

NEED STATEMENTS

What Are NEED STATEMENTS?

NEED STATEMENTS are verbal directions that describe what action is necessary or required. NEED STATEMENTS are generally simple, single item requests. An example: "I need you to sit in the chair."

Why Are NEED STATEMENTS Effective?

NEED STATEMENTS are effective because the receiver can make a picture or movie in his/her head and do as asked. The clarity of the request, the specific construction of the statement, and the delivery brings about the outcome.

Why Do You Use NEED STATEMENTS?

Children tend to cooperate with requests given as NEED STATEMENTS, which save the adult time. Adults do not have to coerce, scold or punish the child who is not following directions. They reduce power struggles and the need to give choices and consequences (i.e., time out, loss of privileges, etc.).

Are NEED STATEMENTS Always Effective?

Because of the clarity of the request (the picture or movie), the receiver of the NEED STATEMENT will usually follow what is asked. Of course, there are times when the receiver does not respond to the need statement and chooses a different outcome, (human nature at work)

How Is A NEED STATEMENT Constructed?

The receiver of the NEED STATEMENT needs to be able to see a picture or run a movie in his/her head of the request. NEED STATEMENTS use behaviorally specific words – words that will create the picture or movie. They should be genuine requests and not manipulative. The NEED STATEMENT is about helping the receiver complete the necessary or required task.

A NEED STATEMENT is a fill-in-the-blank statement (i.e., "I need you to _____").

- Avoid statements that do not create clear pictures, such as "be good," "be nice," or "be respectful." Examples of behaviorally descriptive phrases are, "say 'thank you' to _____," "hold the puppy with both hands" and "speak to me in an 'inside' voice."
- They need to be delivered with respect and in as neutral or positive tone as possible.
- Avoid ending needs statements with "please."

Examples of NEED STATEMENTS

- “I need you to stand in line by the door.”
- “I need you to hold your own hands when we go down the hall.”
- “I need you to do as I say and sit in your chair,” or “I need you to sit in your chair.”
- “I need you to take your bath now.”
- “I need you to put your glass on the counter by the sink.”

No “Pleases,” Please

Most requests of children really are demands, not requests. Requests imply that the child has a choice. If the child does have a choice, then “please” is socially appropriate. Often, adults use “please” with a request. First, this is confusing to the child because at some level they know they really do not have a choice. Secondly, it gives them “wiggle room” and potentially control of the situation. If they do not comply, the adult has to re-engage with them and they are in control.

“PREFER” Statements

If the child can have some part of a decision, the parent or teacher, using a statement with the word “Prefer” can be used. An example would be, “You have a choice of wear this or this, but I prefer you to wear this.”

The adult can always change their mind when the child’s participation in the choice is no longer an option. When the situation changes and the child can no longer have part of the decision, the adult may find it helpful to use the phrase, “I have been thinking ---. (i.e., because the weather is cold, etc.) you will need to ---.” This is a form of a NEED STATEMENT.

Reinforce the Desired Result

Children do best when they know they have correctly done as asked. Two ways of reinforcing appropriate behavior are “thank you,” and “Good ____.”

Examples (after they have followed through with the request of the NEED STATEMENT):

- “Thank you for putting up your coat.”
- “Thank you for getting your clothes off and ready to take your bath.”
- “Thank you for standing in line with me while we check out.”

- “Good putting up your coat.”
- “Good getting your clothes off and ready to take your bath.”
- “Good standing in line with me while we check out.”

Likewise, an adult can reinforce a child’s behavior any time with THANK YOU or GOOD statements. These statements do not need to follow a NEED STATEMENT.