

How You Say It Is Key

All parents get tired of yelling and repeating themselves trying to teach their children the same lessons and the appropriate way to behave. When it comes to disciplining your child effectively, how you communicate – what you say and how you say it -- are key. Discipline your child with words that are instructive, not destructive, and that are caring, not callous. If your child feels that you respect him or her, your child is more likely to comply.

- **Be calm.** Your neutral tone shows your child you are standing your ground. Your calmness is contagious and will help your child calm down.
- **Be confident.** If you want your child to have a two-cookie or one-hour TV limit, then establish that those are the rules in your home by enforcing them consistently and with confidence.
- **Focus on your child.** Say his or her name when you give a directive and look directly at the child.
- **Praise good behavior.** Use specific praise that reiterates the good thing your child did and what it meant. "Thank you for sitting quietly and reading while I dressed your sister. It made us all happy and able to get things done. You are becoming a good reader."
- **Gentle reminders.** Time these appropriately. As your child leaves the bathroom, remind him or her to hang the towel up.
- **Present choices.** Instead of always telling your child not to do something, give your child choices such as, "do you want to put your socks on first or your shirt?" Just make sure you only give choices that if your child chooses, you will be comfortable with.
- **Don't ask, tell.** Asking "Are you ready for bed?" leaves the decision up to your child and the likely answer will be "no!" Try "Time for bed!" instead.
- **When...then .** Tell your child when he completes an act of good behavior (puts away a toy, finishes homework, brushes teeth), then something desirable for your child will happen (you can have a cookie, watch TV, call your friend on the phone.)
- **Tell your child you will count to ten** and explain what needs to happen during the countdown. Kids actually like the 'beat-the-clock' challenge and the countdown also allows you to keep your cool.
- **Invite input.** Work out a situation together by asking your child how he or she would solve the problem. Then listen and work together to solve the issue at hand.
- **Say please and thank you .** This helps your child use these important terms in his or her own language, but also provides an air of civility and kindness
- **Focus your message and be specific.** Direct your child specifically, saying, "Dinner's almost ready. Please turn off the TV, wash your hands, and come to the table."
- **Brief is best.** One or two sentences will work better than a lecture in most cases. "Put your coat on or you'll be late for school."
- **Use "I" phrases, instead of "you" phrases.** Shift your criticism from the child to the child's behavior. Rather than, "You really make me sad when you do not put away your toys" try "I really like it when you put away your toys when you are finished playing."
- **Don't give too many orders at once.** As your child completes a task, then direct him or her to the next one to avoid overwhelming your child.