

Words that work

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Using the right language and making connections with children will help manage and guide their behavior.

What are your most difficult behavior problems? What do you do now?

Who are the children that you feel most connected to? Why?

It's impossible to change children's behaviors without making a connection with them. What actions, attitude, and words can you use to make this connection?

In our classrooms we practice behavior reflections. Behavior reflections are non-judgmental statements made to a child or a group of children regarding some aspect of their behavior or person. The adult observes the child/children and comments to them about their attributes or activities. Such statements do not express **opinion** or **evaluation**, but are exactly about what the adult sees. Behavior reflections help children to feel (this is where the connection starts):

- That whatever they say or do is interesting
- That they are important
- That they are liked
- That they have good ideas
- That they have worth
- That they have competence

Reflecting on behaviors is as simple as stating exactly what you see. By stating what you see you might say:

- You are holding the baby very carefully
- You are covering your whole paper with blue paint
- You have 8 blocks in your tower
- You are done building with the legos
- You worked on that puzzle for a long time and now you're done

When it comes to reflecting on negative behaviors, you might say

- Your friend is crying
- I see that toy got thrown across the room
- Hitting hurts
- I notice your bike is crashing today

The point is not to judge the behavior but to help the child hear what has caused the problem and then guide the child to solving the problem. Phrases that reassure children and help them move forward:

- We can fix this...
- At school we...
- Let's figure out a way to solve this. I will help you.
- It might be helpful (friendly, thoughtful) if you...
- Let me show you another way to do that
- Let's practice the school way to...
- What can you do to help your friend feel better?
- I have a message for you...
- Using the word "come" rather than "go" when asking resisting children to do something is also helpful, as "come" is viewed as an invitation and "go" as a command.

We have three basic rules:

1. At school we take care of ourselves
2. At school we take care of others, we keep each other safe
3. At school we take care of our things

We want to tell children what to do (not what not to do), as this message is more positive and constructive.

Example of how to use the rules: Outside, child is crashing and wild on bike.

1. First- reflect: state what you see happening
2. Second-clarify the rule: which one of the school rules would cover the infraction?
3. Third-find a phrase that will guide the child toward what we want him to do: we want him to ride the bike in a way that will keep everyone safe

Our goal is not to punish, but to guide the child towards self-management (self-regulation) by using the technique of reflection and thoughtful evaluation of all behaviors that leads to connections with each child.

How we behave with children today models skills and teaches them social and emotional choices they will use for the rest of their lives