

The Power of Positive Language

Contributed by: ALICIA EATON

Wouldn't life be so much easier if we could simply wave a magic wand to get children to do as we asked, first time around? Too many parents nowadays, will admit that they struggle to get their requests heard, understood and taken seriously. Alicia Eaton, is a 'Children's Behavioural and Emotional Wellbeing Specialist' and also a qualified AMI Montessori Teacher and mum gives some tips about how to use positive language.

Modern day parenting has become an exhausting, not to say, expensive business. It seems if we're not resorting to getting cross with our children, then we're busy devising star charts and reward systems – the kind that quickly lose their appeal and do nothing but cost us money. The secret to getting children to listen is quite simply to, 'mind your language'.

Life can become much easier, simply by changing the words we use and structuring our sentences in a slightly different way using NLP, or 'Neuro-Linguistic Programming' to give it its' full title. NLP's 'Language of Persuasion and Influence' is what TV

advertisers, sales people, estate agents and politicians use all the time. They know the secret to persuading people to do exactly what they want, only, more often than not, we simply don't realise it.



Decanomial Square Presentation

“Life can become much easier, simply by changing the words that we use”

- ALICIA EATON

As we think and speak, our minds are constantly creating mental images or pictures. They flash through our minds really quickly and we often don't notice them. The reason why it's important to become aware of these images and any voices or sounds that happen to come with them, is because our bodies generally take these as the command, or instruction, on what to do next.

This thinking process is what helps us to get into a swimming pool and swim a particular stroke, say breaststroke, instead of backstroke. Our arms and legs can't think for themselves, so we give an instruction through our thoughts – the words and pictures. It's also the reason why it's really important to always 'say what you do want and not what you don't want' when speaking to young children. How many of us have witnessed a young child being told: 'Don't touch the vase!' Invariably, the next thing they'll do is exactly that. They won't be able to stop themselves.

There are no pictures for negative words like 'don't', 'no', 'not', or 'never', so our minds can only make pictures from the remaining words. Unfortunately, these remaining words frequently encapsulate exactly what we don't want to happen. The pictures that spring into mind will be formed from the words 'touch' and 'vase' – so the young child operating on 'auto-pilot' will have no option but to indeed, 'touch the vase'.

After an incident such as this, it's not uncommon to hear parents mutter 'Is he deaf? How many times have I told him not to do that?' or worse still, 'Is he stupid?' So now you know. It's none of those. It's also the reason why telling your child 'not to worry' about an upcoming exam or reminding them to take their PE kit to school with the words 'don't forget' is not a good idea at all.

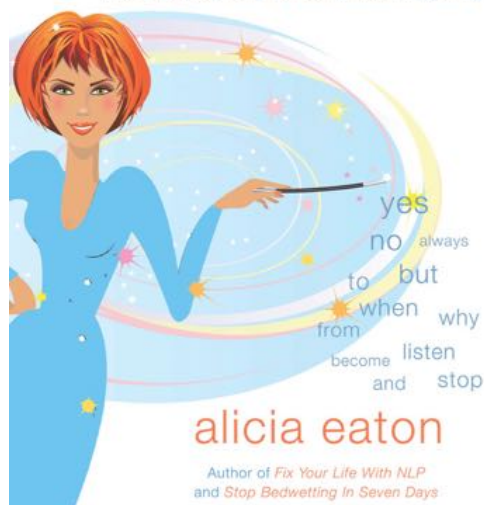
In my book, 'Words that Work – How to Get Kids to Do Almost Anything' I explain that there is a secret behind 'persuading' people to do the things we'd like them to do, explaining how and why words have such an effect on our behaviour. There are some words that parents should definitely never use – for they won't work!

So whether the issue is mealtime arguments over fussy eating or junk food cravings; an anxiety or phobia about dogs, spiders, wasps, going to school or exams; bad habits such as nail-biting and thumb-sucking; a lack of confidence or shyness, Alicia believes parents can easily learn what to say and what not to say.

Alicia Eaton is a Behavioural & Emotional Wellbeing Specialist based in London's Harley Street. Her new book "Words that Work: How to Get Kids to Do Almost Anything is available from www.success-4-kids.com and www.amazon.co.uk

WORDS THAT WORK

How To Get Kids To Do Almost Anything



Ten Top Tips for Positive Language

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1 Say what you want *do* want, rather than what you don't

Too many of us get stuck in a cycle of negative talk which quickly turns into nagging:

'Don't leave your room in a mess!'

'Do you have to leave your shoes lying around?'

'How many times have I told you not to push your sister?'

'Do you have to be such a slowcoach – we'll be late!'

'Don't forget to take your PE kit in the morning.'

Then, we're surprised when our children don't do what we want them to. But they're not mind readers and turning the phrases around in a positive way is more likely to get the result you want, for children naturally respond to the words that they hear. Compare these examples to the ones above:

'Let's leave the room tidy and put the Lego away in the box.'

'Shoes belong in the cupboard under the stairs.'

'Please leave your sister alone; she'd prefer to sit and read.'

'Let's get our skates on and see if we can be early for school!'

'Remember to pack your kit bag ready for the morning'

2 Create the illusion of choice

If 'Hurry up and get dressed for school' doesn't spur your child on, then you can nudge them in the right direction by offering the 'Illusion of Choice':

'Which t-shirt will you wear this morning? The blue one or the one with the stripy pattern?'

