

## Getting More Cooperation From Your Preschooler

Some days, I hear myself repeating, “no”, “don’t”, “stop that” – one after the other with my young children. I get so tired of hearing myself reacting so sensitively and critically of every little thing they do.

When I take a breath and make a conscious effort to redirect their behavior or bring them by my side, into my own work, I feel a shift in the energy between us. Focusing on their positive behavior often and downplaying their mistakes and poor choices without ignoring them, helps us find a peaceful rhythm.

Today is a great example. On grocery store trips in the past the kids have been really challenging. Running in the aisles, getting things we don't need off the shelves, and begging to get in and out of the cart. I looked like your typical harried mom at Trader Joe's. Today, I decided to have a game plan. I knew that I wasn't making the experience purposeful enough for both of them so I decided to *assign them jobs*.

My six year old was in charge of marking off the grocery list and my 3 year old was in charge of putting the items in the cart. We got through the store in less than an hour and they were incredibly cooperative. Throughout our time in the store I acknowledged their helpfulness which seemed to keep them on track.

One of the most powerful ways you can shape your child's behavior and bring out their best is to notice their virtues and verbally acknowledge their positive actions. These are common ways we acknowledge our children when they comply with requests:

"Thanks, Emma, for helping mommy."

"I like it when you put your toys away."

As kind as these two acknowledgments sound, you may not realize that this sounds a lot like your children having to please you, rather than truly acknowledging them for making good choices.

Challenge yourself to acknowledge your child's positive behavior without saying "thank you" or without saying "I like it when..."

So, you may be wondering what this new kind of acknowledgment sounds like when the pleasing part is removed. Here are some examples from Linda Kavelin Popov's *Educator's Guide...*

### **How to Give a Virtues Acknowledgment**

"It was kind of you to help your brother put on his shoes, Emma."

"You really showed an attitude of service tonight setting the table without being asked."

"Wow! You were so honest admitting that you took the toy first, Emma."

"That showed a lot of courage when you told me the truth about having another cookie."

"It was compassionate of you to help your sister wash the scrape on her knee."

"You were assertive when you told your friend you didn't like that she was pushing you; you didn't push back."

### **How to Give Virtues Guidance**

"I want you to be kind to your friends by using gentle hands and inside voices."

"I want you to be patient while you wait for your turn by sitting quietly with your hands in your lap."

"I want you to be helpful and pick up the crayons."

### **How to Give a Virtues Correction**

"Be kind to your brother by not teasing him but invite him to play too."

"What would help you to cooperate with each other?"

"What would be a respectful way to say that?"

"Be truthful."

This kind of language takes time and patience to learn. By noticing my kids a few times every hour, I find that I get a lot more cooperation and helpful behavior and less sibling squabbles. Give it a try and be sure to let me know what you notice from this new language experiment. This language can also be interesting with your spouse, friends, and even strangers! It's rare these days that we verbally acknowledge others' virtues.