

# Straight talking

**Adult assertiveness: be bossy, but kind and fair!**

*A guide for teachers, nursery practitioners and classroom assistants.*



# Adult Assertiveness

## **Be consistent.**

All significant adults need to work together and ensure consistency. E.g. both parents (and their partners if appropriate), grandparents, childminders, etc. should give children the same messages and deal with things in the same or a similar way, using the same rules and boundaries. Children become confused and often misbehave when different adults have different expectations.

Be careful not to enter into negotiations with the child. (E.g. the child replies that after just five more minutes he will do what you ask). Be reasonable, but remember that adults are in charge...always.

## **All behaviour is communication.**

Small children find all kinds of ways to express their wishes and tell you what they want or what they are not happy with! Children naturally test the boundaries. Children who are not yet talking confidently or who have fewer words to use are more likely to have tantrums if frustrated. If your child has a tantrum or a meltdown, just have a think about whether they understood what was happening or expected, and whether they were able to tell you what they wanted.

Many children take things very literally and easily become confused if our instructions are not clear. If you use too many words this can also be confusing.

## **The general rule is...**

Be clear, firm and precise and say exactly what you want.



# 8 Great top tips to being assertive

## 1. Use instructions, not questions. Say exactly what you want.

Avoid questions if it is not truly a choice. Do not use, "Will you...?", "Can you...?" Instead, say, "John, (to get attention) put the bricks away. Thank you". ("Thank you" assumes compliance).



"Lilly, put the wooden animals away. Thank you".

## 2. Use praise.

Use praise to make the child feel successful and valued. Try to be specific. Say exactly what it is that you are pleased about, e.g. "well done for sharing your cars with John". This reinforces the behaviour that you want and makes the praise meaningful.

"Holly, you are working so well with your friend today. I love how you helped him to find the matching card".



### 3. Be positive.

Asking for the behaviour that you **do** want to see rather than talking about the behaviour you wouldn't like to see. If you say, "No jumping... don't jump", a child is likely to have the word 'jump' in their head and may find it hard not to jump! Say what you **do** want - "remember, we sit on the sofa". **Avoid lengthy conversations about mis-doings.** These lead to guilt, distress, and confusion. The more distressed children become, the less able they are to think clearly.



"Maisie, you need to sit on the sofa".

### 4. Give warnings.

This is useful for children who find it hard to finish and move on and are struggling with transition times. You might need to specifically tell the child that finds it difficult and let them see a visual timer. You can use timers on your phone or kitchen timers. Five-minute warnings let children see how much time is left.

"Max, when the timer finishes it is Sally's turn".



## 5. Use 'when' and 'then'.

Use 'when' and 'then' to make what is going to happen clear. "**When** you have put the bricks in the box, **then** you can go out and play". "**When** I have finished the washing up, **then** I will read you a story". This is helpful when children are demanding attention. Never break a promise or make a promise that you may not be able to keep.



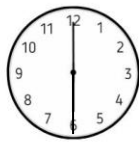
"**When** you put the toys away, **then** we can go out in the garden".

## 6. Use visuals.

Visual timelines, now and next, photos/drawings of key words etc will illustrate what you are saying. All children will benefit from visuals to support their language development. Processing language is complicated for young children and especially if they are tired, emotional, overwhelmed etc.



↓  
**NOW**



→  
**NEXT**



>>>>  
**AFTER**



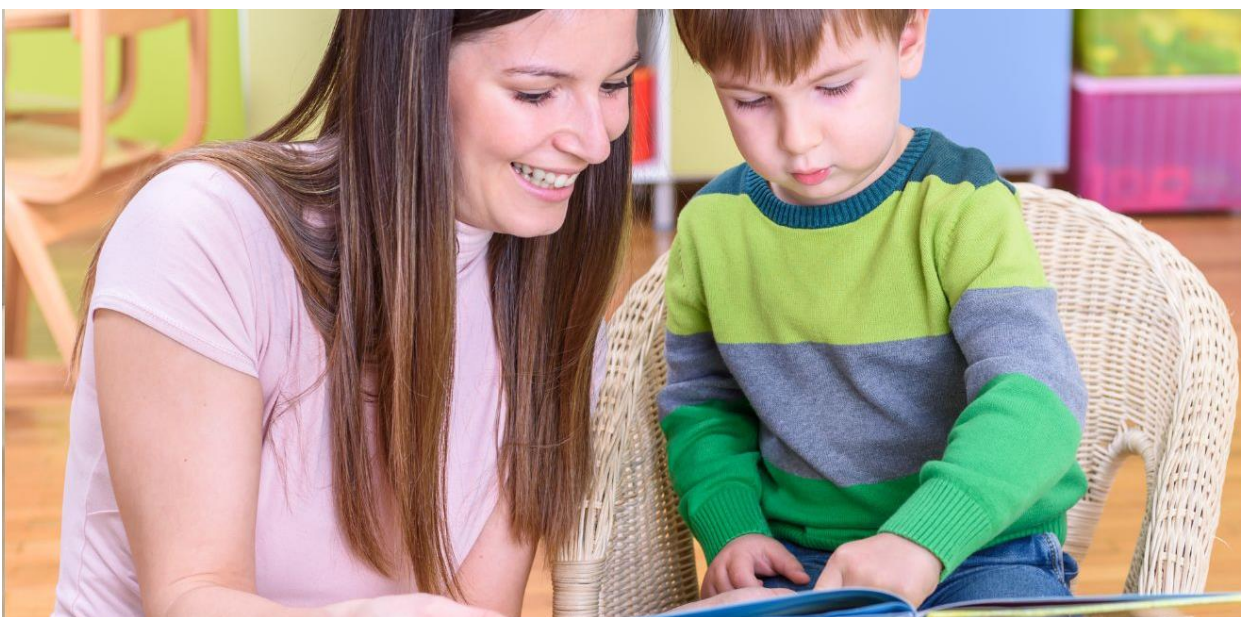
## 7. Instructions.

Many children have great difficulty in processing a sequence of instructions, e.g. "wash your face, clean your teeth and put your pyjamas on" = 3 instructions. Until you are absolutely sure that children can sequence, give one instruction at a time.



## 8. Special times.

Set aside some time when you can give the child attention without being interrupted. Even if it's just for a few minutes. You could share books and play games together. This can develop language as well as listening skills. It is also precious bonding time.



**When children are confused, they feel unsafe. In order to feel safe, they often try to take control for themselves.**

**In order to feel safe and secure, children need to know that grown-ups are always in charge. They will then feel less likely to need to take control for themselves.**

