

The Role of Language

How parents and teachers talk tells a child how they feel about him.

Their statements affect his self-esteem and self-worth.
To a large extent, their language determines his destiny.

-- Haim Ginott

Guidelines for Spoken Interactions with Children

- Use a calm voice.
- Use questions whenever possible. Questions require the child to process ideas as opposed to passive listening. "What do you think the problem is? How can we solve this problem?"
- Make sure limits statements are clearly defined and understood. (See Guidelines for Limits Statements)
- Avoid using labels when referring to behavior, e.g. "bad," "noisy." Language that is descriptive is more effective, e.g. "You're using a loud voice today. I need you to use a quieter voice?"
- Make statements in positive, rather than negative form -- "Your laundry goes in the hamper." Rather than "Don't leave your laundry on the floor." This practice is more direct and clear about the expected behavior.
- Think about the timing of your statements. Reminding, Redirecting, Reinforcing. Be sure that the bulk of the responsibility for resolving problems rests with the child. You are there to guide. With enough work in practicing effective interactions, the child will have the resources to resolve most problems. Give them support to put their skills to use as independently as possible.

The 3 R's

(Reminding, Redirecting, Reinforcing)

In order to develop and meet familial and social expectations, children need feedback. Timing can be key. At times the feedback comes in the form of statements about what they have achieved (Reinforcing). At other times children need support to remember expectations (Reminding). Children also need specific, directive help to make positive choices (Redirecting)

Below are some statements that can be used for a variety of situations.

Reinforcing:

- "I see you remembered to clean your room. It really looks great."
- "I saw you help your brother when he was _____ . I'm sure he appreciated it."
- "It looks like you worked hard on your homework tonight. I'm sure you'll be proud to turn that in tomorrow."

Reminding:

- "It's time to get in the car. Tell me again what we agreed on about how we behave in the car."
- "Its getting late and we have had talks about what your responsibility is about homework. Tell me again what you need to do so you can finish your work in time for bed."

Redirecting:

- "The two of you are playing too roughly in the house. Your choices are to go outside with that game or choose something more calm for in the house."

