



YOUR WORDS MATTER

Many children with ASD have “**Mind Blindness,**” meaning they are often literal and don't know the inferred intent of language. This often leads to difficulty understanding another person's perspective.

This can mean certain words are often very confusing, for example, children with ASD typically struggle with the words **STOP** and **NO**. If an adult says “STOP” what does that mean? Do they mean stop breathing? Stop looking? Stop moving? STOP does not tell a child what they can do – it only tells them what they shouldn't do. When you have to use STOP make sure you add a little bit more information so that the child knows what they should do, i.e. “**STOP working, pencil down, it's time to listen.**”

“NO” will also often escalate inappropriate behaviours rather than reduce them. Some children are very literal so when an adult says “No juice,” some children would interpret this as they will NEVER be able to have juice again, when what the adult really meant was the juice was “**all gone**” or the child could have it **'later.'**

Another instance where confusion may occur due to this literalness is in the use of the words **'could,' 'would'** and **'can'** as they often sound like a choice rather than a direction. For example when asked, “Could you start your work?” children may just answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ rather than taking action! It is therefore better to simply say “**Start work,**” to avoid this confusion.

Although these instructions may sound over-directed they clearly convey the intended message to the child. It is important children know what your words mean, so they can respond appropriately for their own safety and learning.

Focus on telling the child what you want them to do rather than focusing on what they are not to do e.g. if they rushed into the bathroom and started playing with the taps, rather than saying “No!” say, “**First toilet, then wash hands.**” The latter is far more supportive and directive for the child.

In the table on the following page I have a few ideas to get you started with thinking about how “**your words matter**” and can be replaced so you “**Say what YOU mean**”

Your Words

Matter!

INSTEAD OF...

TRY



No yelling. Be quiet.

Use a softer voice



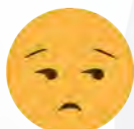
What a mess!

It looks like you had fun!
How can we clean it up?



What are you doing?

I'm here if you need help.



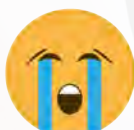
No!

Wait, Now, Next, Later.



Do you have any questions?

What questions do you have?



Stop crying.

It's ok to cry. Take a deep breath.
Tell me what's wrong.



Calm down.

What can I do/get to help
you calm down?



That's wrong.

Mistakes are good opportunity
to learn. What else can we try?



It's not that hard.

You can do hard things.
Have a go. Try another way.



Don't swear.

Can you say that differently?
That is not appropriate language.



Stop!

Eyes this way. It's time to listen.
Pack away.



No running!

Can you please walk.