

## POSITIVE PHRASING

by Parent Encouragement Program

"Positive phrasing" means giving information about a situation in a friendly, precise, respectful way, especially when a problem or a conflict is involved. This approach facilitates your effectiveness because even sensitive information (about strong feelings or trouble) is more likely to be heard when it is presented courteously and as an opportunity.

Listeners block messages which threaten their status and sense of self-worth (i.e. blame, insults, threats, orders, criticism, etc.) because they immediately focus on defending themselves (at least psychologically) and on retaliation.

Example: "If we don't eat tonight you can all blame Tom for not remembering to set the table." versus "I'll be happy to dish up as soon as the table is set."

Specifically, positive phrasing:

- states the problem clearly (people are rarely the problem). In the example, "an unset table" is the problem, not Tom.
- states problems in low-key, depersonalized terms. (i.e. "The dog's water dish is empty." or "When people yell at me, I don't feel like answering.")
- states in positive terms what YOU are willing to do. ("I'd be glad to take you..."/ "I'd enjoy showing you our wedding pictures...")
- tells when (...when your hands are clean." "When you've finished your practicing...")
- may offer choices. ("Would you prefer to wash the dishes or dry them?")
- gives permission rather than limiting or depriving. ("You're welcome to stay in the house and play quietly or you may go outside and rough-house all you want.")
- avoids telling others what they must do or telling them what they already know.
- eliminates unnecessary verbiage (i.e. word garbage, in which the message gets lost).

### POSITIVE PHRASING IS:

- friendly
- respectful
- precise
- impersonal
- reasonable
- encouraging
- often a choice
- often an opportunity
- easy to listen to
- genuinely informative
- limit setting
- caring

### POSITIVE PHRASING IS NOT:

- angry
- rude
- wordy
- personalized
- discouraging
- deprivation
- threatening
- blaming
- an attack
- an attempt to intimidate or punish/not a challenge

\* A BONUS HINT: use humor, mystery, intrigue, and surprise where possible!