

Don't Poke Peas up Your Nose and Other Baffling Battles

By Patricia Morgan © 2007

“Don't poke peas up your nose!” It sounds ridiculous to be making such a statement to young children. Perhaps they never thought of it. Actually it might be fun. Haven't we all seen a fun guy pretending to be a walrus with drinking straws up his nose? Maybe there are parents screaming, “Don't shove straws up your nose!”

Certainly the line “Don't poke peas up your nose!” plants an idea to do so. Actually it creates a green nostriled image. It stimulates a picture in our minds as does the phrase “Don't think of a pink elephant.” Say that phrase a couple times, “Don't think of a pink elephant,” “Don't think of a pink elephant,” and see if you can accomplish the directive, “Don't think of a pink elephant.” How did you do?

As human beings we tend to think and imagine in pictures. “Don't” provides an empty mind screen with no image until we add directives, “Poke peas up your nose,” “think of a pink elephant” or any number of other phrases beginning with “don't.” Parents often unwittingly use picture and action words like the following:

Don't touch.
Don't shout.
Don't fight.
Don't hit.
Don't be late.
Don't swear.
Don't talk with your mouth full.
Don't argue with me.
Don't leave your shoes by the door.
Don't pick on your brother.
Don't spit.
Don't hit your sister.
Don't hit each other.
Don't make me wait.
Don't act like a baby.
Don't be so silly!
Don't give me that tone of voice.

Reasons to minimize “Don't”:

1. One of the finest gifts parents can give their children is clear, honest and whenever possible, encouraging and loving communication.

2. The media hype over the movie, *The Secret*, has people talking about the idea that *what you focus your thoughts on you will attract*. Teachers of the “law of attraction” include Jack Canfield (author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series), Denis Waitley and Dr. Michael Beckwith. In essence it means if you take charge of your thoughts, you’ll take charge of your circumstances. However, our children’s circumstances are primarily created by us. Children’s success is better supported when parents wisely choose the picture words they speak.
3. What you focus your energy and time on tends to expand. Children are often motivated to attract parental attention. If your attention is mainly on what not to do, that will be fuelled. I’ve actually heard children say, “But that’s the only way to get Mom and Dad to notice me.”
4. A positive directive is easier to follow than a negative. “Don’t drive North.” is totally confusing while “Drive West” is clear.

How to Transform *Don’ts* into Positive Action Phrasing

1. Catch yourself when you say “Don’t.” Even record it.
2. Decide what you want your child to do.
3. State it clearly.
4. Be prepared to take some kind of action if your child refuses.
5. Be willing to negotiate differences with older children.
6. As often as possible catch your child doing what is appropriate, helpful and cooperative. Make a big deal of it, as much or more as when your child is behaving inappropriately. Remember, what you focus on expands.
7. Here are some transformed statements from above to get you started.

Don’t touch .	“I want you to keep your hands by your side.”
Don’t shout .	“Remember to use your inside voice.”
Don’t fight .	“Please use your words to say what you want.”
Don’t be late .	“I’d like you home by 10 pm.”
Don’t swear .	“Please speak respectfully to me.”
Don’t argue with me .	“I’d like you to talk calmly about what you want.”

All the best in creating family cooperation, healthy conflict resolution and harmony by using positively directed words.

Patricia Morgan is an author, speaker and workshop leader. She helps people develop light hearted strategies for strengthening resilience. She can be reached at 403-242-7796, patricia@lightheartedconcepts.com or www.lightheartedconcepts.com