

# Concrete Communication: It's all in the phrasing

John Paul Abner, Ph.D.

Milligan College

PCIT International Certified Master Trainer

# Children on the spectrum sometimes have a difficult time with attention.

<http://www.autism.org.uk/about/communication/communicating.aspx>

- Use their name at the beginning so that they know you are talking to them.
- Make sure they are paying attention before you ask a question or give an instruction.

# Some children on the spectrum are slower at processing language.

<http://www.autism.org.uk/about/communication/communicating.aspx>

- Slow down.
- Reduce your questions.
- If using questions, be specific?
  - What did you do in math today versus
  - How was school?
- Use visual supports
- Be aware of the sensory environment.



# Children on the Spectrum are often concrete communicators

- Avoid Sarcasm



# Overtly teach jargon and colloquialisms

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbCZn36fllg>
-

HOW TO PHRASE DIRECTIONS SO  
THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE  
OBEYED.

---

# Commands should be direct rather than indirect.

- Example “Please take your hand out of the cookie jar” rather than “Will you please take you hand out of the jar?”
- Direct commands give the child no illusion of choice.
- Easier for child to follow.



# Commands should be positively stated.

- Tell child what to do rather than what not to do.
- Come sit beside me
  - rather than “Don’t run around the room.”
- Avoid
  - Don’t
  - Not
  - Stop
  - Quit
  - No





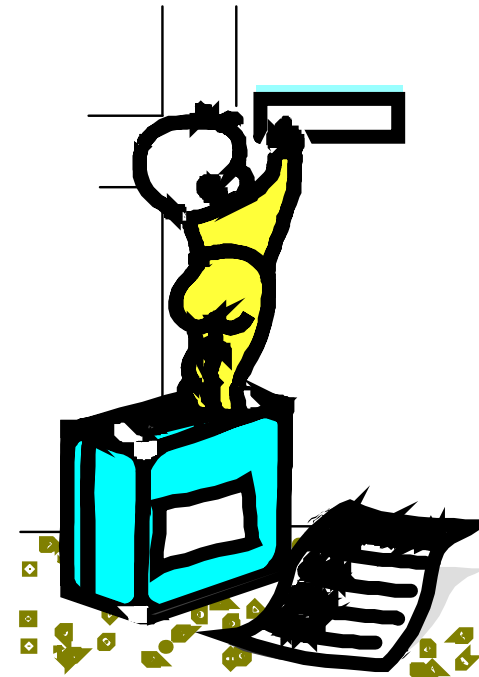
# Commands should be given one at a time.

- “Please put your shoes in the closet.”
- Rather than “Put your shoes in the closet, take a bath, and brush your teeth.”
- Helps parent to know when child is obeying.
- Helps child remember command.



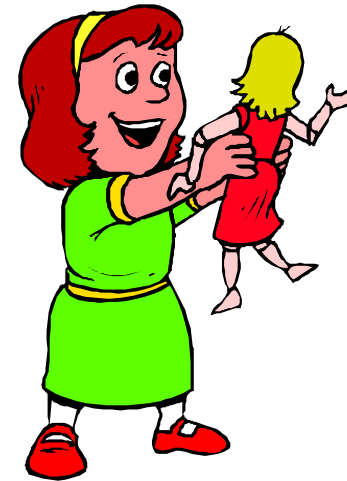
# Commands should be specific.

- Tell the child specifically what you want them to do.
  - “Please get down from the suitcase.”  
Rather than  
“Be careful”
- Avoids the vague commands of parent hood.
  - Behave!
  - Be careful!
  - Watch out!
  - Be good!
  - Hey!



# Commands should be developmentally appropriate.

- Simple, understandable commands.
- “Please put up the toy”, *rather than*
- “Please put up the chauvinistic unrealistic 1/16 scale replica of a female.”



# Give commands politely and respectfully.

- Give commands in a normal tone of voice.
- Avoids training parent deaf children.



## Explanations should be used *before a command* or after the child has obeyed.

- Give child attention for obey
- Discourages child from using “why” as a delay tactic.
- “Since, we are about to leave for the store. Please put on your coat.”
- “Please pick up the cars. (Child obeys). Thank you for picking up the cars. Now the house is safer and we won’t trip on the cars.

# Commands should be used only when necessary.

- Too many commands may frustrate child.
- Many things we use commands for we can give choices instead.



## Quick Quiz:

# Make These Effective Commands

- (To a 3yo child) Please tie your shoes.
- You are being ridiculous. Put that crayon down now!
- Put your coat on. (Child: Why?) Because I said so!
- Stop touching the crystal.
- Would you please give me that potato head.
- Please behave.
- Please take apart those blue blocks, put them in the bucket, and put on the lid.

# Quick game

- Giving Effective Commands → Simon Says
- How it's played:
  - If you think it's a DC, then follow the instruction (just like Simon Says)
  - If you think it's an IC, NTA, or other statement, don't follow the instruction (just like Simon didn't say)
- If you get it right, give yourself a point!



# 5 second rule

- Wait at least 5 seconds after you give a direct command to see if child will comply.

- .



Consider scripting your responses to directions.

