

Assertiveness- Essential Phrases (English)

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Role-play situations when your child may use the phrases below. Be sure your child gets to be on both ends of the role-play, for example, the child grabbing as well as the child being grabbed from when s/he's practicing "I have it now. You can have it when I'm done." Find at least 10 times to practice ONE phrase each day. On the way to school the next day, help your child practice that phrase some more and remind your child of situations when s/he can use that phrase at school. Write the phrase down on a paper with your child's name on it, and share the phrase your child is practicing with your child's teacher. Ask the teacher to help your child look for opportunities to practice that phrase during the day. If your child remembered to use that phrase even ONE time, that's a huge "win" for your child.

Children need a *well-rehearsed* list of phrases to be able to "use their words" to express their needs and to protect themselves when they are overwhelmed/upset. Young children need such phrases to establish respectful boundaries, to cooperate effectively, and to avoid acting out physically. Kids who impulsively "use their bodies instead of their words" don't have effective ways to use language. If your child acts out aggressively, even in self-defense, it won't be effective at school. Such phrases also help shy or reserved children to affirm their needs/wants effectively, and build self-esteem. (Avoid teaching them vague, whiney complaints such as "I don't like that!") We are teaching them to ask clearly for what they DO want in respectful, appropriate ways. Adults need to model using the same phrases.

For children with more limited language, abbreviate the phrases into a simpler form. Avoid "correcting" or saying "no!" when your child doesn't say the phrase "exactly" right – you risk discouraging and shutting your child down. Simply offer language they can repeat, and encourage them saying "Almost! You're getting it!" to keep inviting their practicing. If it's not fun, they will resist you. After they have the words down, encourage them to use a strong (not hostile) tone. Help them learn to distinguish which of their peers may require a strong tone, and which might not.

- **"I'm using it! You can have it when I'm done!"** (When a child grabs. Teach child to go and bring timer so other child knows when it's his/her turn.)
- **"May I have it when you're done?"** (Saying "*when you're done*" acknowledges that the other child has it until s/he's ready to give it up, so preschoolers are especially more likely to give it up. If your child just says "May I have it" usually preschoolers will say "no" defensively.)
- **"Respect my body! Use your words!"** (when another child pushes, hits or kicks)
- **"Ask me, don't grab!"**
- **"I have this now! Want a _____?"** (Even 2-year olds learn, for example, that if they have a book, and another child grabs it, they can *offer the peer a comparable alternative*, such as a different book. Language may be simpler at age 2, such as: "Mine! Book?" While extending another book to the other child.)
- **"Ask me, before you touch my body!"** (when another child touches, hugs or leans uncomfortably)
- **"I need to be quiet now!"** (Respectful alternative to "Shut up!" or "You're too loud!" or "You're overwhelming me!" which attempt to control/blame/criticize the other child/adult disrespectfully)
- **"Please use your soft voice!"** (or "inside voice" – helpful with adults and peers who yell)

- **“I need to be quiet and calm my body. I can’t think or talk until I calm down.”** (When child is overwhelmed, tired or having “big feelings” this teaches children to resist reacting impulsively; they instruct *themselves* to calm their bodies before expecting themselves to use words effectively. Requires adults to back off til child is ready.)
- (More advanced- helps child notice weather others are in a condition to listen and respond effectively to request.) **“I see you are busy/upset/distracted now. When you have a minute, would you _____please?”**
- **“No Thank You!!!”** (Helps children set limits respectfully with adults, for example when adults want to offer unwanted/intrusive Help, Food, Physical Affection, etc.)
- **“We have different ideas. You want X. I want Y. How can we both get what we want?”** (Teaches children a way to approach differences with acceptance and aim for win-win solutions.)
- **“I have a different idea about that.”** (Teaches child not to oppose the other child/adult directly with a “No!” or “I disagree!” – the latter polarize the child from the other person. “I have a different idea about that” allows the child to come up *alongside* the other person, with a different idea, without reacting *against* the other person to further his/her own idea.)