



# BE HAPPY

## GIVING EFFECTIVE COMMANDS

The University of Texas at Tyler School of Medicine

Clear and effective commands help children understand expectations, follow directions, and reduce power struggles. Use these simple guidelines to make your instructions more effective and developmentally appropriate.

### ✓ Direct

Use clear, direct statements and ensure you have child's full attention.

**Don't:** "Would you like to sit down?"

**Do:** "Please sit down right here."

### ✓ Positively Stated

Tell your child what TO DO instead of what not to do.

**Don't:** "Quit running around!"

**Do:** "Please hold my hand in the store."

### ✓ One Step at a Time

Give one instruction at a time instead of multiple directions.

**Don't:** "Get dressed, brush your teeth, and make your bed."

**Do:** "Please put your clothes on."

### ✓ Specific

Be clear about exactly what you want to see.

**Don't:** "Please behave."

**Do:** "Please sit here and play with your toys while I talk on the phone."

### ✓ Developmentally Appropriate

Make sure the request matches your child's age and ability.

**Don't:** (to a 4-year-old) "Go get ready for bed."

**Do:** "Pick out your pajamas and I will help you with bath time."

### ✓ Polite

Be respectful while still being firm and clear.

**Don't:** "Stop acting like a baby!"

**Do:** "Please use your indoor voice."

### ✓ Neutral Tone

Use a calm, neutral voice instead of yelling or pleading.

**Don't:** "SIT HERE NOW!!!"

**Do:** "Come sit next to me."

### ✓ Concise

Avoid over-explaining. Give reasons before or after compliance, not during conflict.

**Don't:** "The house is a mess and your toys are everywhere. You need to pick them up quickly because we are already running late."

**Do:** "We need to leave in 5 minutes. Please put your toys away."

### ✓ Necessary

Only give commands you are prepared to follow through on.

**Don't:** "Forget it, I'll clean it up for you."

**Do:** "We cannot leave for the park until you pick up your crayons."

**Remember to give lots of praise when your child follows commands!**