

Parenting Your Child Effectively: Focus On “Do”

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This publication discusses the importance of telling your child what to do instead of what not to do. This is a part of a series of 10 “Parenting Your Child Effectively” guides.

Sometimes we need something right now to help us calm an emotional discussion with our children. When things are difficult, we are most likely to “lose our cool” and say or do things that we wish later we hadn’t. We need something that settles the conflict without either the child or the parent feeling put down. There are a number of guidance principles that help us discipline in stressful times.

Guidance Principle

Focus on “do” instead of “don’t.” If you use lots of negative words (no, don’t, stop it, quit that, cut it out, shut up), your children may decide to tune you out. When children hear many negative words, these words mean less and the child tends to ignore or disobey you.

Tell your child what **to do** rather than what **not** to do. If you already have the “don’t” habit, using “do” may be difficult and take a lot of thought and practice. However, the change in how you and your child get along will make it worth the effort. Remember, talk to your children the same way you want others to speak to you. Be polite to your children by saying words such as please, thank you and excuse me.

Fill in the blanks with “do”:

Don’t	Do
Don’t throw your silverware.	Put your knife, fork and spoon beside the plate like this....
Don’t drop your milk.	Carry your milk in both hands like this. (Demonstrate)
Stop running in the house.	
Don’t talk with your mouth full.	
Don’t slam the door.	
No more toys for you. You don’t take care of what you have.	

Acknowledgment

This fact sheet series contains guidelines to help parents interact with their children. It was reformatted from NebGuide G991 (Revised May 1997) written by Herbert G. Lingren, Extension Family Life Specialist.

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Parenting**
Issued July, 2007

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