



Purple Playas Power Pointers

Ages: Birth to 7 years old



The Power of Words Communicating with Your Young Child with Chronic Illness




Why isn't my child listening to me?

Most parents of young children have moments when they feel like their children don't follow directions or listen. Chronic illness can increase difficulties or bring on anger, frustration, or anxiety. Children may not feel well, take strong medications or experience scary medical situations, triggering challenges or withdrawal behavior.

Not to worry, there are solutions. Your words have power! How you talk to your children can make a big difference in children's communication, feeling understood, believing in one's self, and with following directions.

In tough situations, it is instinctively human nature to respond with "fight or flight" (yell/be aggressive or give up/do nothing). As parents, we set the example. It is important to remain calm, nurturing, and respond in a positive manner, despite our own frustrations.

These tips can reduce challenging behavior and help children understand what you expect or need them to do.

-  **Show and tell.** Showing what you want can help your child better understand. Try using simple, one-step phrases. For example, if you need your child to put his/her toys away say, "Please put your toys in the box," and then model how to physically pick one item up and place it inside. Modeling reinforces understanding. You might even need to physically help your child so they can be successful.
-  **Use first/then statements.** Help motivate your child by using positive, clear, calm statements by saying "first ____, then ____." A calm positive tone promotes a belief in your child that he/she can do it and encourages follow-through with your request or demand. Here are a few examples: "First, we put on sunscreen; then, we can go outside." "First take your meds; then, we can (favorite activity)." "First, sit in your car seat. Then, you can play with (favorite toy)."
-  **Offer choices.** Choices can give your child a sense of control, even if you only offer limited choices. Combining your child's preference with choices can help engage your child. Don't things feel better if you have a choice in how or what to do? For example: "Time for meds. Do you want it in chocolate milk or juice?" or "Let's take a bath. Do you want bubbles or colored water?" or "Brush your teeth. Do you want the Elmo toothbrush or the purple toothbrush?" Having a choice feels empowering.

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-  **Limit use of negative wording like “don’t,” “no,” and “stop.”** Tell your child exactly what to do. When children hear “don’t,” “no,” or “stop,” they may know they are in trouble by your tone or body language. However, often they have difficulty knowing what to DO instead and they may do the very thing you’re telling them not to do. Here’s the “solution,” instead of saying, “Don’t spit out your juice!”; say, “Drink your juice.” Replace saying, “No running in the house!;” with, “Use walking feet.” In place of saying, “Stop hitting.” say, “Hands to self.” Clearly phrasing what you want will limit misunderstanding.
-  **Acknowledge efforts and successes (no matter how minor).** Let’s be real, even healthy children have a hard time using positive communication in tough situations. For kids, these skills take lots of practice. Children feel encouraged to keep trying when they feel validated for their efforts (and successes). For example, “I see you are scared; you are being so brave.” Or, “I could see it was hard for you to share your toy. That was very kind.” Or, “I know that shot hurt. You did it though. (hug or thumbs up).” Telling your little ones exactly how they are successful provides the motivation they may need to do it again. Plus, when siblings overhear their sister or brother being acknowledged, they often copy the skills too. Now that’s powerful!

Consistency in how we communicate is key to our success in ensuring our words have power for our children and us. Celebrate both your little and big victories.

You can do this!

*We would love to hear how the “Power of Your Words”
has worked for you! Come chat with us on Facebook: Purple Playas*



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