

Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointers

Setting Limits

We know that children need big doses of love and acceptance, combined with clearly defined limits. How can we set limits effectively and make sure that parental requests and commands are followed by our children? Here are some things to think about ...

The first thing to remember is that normal, healthy children will refuse to follow instructions about one third of the time. This is part of children testing boundaries as they grow and develop. "What rules are my parents serious about and what can I get away with?" When they test us, it's important that we don't take it personally and we remain calm, firm and polite. If we lose our temper, we are modelling to our children that it is OK to throw a tantrum when we don't get our own way.

Our commands will be much more effective if we keep them to a minimum. For example, if we have well established routines, we won't have to tell our children what to do every five minutes because they already know what the expectations are. Studies have shown that in families where parents constantly nag their children, rather than causing them to follow instructions, they are more likely to rebel.



When we give an instruction, are we being clear on what we are asking for? In the Incredible Years group I give the example of The Big Red Bus. I ask parents **not** to think about a big red bus, don't think about a big red bus, do not under any circumstances think about a big red bus! Of course by this point everyone is thinking about a big red bus! The point of this exercise is that we don't hear the word "don't". Rather than saying to our children "Don't run" we can try saying "Please walk". In other words ask for what we want rather than what we don't want.

We need to think about what our children are doing when we ask them to do something. That computer game may look really tedious to us, but to them it is really exciting. How would we feel if we were in the middle of doing something we really enjoy and we had to stop to do something else? Giving lead time can really help here; "In 5 minutes it will be time to stop". Or, if it's reasonable, maybe we negotiate, "when this TV programme has finished ...", or "when you get to the end of that chapter".

Sometimes we give vague commands or instructions. "Let's tidy up the toys" implies that we are prepared to help with the tidying, whereas saying "Please tidy up your toys" is a clear, respectful command that communicates exactly what is expected. Children need about 5 seconds (or sometimes longer) to process an instruction. Try counting to 5 silently in your head after asking them to do something, before repeating yourself. Maybe they just need a bit longer to think about what you have said?

Finally, praise, praise, praise! One of the reasons for reducing the number of commands that we give and slowing down while we wait for them to comply, is that we can remember to praise them **every** time they follow an instruction. Remember our children crave our attention and if they get positive praise when they do as we ask them, they are more likely to do the same thing again next time.

Got any questions? Need any help or advice? Please e-mail me at parenting@foundrylaneprimary.co.uk