

Giving Effective Commands

Understanding how to give commands is as important as the actual directive you are communicating. Parents often make a variety of common errors in giving commands. Following simple guidelines can assist in both the communication of the command as well as improving the likelihood that the directive will be carried out. When you are giving a command be sure that you are aware of the following:

1. *Have the Child's Attention:* Be sure that the child is focused in on you and what you are saying. Reduce environmental distractions such as the television and stereo. If the child is involved in an activity ask them to stop and pay attention to you. Having them put down whatever is in their hands and make sure you they are facing you with established eye contact. If necessary gently turn the child's face toward yours.

2. *Make the Command a Command:* Do not make the mistake of presenting the command as a request or suggestion but as a directive that must be carried out. Use a steady, businesslike tone to your command.

3. *Keep the Command Simple:* Avoid the pitfall of multiple step commands or commands that are vague in description. Often parents will provide the child with several commands or directives at once. Only the first one or two are recalled and both parent and child can become frustrated. For younger children it is particularly important that a requested behavior be broken down into manageable components. When the child completes the initial task then provide them with the next step. Offer positive reinforcement as each command is carried out.

4. *Have the Child Clarify and Repeat the Command:* You may find it helpful to have the child repeat the command back to you. This ensures that the communication is accurate and the child understands the task.

5. *Work Slips for Household Chores:* For those regular tasks around the home you should prepare a set of workcards detailing how the work is to be carried out and how an evaluation will be conducted. Take a three by five inch index card and have a plastic laminate placed over it. Then make up a holder for the cards with a slotted pocket for each member of the house (regardless of age). Then, as the duties are assigned, place the work slips in each family member's slot. The family should have an agreed

upon time by which the work should be completed. An example of a work slip is given below:

Work: Take Out the Trash

Step 1: All trash containers in the house and garage will be emptied into a large trash sack.

Step 2: The large trash sack will be taken to the dumpster.

Step 3: All aluminum cans will be collected, crushed, and placed in recycle bag.

This will be set out next to dumpster.

Step 4: New trash liners will be put in all containers.

Step 5: Either mother or dad will be told when work is completed.

You will find that this approach will reduce family conflict by offering a clear pattern of the expected responsibilities. The work slip provides an unavoidable explanation of what the job is and how it should be completed.