'Which will you put on first? The trousers or the t-shirt?'

This pre-supposes that the child has agreed to get dressed and overcomes the impasse. Likewise:

'Do you want to work on your school project today or tomorrow?'

'Would you like to organise your school bag before or after supper?'

'Would you like to taste the broccoli or the carrots first?'

This works well with young children but can sometimes be a bit too obvious for older ones and teenagers, so it is best to use this technique in a slightly more sophisticated way, like so:

'I can see there are three things stopping you from doing your homework right now: you're hungry and need a snack; you've lost your pencil and have to find a replacement; you need to phone a friend to ask which question was set for tonight. Which of these three things will you do first, I wonder? And which will you do next?'

'Let's get our skates on and see if we can be early for school!'

'Remember to pack your kit bag ready for the morning.'

3 Use presuppositions and talk as if it's a given

The word 'when' is often referred to as the most hypnotic word in the English language. It gently implies that something will be done in the initial instance:

'When you've tidied your room, we'll have some lunch.'
'When you've finished your maths homework, we'll go to the park.'
'When you've put your uniform on, we'll go downstairs for breakfast.'

As you get better at this technique, you might even be able to fit several presuppositions into one sentence:

'When you've finished your homework, you'll quickly start to notice how much easier it's going to be to solve similar problems.'



Working with the Geometric Solids



Brass Polishing

4 Front-load your sentences

Front-loading your sentences with phrases such as 'think about it', 'listen' or 'stop' sends a powerful suggestion to your child to do just that:

'Think about it. Isn't it better to look at this differently?'
'Think about it. Won't it be great to go to school knowing you are up to date with work?'
'Listen, here's what I think needs to be done next...'
'Listen, we need to quickly put our coats on or we will miss the bus.'
'Let's stop and picture what it could be like...'
'Stop... let's think about what we need to do to make it better.'

5 Say 'thank you' before rather than after

We're used to thanking people after they've done something for us, but what about thanking before it's been done? This often works really well because children naturally want to please people, especially their parents.

So next time you ask your child to wash their hands, come to the table or switch off the TV, quickly follow it up with a 'thank you, that's really helpful'. It's a great way to wrong-foot a child who was going to ignore your request – once they've been thanked, they feel obligated to perform the task.



Fashion Design Project

6 Give a reason

Children are far more likely to do as they're told if they are given some understanding of why it is being asked of them. This has been backed by numerous studies that show you are much more likely to get compliance if you give a reason for your request. For example:

'Let's turn the volume down and start being a bit quieter because we need to decide what we're going to do next and it will be easier to think of good ideas'.

'Can you help me carry the shopping from the car because there are just too many bags for me to do them in one trip.'



Reading a book

7 Put a positive spin on moaning



Moan, moan, moan – some children get stuck in the habit of complaining, don't they? You can help your child get into the habit of looking for solutions by reflecting or bouncing the statement back with a positive spin. When your child complains:

'I'm too hot' Bounce back with: 'Ah, you'd like to feel cooler. What would make you feel better - opening a window or removing your jacket?'

Or 'I hate sharing a bedroom.' - 'So, you'd like to have some space to yourself? What is it about having your own space that appeals to you?'

'The room wouldn't be messy with Emily's Lego all over the floor.' - 'OK, so you'd like your sister to tidy her toys?'

8 Use leading questions

You can continue the theme of 'looking for solutions' by using this language pattern.

'So, you've been feeling worried about your exams – to make yourself aware that you need to do something more about them?'

'I get it – you've come to the conclusion that you don't like any of the vegetables that we eat at home, in order to start experimenting and tasting some new ones?'

'So, you're talking to me about this now – in order to start making some changes?'

'So, you're telling me about how much you hated this year's maths teacher – so you can begin to look forward to the new one you'll be having when you go back to school?'



Country and Capital Map

9 Help your child to avoid using the word can't

The word 'can't' is used far too often in our conversations and doing so shuts out the possibility of achievement. To get your child out of this habit, highlight that things can and do indeed change. Your child is changing all the time, which means not being able to do something is merely transient.

When your child says: 'I can't do maths!' turn it around into: 'Ah, you just haven't yet found a way to do that particular exercise yet.'

Switch focus to talk about what your child CAN do rather than what they CAN'T:

'You completed the multiplication exercises and you just haven't yet found a way to do fractions. Don't forget, things change. We change all the time – and learning how to do fractions is just one more of those things that will gradually change.'

This will shift your child's closed-down attitude to a more open one of possibilities.



Making Tea

10 Suggest change is happening

It is possible to reinforce the idea that problems are merely transient by using the word 'become'. It suggests progression, a change of direction and that things are moving forward:

'As you become more and more relaxed about this each and every day...'

'As each week passes, you're becoming a much better swimmer.'

Other words that also suggest change is happening are:

'As you start noticing yourself becoming more and more successful...'

'As you start to change the way you organise your bedroom, you'll quickly see the difference it makes.'

'You'll be surprised how quickly you'll be able to stop making those mistakes and start getting more and more of the answers right.'

'I can see by looking at the relaxed smile on your face that a transformation is taking place.'