I can't see it."* In essence, he is doing what he was told. Prevent this miscommunication by being very clear - *"Please put the toys in the toy box, and books on the shelf."* Now THAT is very clear.

Think

Often we make half-hearted requests of our child, and when he doesn't respond we just drop it. Usually, this happens over little issues, and we drop it because it's not worth fighting over. The problem is, a child gets in the habit of ignoring you, on both little issues and big ones. When you take a breath, take a minute and think first, you can then be clear about your request and willing to follow through to the end.

Eye-to-eye

How often do you call to your child from another room and expect her to listen? Do you then follow-up with, *"Did you hear me?"* Instead, take the time to get eye-to-eye with your child. Make a clear, specific request and ask, *"What do you need?"* When your child tells you what you said it helps her to remember. For example, your child is in the other room playing. Go to her, look her in the eye and say, *"Mara, please take the trash out before dinner. Now, what do you need to do?"* When Mara says, *"I need to take the trash out before dinner."* she has given herself clear instructions and is likely to follow through.

Pick your battles

Parenting is a 24-hour a day job. If you try to deal with every issue, fix every problem and be a constant teacher and coach, you will drive yourself CRAZY! Before you open your mouth, take a minute to decide if this issue is worth a battle. If you decide it is – then win at all costs. This will prevent you from choosing the wrong battle, realizing it in midstream and backing down because it's really not important. The danger is that your child doesn't know you've changed your mind due to a better decision. He figures you changed your mind because he put up a good fight, which leads him to try again the next day and the next. Fight the important battles, and using good skill and a level head – WIN! It's good for you and best for your child.

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of "Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting."

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