

Appendix 1 - Reducing the perception of demands

Re-framing demands to make them feel less 'demandy' is a key technique. There are lots of ways to do this – you will probably find that a 'mix and match' approach works best:

Phraseology and tone:

Subtle adaptations to our language and tone can benefit our children greatly. Using declarative language (statements, comments or observations), or rephrasing things to talk about an object rather than a person, and even simple things like starting rather than ending requests with the word 'please' can all make a big difference. For instance, when getting ready for school you might say "The clothes are on the bed, I'm happy to help" and then walk away, rather than "You need to get dressed now"; or if your child hasn't had a drink all day you might just place the drink alongside them and say "Here's a drink". Similarly phrases such as "I wonder whether ..." and "Let's see if ..." and including words that suggest an element of choice, such as "maybe we could ..." or "a possible idea could be ..." or "I'm not sure if ..." all reduce the perception of demands. Likewise it's helpful to avoid trigger words like "no", "don't" or "can't" – you can convey the same message using different terminology (e.g. "I'm afraid it's not possible right now") and if possible also explain the reason and offer alternatives whilst delivering the message (e.g. "I'm afraid it's not possible to go to the park right now because there's a storm, but we can try this afternoon when the forecast is better and in the meantime would you like to bake a cake or watch a film?").

Indirect communication:

Indirect communication includes physical prompts (e.g. tapping shoes instead of saying "please put your shoes on"); visual prompts (pictures or checklists (ensuring our children have an element of choice and control, for instance in the order that things are done rather than a more formal 'first this ... then that ...' approach), post-it notes or communicating via instant messenger apps can work well); telling someone else to do something whilst in our child's earshot (e.g. telling another child or adult "Please remember the rules about not running at the side of the pool" when you know that they know the rules already); leaving leaflets/books 'lying around' for our children to pick up out of natural curiosity; communicating using role play or via a third party (e.g. communicate through a favourite toy or by adopting the persona of a favourite character).

De-personalising:

Explain that the requirement is made by some other, higher authority than you – for instance that "the pool manager is shutting the pool at 3pm" or that a certain law dictates certain rules.

Distracting/turning things into a game:

The idea here is to focus on something else other than the demand, so you might say "let's see who can pull the silliest face between each item of clothing" when getting dressed or "let's list the top 10 dinosaurs" whilst getting into the bath for instance.

Using humour/novelty:

Humour is a great way to make everyone feel more relaxed and to help reduce the perception of demands; and novelty (provided the change in direction feels like a bonus/benefit for the child) can also work well.

Asking for help:

Saying that you don't know or can't remember how to do something can be a great way of making a demand more indirect.

Offering choices:

The idea here is to give a child some control without losing all control as the adult, by offering limited choices (and being willing to accept a different choice of their own that still achieves the aim) or by offering free choice within certain parameters. For instance, you might ask "would you prefer to have a bath at 6 or 7 this evening" (and accept their negotiated answer of "6.30") or you might stock a cupboard or shelf in the fridge with a range of healthy options and allow your child free choice of any items from there.

Model behaviours or apply demands to yourself (with no expectation that your child will follow suit)

For instance, you might say "I'm feeling really stressed right now so I'm going to lie down in a quiet room and listen to some whale songs to help me to calm down".