



Building Blocks

for Parents

Commands and Requests

What:

A command is a statement which tells someone to do something. A request is a statement which gives a person a choice of responses.

When or Why:

Commands should be used when you want a child to obey *with no questions asked*. Requests should be used only when you want to give a child a choice about whether or not he does something.

Examples:

How Not to:

If we request something of the child instead of commanding him, we really give him a choice to act or not to act. For example, "Would you like to run upstairs and get the scissors for me?" Might cause a child to reply, "No, I don't want to run upstairs and get the scissors for you." A parent's suggestion of, "Gee, what a nice day to go outside and play!" is an unclear request or "hint". The child does not really understand anything about his *having* to go outside, so be prepared for his staying inside if he wants to.

How to:

Commands should be *short and direct*. The child should clearly understand that he must do exactly as told. There should be no choice for the child. "Put your hat on right now" is direct, and there is no choice suggested. If the child questions *when* he should put his hat on or "tests" you by asking "why?", a simple restatement of the command should be given, "I want you to go to your room," and you might add, "now." (If the child does not obey, see child-management techniques on "compliance", "time-out", and "praise".)

Follow-up:

When you have commanded a child and he has obeyed you, you should follow-up with praise. If you make a *request* and the child does not comply, you must realize that you gave him a choice. If you really want him to do something, then restate the request in the form of a command.

— *Home and Community Treatment Project,*
Mendota Mental Health Institute

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AREA EDUCATION AGENCY

If your child is 0-3 years old and you have concerns about development, call Early Access at (319) 399-6746 or 1-800-332-8488. If your child is 3-5 years old and having difficulty with vision, hearing, speech, coordination, or the ability to learn, call (319) 399-6874 or 1-800-798-9771, Extension 6874, or TDD (319) 399-6766 (Early Childhood) for services at no cost to you.

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