Effective Commands

Definition & Rationale:

Effective commands are precise verbal instructions given to students by teachers and other school personnel to increase the probability of student compliance.

When commands are clear and concise students are more likely to understand and comply to instructions, resulting in reduced behavior and academic problems.

Characteristics of Effective Commands:

- **Only given when you have the student's attention**
  - Use the student's name and make eye contact

- **Given one at a time**
  - Wait for the student to complete the first step of the direction before giving the next step in the sequence
    - When multi-step commands are given students may forget steps in the command or mishear the directions

- **Clear and simple**
  - Use specific language to tell the student what you would like them to do
  - Don't form commands as questions. Questions allow the child to say "no"

- **Realistic and Enforceable**
  - Make sure the student has the skills to comply with the command given
  - Can be measured and it is clear if the command has been followed

- **Time given to comply**
  - Give students 5 to 15 seconds to comply with the command

Examples of Effective Commands:

- "Jacob, put the table toys away."
- "Carla, bring me your red folder."
- "Row 1, line up for lunch."
- Class, use walking feet in the hallway."

Next Steps:

- Practice giving effective commands
- Use the tip sheet to reflect as you practice effective command giving
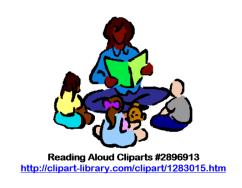
Literature References:

Walker, H. M. & Walker, J. E. (1991). *Coping with noncompliance in the classroom: A positive approach for teachers*. Austin, Texas: Pro-Ed, Inc.

Webster-Stratton, C. (1999). *How to promote children's social and emotional competence*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Inc.

Giving Effective Commands

1. **Getting Ready to Give the Command…**

   - Make sure the student is paying attention to you.
     - Use the student's name.
     - Make eye contact.
     - Consider lightly touching the student's shoulder if needed.

2. **Giving an Effective Command…**

   - Give one command at a time.

   - Give clear and simple commands.
     - Be direct – avoid complex sentences and instructions.
     - Tell the student what you would like him/her to do – do not ask him/her to do what you want unless he/she really has a choice and can actually say "no."
     - Give polite and positive commands – avoid criticisms.
     - Use start (not stop) commands – say "start using your walking feet" rather than "stop running."

   - Give realistic commands – make sure the student actually has the skills to comply with the command.

3. **After You've Given the Command…**

   - Allow time to comply.

   - If the student fails to comply, remind him of the rules and the consequences, and then repeat the command.

   - If the student still does not comply, apply the consequences in a matter-of-fact manner.

4. **Helpful Tips for Giving Effective Commands…**

   - Give a warning that the command is coming – say "in five minutes, I will tell you it's time to clean up."

   - