



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES

Cooperative Extension

Pima County – Family Engagement

The Language of Firmness

Based upon Positive Discipline for Preschoolers, Chapter 9

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The concept of Positive Discipline involves parents being kind and firm at the same time. Parents we often have a good grasp of how to show kindness. Sometimes, however, the language of firmness is a little more difficult. Parents try to be patient until communication elicits fear or open rebellion. When a child wants to do something other than what is being asked or expected, the following tools may be helpful.

They also serve as constructive alternatives to the word “no.”

1. State clear expectations ... "As soon as you finish _____, then you may _____".
2. Respond with a question "Would you like to do this yourself, or do you want/need my help?"
3. State a given (i.e. a rule or condition) "This is bath time."

Check the child's knowledge or understanding "What needs to happen before you can _____?"

4. Invite cooperation ... "I need you help...can you figure out the most helpful thing you could do right now?"
5. Limited choices... "Would you rather set the table or feed the dog?" "Would you like to get dressed now or take your clothes to school in a bag?"
6. Say what you want. "I want you to stay with me while we shop."
7. Negotiate an agreement... "If I let you _____, when will you _____?"

AND, Follow through...."Time to ____, now." Or "What was our agreement?" - then wait for their response. Don't argue, just calmly repeat the main word "now" or point to your watch. (A reminder about the importance of following through: be sure you have time to keep up with their part of the agreement.)