

TALKING ASSERTIVELY TO CHILDREN

1. Why is it that children are happy to do as some people ask but no others? In some families parents/Carers make many requests to children which go completely ignored. The parent ends up shouting, screaming, smacking – often feeling guilty, intimidated, helpless. Yet the same children will do exactly as another adult or their teacher asks.
2. The reason is often to be found in the way these adults speak to the children. They tend to speak **ASSERTIVELY** not aggressively BUT Assertively with Authority. **How** they say it is just as important as **What** they say.
3. Assertive adults make what is expected very clear to children. They speak to the point without being rude, paronising or demanding. They let the child know how they feel and what they want. They usually start the discussion with 'I'.
 - *I want you to tidy up now.*
 - *I will not be spoken to like that.*
 - *I am very angry that you hit your brother.*
4. Many statements which start with the word 'you' end up with an argument, either because the adult has told the child how the child is feeling 'You really must be in a world of your own' or because the child has been labelled 'You are a naughty boy'.
5. Many parents make the mistake of giving the child a choice when they are really telling them what to do.
 - *Would you like to come for dinner?*
 - *Don't you think you should be getting ready for bed?*
 - *Can't you stop disrupting your sister's game?*
6. At other times they make a statement without a clear demand.
 - *It's time for bed.*
 - *What a terrible mess!*
7. Although what we say is important, in fact the greatest effect comes from how we say it. Psychologists have suggested that only a very small amount of the impact of our requests comes from that we say (despite the agonies we may go through about how we have offended someone and how we might have said it differently).
 - *How we put our message across involves more than our voice.*
 - *We need to remember to keep our voice calm and at a normal pitch.*
 - *We also need to be aware of the message we are giving with other parts of our body.*
 - *Always look straight at the child when you are talking.*
 - *If necessary, move closer for greater impact.*
 - *Keep your hands relaxed and use them to add emphasis to what you say.*
 - *Use your hands in a 'stop' gesture if they interrupt.*
 - *Stand or sit upright but relaxed, looking in command but not cowed or worried.*
 - *Use gentle touch to make your point or to help calm a child.*
8. Assertive parents try and choose the right moment. They don't tell a child to go to bed in the middle of a favourite TV programme. They don't insist on a child eating all their food when they are out visiting. They don't choose to tell the child something important when the child is already angry about something else. In short, they pay attention to the child's rights and feelings as well as their own.
9. Being assertive is not about being domineering, bullying or aggressive. It is about showing the child that you care enough about them to stop them infringing the rights of others. It is also about treating the child as a person with opinions, needs and responsibilities.

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