Declarative Language & PDA

No Pressure PDA & PDA North America

Not every technique works the same for every child, so here I will try to explain what declarative language is, why it can help communication with some PDA children, and a few warnings or alternatives if declarative language turns out not to be a perfect fit for your family.

What it is:

Instead of direct commands "do this thing" it is statements in the form of observations that leave room for the other person to choose how they respond.

Why it can help PDA kids:

Imperative language (direct commands) can trigger a demand avoidance reaction because it feels like there is no choice therefore increasing pressure.

Declarative language when done right makes room for the child to think of their own solutions or come to natural conclusions themselves.

Examples:

Imperative Language: "go put your coat on"

Declarative Language: "It looks pretty cold outside"

Imperative Language: "pick up your toys, please"

Declarative Language: "there are a lot of toys out and I'm worried about breaking them or one of us hurting ourselves."

Warnings:

Declarative language should be paired with other low-demand lifestyle supports and make room for a child's "no". If a child is not able to pick up their toys for instance, adults should be ready to either offer to help or take over the task completely.

A child may also have different sensory needs that mean that they don't need a coat, or that certain shoes hurt, or that they are overwhelmed by how many toys there are and need help breaking the task down. Declarative language can help keep the door open to learning more about your child by keeping tasks an open conversation.

Some children prefer imperative language instead because declarative language is pressure for them to think of a solution.

Declarative language isn't intended for safety situations or settings where an adult cannot accommodate alternative ideas, otherwise it's misleading or dangerous.

Adaptations:

One adaptation to declarative language is to diffuse requests by including everyone in the activity. "Let's put on our coats" spreads the demand out equally.

Declarative language plus modeling the choice you think is ideal also works well. "It's cold outside" as you put on your own jacket sends a specific message in an indirect way.

Ultimately:

Declarative language is one tool to help PDA families and can work very well in conjunction with other low-demand supports.