

Positive Phrasing

“*Positive phrasing*” is our method of addressing children in the Montessori classroom. Rather than constantly telling children what *not* to do, we tell them what they *can* do instead.

Parents can use this phrasing at home to reduce conflict and gently establish firm limits without reprimanding or scolding.

Here are some examples of positive statements:

“Dinner is ready. We’re all going to sit down at the table.”

“It’s time for dinner. You can come inside and wash your hands.”

“I see that your toys are on the floor. *You* can put them away in the basket.”

These are different from imperative **commands**: “put your toys away!”

They are also different from **questions**: “would you *like* to put your toys away?”

These phrases are simply **statements** telling the child what she is *going* to do

“It’s time to get ready for bed. You can put your toys away and I’ll meet you in your room!”

The word ‘*can*’ not only implies that the child is *capable* of completing the task at hand, it lends a firm confidence to the statement: this *is* what will happen.

These statements can all be said in a positive, peaceful, happy voice!

We are not scolding, lecturing, or arguing with the child.

We are simply telling her what the limits are.

These types of positive statements are gentle but firm: they allow the child to feel in control of his or her own actions but also make the boundaries very clear.

Giving Choices

It is not fair to give children a choice unless you are okay with *either* option!
Do not ask a yes or no question if you are going to get upset when the child says no.

Give the child a choice between two options you are okay with *or* give a factual statement.

For example:

It is cold outside and your child is getting dressed. You know he or she will need to wear a sweater.

Instead of a command: “Put your sweater on,” or a question: “Would you like to wear a sweater?”

Give the child a choice between two options that work for you:

“It’s cold outside. Would you like to wear your blue sweater or your red sweater?”

{Your child can have a choice, but she does not get to choose to wear her bathing suit in the snow!}

Or simply choose for her:

“Here’s your sweater. You can put it on and I’ll wait here!”

When there is something the child *needs* to do {use the bathroom or come inside, etc} then you need to make it clear that she *is* going to do it.

Feel free to give choices *within* that limit, but do not let the *child* decide whether or not it’s time to do that action.

Examples of statements with clear limits:

“Let’s go use the toilet.”

“You can go brush your teeth and I’ll wait here!”

“It’s getting cold out! You can put on your jacket or come inside.”

“It’s time to come indoors.”

Examples of statements with limited *choices*:

“It’s time to get ready for bed! Would you like to brush your teeth first or take a bath first?”

“It’s time to get in bed! Would you like to choose one of these two books or shall I choose?”

Respecting Your Child's Feelings

Because your child is not old enough to set her own bedtime and choose healthy meals for herself, she depends on you to make these types of decisions for her. You can be confident in the limits you set because in these situations, you do know better than your child and you are setting limits to keep her healthy and safe.

If the child insists that he or she does not *want* to do this action, that's okay! You can remind her that it's okay not to want to, and it's *still* what we're going to do.

Usually when presented with this firm limit, the child accepts and is ready to move on to the next thing.

Some examples:

"I understand that you want to keep playing. It's still time for dinner, so we're going inside!"

"It's okay if you're not feeling sleepy. We're going to get into bed and read a book together. Did you choose a book yet?"

{You can avoid using the word '*but*' so that you aren't negating your child's feelings and use '*and*' instead}

Make it clear that you do hear and respect your child *and* the limit is still there.

None of these phrases need to be said impatiently, loudly, or angrily!

You love your child and you can show that through your tone *and* still set limits!

Freedom within Limits

We can give the child choices to allow her to express her individuality and feel independent, but ultimately *we* are in control of important decisions.

This ‘freedom within limits’ structure defines the Montessori classroom.

The classroom is set up so that children have a few options to choose from on a low, accessible shelf.

This is the physical equivalent of offering the child two options that you are okay with.

This also avoids unnecessary conflict because we don’t have to say “no” quite so often.

You can set up areas of your home the same way.

Consider hanging a few clothing options low in your child’s closet so that she can dress herself from a small selection that you have chosen ahead of time.

Toys or games can be stored out of reach in a high closet and a few options at a time can be accessible on a low shelf or toy box for the child.

Instead of storing all of her toys in her room, consider keeping a few different toys on her shelf and rotating them periodically.

Limiting what is available makes the child’s choices simpler and the cleanup less overwhelming.

Staying Consistent

Once you have set a boundary or asked the child to do something, stick to it! Consistency is key to creating a more positive environment and showing the child that she is in a loving environment with rules she can rely on.

Most children will test boundaries {especially new ones} to see where the control lies. Usually with one or two firm reminders, the child sees that you are sticking to it and will adapt!

Sometimes this just means repeating yourself a few times. You don't need to raise your voice or use harsh words, you just need to reassure the child that the limit is still there and that it doesn't change based on how the *child* is feeling.

If you ask your child to pick up a stray lego piece on the floor and she refuses, you have two choices:

1. You can give in and pick it up for her, which shows that you didn't really mean it when you asked her to pick it up.
2. You can repeat your statement to show the child that this limit is real and that even though you love your child and respect her feelings, you are not going to change your mind!

You can pleasantly reassure her that she is both capable of doing the task *and* that you are not going to do it for her simply because she protested.

Some examples of phrases that follow through:

“I'm going to stand right here. You can do it!”

“My hands are busy right now, but *you* can put the legos in the basket!”

“We're going to lay down and rest because it's bedtime”

This is not 'mean' or demanding! When your child is perfectly capable of doing a task {putting toys away in a box, putting a book back on a shelf, putting a coat on}, the *most* helpful thing you can do is to let her do it herself!

When we ask something small of our children and we know that they are perfectly capable of doing it, it is *not* unreasonable to stick to it and ensure that they follow through.

What *is* unreasonable is creating an environment for your child in which rules are constantly changing and anything you say may or may not be serious!