

## **The Language of Firmness Preschool/Elementary School**

Based on Positive Discipline by Jane Nelson

As parents, we often have a good grasp of how to show kindness. Sometimes, however, the language of firmness is a little more difficult for us. When a child wants to do something other than what you are asking or what is expected, the following “tools” may be helpful:

1. **State Clear Expectations...** “As soon as you finish \_\_\_\_\_, then you may \_\_\_\_\_.”
2. **Respond with a question...** “Would you like to do this yourself, or do you want/need my help?”
3. **State a given (i.e. a rule or condition)...** “This is homework time.” “This is bath time.”
4. **Check the child’s knowledge or understanding...** “What needs to happen before you can \_\_\_\_\_?”
5. **Invite cooperation...** “I need your help...can you \_\_\_\_\_ for me?”
6. **Limited choices...** “Would you rather set the table or clean up afterwards?”  
“Would you like to put away your clothes first, or pick up your toys?”
7. **Say what you want...** “I want you to eat your broccoli without crabbing about it.”
8. **Negotiate an agreement...** “If I let you \_\_\_\_\_, when will you \_\_\_\_\_?”

**AND Follow through...** “Time to \_\_\_\_\_ now.” Or “What was our agreement?” – then wait for their response. Don’t argue, just calmly repeat the main word “now” or point to your watch. (A word of caution on this one: if you might get so busy you run the risk of forgetting to follow through, don’t choose this option!)

## **Four Hints for Effective Follow-Through (for children over the age of 5)**

Use these steps once you and your child have agreed that he/she will do a task at a certain time or on a certain day, or in a particular manner. For example, maybe you have agreed that your child will clean his room at 10:00 on Saturday. It is now 10:15.

1. Keep comments simple, concise, and friendly. (“I notice you didn’t do your task. Would you please do that now?”)
2. In response to objections, ask, “What was our agreement?”
3. In response to further objections, shut your mouth and use non-verbal communication. (Point to your watch after every argument your child makes. Smile knowingly. Give a hug and point to your watch again.) It helps to understand the concept of “less is more.” The less you say, the more effective you will be. The more you say, the more ammunition you give your kids for an argument.
4. When your child concedes (sometimes with great annoyance), say, “Thank you for keeping our agreement.” Ignore the “attitude” and thank them for the behavior.

\*Note: It is important to be sure that your child is capable of doing the task without help. If he/she is resistant to doing the task, it could be that he/she does not feel capable of completing the task independently. If this may be the case, do the task WITH your child (not FOR your child) several times, each time noting the steps it takes to complete the task. (Ex: “When you put your clothes away, it’s important to hold them carefully so they stay folded neatly when you put them in the drawer.” “I appreciate the way you put your dress straight on the hanger before you hang it up in your closet.” “Once your clothes are put away, you can put the basket back on the top of the wash machine.”) When you believe your child has the skills to complete the task independently, let him know that you have confidence that he can do the job.