

# TALKING TO TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS

Often people who work with preschoolers use their voices and words to teach and keep trouble from occurring. Listed below are suggested methods for making one's verbal guidance more effective by speaking brief, firm and positive. It is essential that adults avoid the use of "No" and "Don't" when working with young children, and give them guidance about appropriate behaviors instead.

## **Positive**

Say, "PLEASE", and the following:

Sit down when you slide  
Dig in the sand.  
Use both hands when you climb.  
Sit in the swing.  
Climb down the ladder.  
Keep the sticks on the floor.  
Keep the puzzle on the table.  
Turn the pages carefully.  
Talk in a quiet voice.  
Wipe your hand on the paper towel.  
Be sure the ladder is safe.  
Sit on your chair.  
Move back on your rug.  
Walk around the swing.  
Wipe your brush on the jar.  
Put an apron on.  
Time to go inside.  
Wash your hands.  
Drink your milk.  
Drink out of your own glass.

## **Negative**

Avoid saying:

Don't stand up when you slide.  
Don't throw the sand.  
You'll fall if you don't watch out.  
Don't stand in the swing.  
Don't run up the ladder.  
Stop picking up sticks.  
Don't dump the puzzle pieces on the floor.  
Don't tear the book.  
Don't shout.  
Don't wipe your hand on your shirt.  
Don't go on that ladder.  
Don't rock on your chair.  
Don't block your friend's view.  
Don't walk in front of the swing.  
Don't drip paint on the floor.  
Don't you want to put on your apron?  
Do you want to go inside?  
Are you ready to wash your hands?  
Don't you want your milk?  
Don't drink in your friend's glass.

## **Positive**

1. Speak in a calm, kind voice.
2. Speak directly to the child; do not call to him across the playroom.
3. Speak in short, meaningful sentences which the child can understand.
4. Try to express your request in a positive way. This will help the child to learn a better or more acceptable way of doing things.
5. Get down on the child's physical level if possible. This is, stoop or sit on a low chair so that he can see your face.
6. Answer the child's questions, but do not monopolize his conversations; he needs to associate with his peers.
7. Keep your voice and facial expression pleasant.

## Negative

1. Make fun of the child.
2. Give the child a choice if he cannot have one.
3. Compare the child with another child by saying, "See how clean Jim's hands are." (This might make him dislike both Jim and you.)
4. Be dishonest with the child. Do not say, "Jerry didn't mean to hurt you." (He may be aware that Jerry did mean to hurt him.) Instead say "Jerry didn't know how much it would hurt," or "Jerry didn't mean to hit you so hard."
5. Make a child feel guilty by saying something like, "only bad boys do things like that." (Accept the child even though you do not condone his actions.)
6. Make a child feel inferior by saying, "You're a big boy now. You shouldn't act like a baby."

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR CHILD GUIDANCE

1. Build feelings of self-confidence. Exposure to belittling experiences destroys self-confidence. Building "can do" feelings encourages a child to try new things.

### SITUATION

*Peter spills the garbage he is emptying.*

### BELITILING

"Can't you ever do anything right?"

### CONSTRUCTIVE

"That's a hard job, next time you can carry it this way and it won't spill."

Johnny cries in frustration. "If you would just listen to me, that wouldn't happen."

"You need to do this first and then it will work."

2. Change the environment to change behavior. Sometimes misbehavior is caused by a situation which can be solved by changing the environment.

### SITUATION

*Betty and Bob kick one another at the table.*

### CHANGE ENVIRONMENT

Rearrange the seating by putting Betty at one end of the table and Bob at the other so their feet cannot accidentally hit one another.

Sally spills milk at every meal.

Provide a different type of glass to reduce tipping or put a small amount of milk in the glass.

3. Accept the child's decision if you give a choice. Conflicts can develop between adults and children because adults thoughtlessly give choices when they are willing to accept only one answer (when no choice is available.)

### SITUATION

*You want Billy to put on his coat to go outside.*

### POTENTIAL CONFLICT

"Do you want to wear your coat?"

### BETTER

"Do you want to wear your red jacket or blue coat?" or "It's time to put on your coat so you can play."

Resource: Guidance of the Young Child. Louise M. Langford. John Wylie E. Sons, Inc. New York, 1960.