

DIRECTIVES THAT DEFY RESISTANCE

Parents are in the unpleasant position of telling children to cooperate and follow rules over and over. Asking children to perform tasks gives them the option to say no. They will test the limits of this “freedom” by refusing. True requests are phrased, “Would you . . . ?” These should be reserved for relationships with spouses and friends with whom parents are not in a position of authority. Outright demands and orders can also provoke resistance. You can lighten your load as taskmaster by using the following “indirect directives” that speak to the part of every child that wants to cooperate and succeed:

Truth or Choice

1. A truism is a statement of fact that cannot be denied—“You can tell people how you feel without saying that they are stupid.”
2. A bind restricts children to a narrow range of responses, allows them to make an acceptable choice and provides an image of success—“Would you rather say, ‘I don’t understand you’ or, ‘I don’t agree with you?’”
3. A double bind asks a question in a way that makes children agree regardless of how they answer—“Do you know how you are going to say that differently?”
4. A false choice is a double bind worded as an option—“If you’re not going to do it right, just do it!”

Suggestions and Implication

5. An underlying assumption uses a pause to insert an indirect suggestion—“I’m not sure when . . . you will find a polite way to say that.”
6. Questions are an easy way to embed suggestions and double binds simultaneously—“Just how will you . . . say that differently?”
7. An implied directive assumes something will happen and suggests a way to signal when it is done—“As soon as you . . . think of a nicer way to say that . . . you can just walk away.”
8. Serial suggestions use the momentum of linking a difficult task or a response children are not likely to make with expected behaviors—“Don’t change your tone of voice until you’ve finished rolling your eyes at me.”

Confuse to Create Change

9. The word “try” blocks the action following it—“You can try to keep saying nasty things to people.”
10. Dares push children to do something they are reluctant to do—“You couldn’t say that politely even if you wanted to.”
11. Reverse psychology encourages children to do what they are doing to help them do the opposite—“Someone your age couldn’t think of a nice way of saying that so you might as well keep dishing out insults until it isn’t worth the effort.”
12. Pairing opposite words adds confusion—“Sometimes the harder you try to insult people, the easier it is to be kind.”

Indirect directives are equally powerful when used in a negative way—“Please try to do the dishes” blocks cooperation. “Will you ever learn to do anything right?” implies failure. With this kind of talk parents can literally hypnotize children to do the very behaviors they least want them to do. It is fine for parents to be direct and say, “I would like you to . . .” However, the more ways parents have to make daily demands, the less children will be able to resist them.

The following chart shows how the 12 types of indirect directives can address a variety of behaviors by approaching children through the “back door” of their minds. Notice embedded suggestions to be spoken with special emphasis. Pregnant pauses (. . .) and words like “surprising” help children focus their attention:

Behavior	Indirect Directive	Type
Attitude	Surely you could try to complain a little more	9, 11
	Before you even . . . think of agreeing, let me hear your argument.	8, 11
	You wouldn't dare to . . . talk this out . . . when you are so angry.	5, 10
	I don't think you could even . . . begin to look at me . . . right now.	5, 10
Compliance	How long will it take you to . . . get ready for your bath?	6
	Should we get pizza after you mow the lawn or when you're done?	4
	Do you know exactly when . . . you will start washing the dishes?	3
	Don't . . . start the dishes . . . until you've had a moment to relax.	7, 11
	On your way out the door, you can put your clothes in the closet.	1, 8
Cooperation	Can you tell me what is good about the agreement we reached?	3
	I don't know how . . . you will solve this problem.	5
Honesty	It might take you 2 hours or 2 days to . . . decide to tell me the truth.	2, 5
	You can take time to . . . reach your decision.	1, 5
	Your can forget to lie or . . . remember to tell the truth.	4, 12
Hyperactivity	You can't even stand still without wiggling and wanting to sit down.	5, 8, 10
	I'm not sure how . . . you will learn to focus and concentrate.	5
	It's surprising . . . how politely you could get out all that extra energy by wiggling your toes or doodling on a scrap of paper.	2, 5
Manners	When you know that . . . you will not play with your food, you can pick up your fork and start eating.	7
	It can be fun to . . . remember to thank people for having you over.	1, 5
Tantrums	This is the best of your worst tantrums.	12
	Pretty soon you will . . . get so weak from screaming that you'll find out you can't even . . . be calm.	5, 7, 8
	The harder shake your fist at me, the better you'll start to feel.	8,10,11
Violence	While I'm sitting on you, you'll have plenty of time to figure out how you are going to . . . stop giving everyone a bloody nose.	5, 8
	If any part of you wants to . . . stop all this fighting . . . it could make your eyes blink . . . Otherwise, it would just have you stare.	3, 4

Indirect directives will not eliminate the need to withhold privileges or take action; but they can implant subliminal suggestions before children have a chance to resist. However, even the best hypnotist can only implant acceptable suggestions. Therefore, do not use this approach to attempt to alter beliefs and interests that children hold dear. Harness the power of positive speaking to help children accept reasonable requests.