

Say What You Mean Mean What You Say

“Be good.”

“Get dressed.”

“Clean up.”

Fuzzy statements like these leave kids wondering exactly how they should respond. Kids interpret them at face value, which can lead to miscommunication. It helps kids cooperate when parents are very specific with their requests.

Say please

We learned that one in kindergarten! Saying please softens our request and when followed with a specific call to action it can get a kid moving, and adding a *“thank you”* in closing with your expectation that your request will be followed. *“Please take the trash out before dinner. Thank you.”* The added benefit here is that you are modeling the behavior you want your child to learn.

Be specific

When you say, *“Clean your room.”* your child hears, *“Shove everything under the bed so I can’t see it.”* In essence, he is doing what he was told. Prevent this miscommunication by being very clear - *“Please put the toys in the toy box, and books on the shelf.”* Now THAT is very clear.

Eye-to-eye

How often do you call to your child from another room and expect her to listen? Do you then follow-up with, *“Did you hear me?”* Instead, take the time to get eye-to-eye with your child. Make a clear, specific request and ask, *“What do I need?”* When your child tells you what you said it helps her to remember. For example, your child is in the other room playing. Go to her, look her in the eye and say, *“Mara, please take the trash out before dinner. Now, what do you need to do?”* When Mara says, *“I need to take the trash out before dinner.”* she has given herself clear instructions and is likely to follow through.



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By Elizabeth Pantley, author of “Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting.”
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