

Making Requests that Decrease Tantrums

Tackling behaviors in children can be very difficult, especially when a child has a language or other developmental delay. As a parent it is important to understand behaviors in order to know how to approach them and develop systems of conflict resolution.

A typical reason for a child to tantrum is due to the parent child struggle due to noncompliance. But I must ask, how often are parents truly giving directions? Often we hear parents telling their child "Jimmy would you like to pick up your toys" or "can you stop doing that". These statements can be very confusing for a child, especially when done in an upbeat voice, because they are stated in a form of a question and not a request.

When the child "chooses" not to follow directions this can initiate an argument between the parent and child that eventually ends with a child tantruming. The direction is then ignored because the parent must first alleviate the tantrum. At the end, the parent completes the task that led to the tantrum.

Children quickly learn that tantrums can serve as a distraction from doing, stopping, losing, attaining and modifying activities or objects. A tantrum is a powerful tool that children use to communicate a range of emotions and deviate parents from requesting and following through on directions.

Giving a clear direction gives a verbal or nonverbal child clear expectations and can decrease the likelihood of a tantrum. Replacing requests with statements such as "Jimmy, pick up your toys, please" in a monotone lets Jimmy know you are asking him to do something. If Jimmy fails to comply at the first request, then saying "Jimmy, you need to pick up your toys" reinforces your beginning statement by placing an emphasis that the task needs to be done. If the child fails to comply then a consequence needs to be set.



Children that are verbal or nonverbal can learn through consistency what certain behaviors and phrases mean. This practical magic technique of giving commands by "Name, direction, Please," followed by "Name, you need to, direction" and consequences if not followed through is a method being used throughout the nation. In particular, it is being implemented with children on the autism spectrum and is effective in teaching children to follow through and stay on task.

Telling children what they need to do rather than what not to do decreases tantrums and behaviors. To learn more about this method you can view this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bzBpyBlj60&feature=youtu.be>

One last piece to consider is whether or not the behavior is truly a behavior or if the child is having a difficult time understanding directions or parent expectations. Children with an undiagnosed hearing loss or difficulty processing information don't mean to be noncompliant but have a true impediment.

Reading your child's cues and observing them prior and post to a behavior can help parents understand the circumstance of the behavior. Discussing concerns you may have with your child's behaviors with your pediatrician and/or provider can help you determine possible factors and will also give you a guide to the best method of action.