

DON'T—PLEASE DO

(The following exercise was developed by Elaine Ashcroft,
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Have two students leave the room. Bring a chair to the front of the room. Tell the class that you are going to try two methods of child guidance on the students who left. The objective is to get the students to complete the task of sitting in a chair, folding their arms, and crossing their legs. Assign one student to record the time from when the first student comes into the room until he/she has completed the task. Ask the class to cooperate in the experiment by not talking or helping the students in any way. Tell the class that they may find it interesting to note that parents use the first method more commonly than is the second.

Now, let the first student back into class and say nothing to him/her. Whenever the student does anything other than the intended task, scold him/her and tell her/him what NOT to do.

Examples:

The student comes in and stands looking at the teacher. The teacher says, "Well, don't just stand there, and don't look at me that way."

The student walks in the direction of his/her own seat. The teacher says, "Don't go back there."

The student comes back and puts her/his hands on his hips. The teacher says, "Don't put your hands on your hips."

Continue this for several minutes using lots of DON'T statements. REMEMBER, do not tell the student what TO DO, only what NOT to do. (You may not be able to get the student to perform the task. If not, let the first student sit down.)

Invite the second student into the room. Simply turn to the student and ask him/her to sit in the chair, fold his/her arms, and cross his/her legs.

Now compare the amount of time it took for the first and second student to complete the task.

(NOTE TO THE TEACHER: You may also do this with the entire class. The task might be to have the students stand and face the back of the room with their arms folded. Follow the same procedure given above, and then compare the amount of time the group took to follow the directions.)

It is interesting to see how quickly we can get someone to do what we want if we just state clearly what we want him or her to do. Parents are often frustrated because they spend so much time telling the child what NOT to do rather than what TO DO.

Children are able to comply with directions and guidance quicker and with less frustration when you tell the child what they can do instead of what they can't do. When you only tell them what they can't do it leaves that child to guess what they should do instead. This is time consuming and stressful to all involved.