

Phrases to use instead of “Please…” to Gain Cooperation
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It is ingrained in us by society to use a polite “please” when asking for cooperation. The problem with this is that “please” isn’t honest or correct. It conveys a choice when there isn’t one. This can be confusing to young children, and often even adults.

~~Please go hang up that coat.~~

Let’s go hang up the coat ~~on the ground~~. I will go with you.

Let’s go hang up the coat. I’ll go with you.

Keep it short, use contractions when appropriate. This is because it is ordinary, relaxed speech which is more comfortable for the speaker and receiver.

~~Please clean up now.~~

~~Oh, it’s time to clean up. Look around and find something to put away.~~

Time to clean up. (pause) Look around. (pause) Find something to put away.

Short, clear, 1- step sentences.

~~Go wash your hands first.~~

First ~~you~~ wash your hands, then you can sit for the story.

First wash your hands. (pause) Then you can sit for the story.

Tone matters. Convey that this isn’t a no, just a series of steps.

~~You can’t play now, it’s lunchtime.~~

You can put away your lunch, or you can sit here ~~in your chair~~. Which one ~~do you choose?~~

You can put away your lunch, or you can sit here. (pause) Which one?

Two positive choices are more effective than negating an undesirable choice.

~~You need to calm down so you can play.~~

You look frustrated, you’re frowning and your hands are fists. Let’s ~~pause together and~~ breathe, and then you can choose an idea to play.

You look frustrated. (pause) You’re frowning. (pause) Your hands are fists. (pause)

Let’s breathe. (pause) I need a breath.

Narrate the moment out loud without expecting response until the friend is calmer.

~~I heard the teacher call for clean up. Would you like me to help you put away the blocks or do you want to do it yourself?~~

Do you need help?

Sometimes the simplest question is the clearest.

~~Please move away from Joe and Sara.~~

~~I will help you to move over here to keep our friends safe.~~

We’re moving over here to keep everyone safe.

This is a good time and place for the use of “we”. Use we when it really is more “you and I” doing the activity.

~~I bet you can sit quietly for the story.~~

I know you can sit quietly for the story, you were very still at meeting time.

I know you can sit quietly for the story. (pause) You were very still at meeting time.

“I know you can do this” is powerful.

~~Please give 2 animals to Joe.~~

I know sharing the animals can be hard, they’re all so nice, ~~but you need to~~ pick two to share with Joe before we can set up the animal homes.

I know sharing the animals can be hard. (pause) They’re all so nice. (pause) Pick two to share with Joe so we can set up the animal homes.

“But” diminishes the preceding comment.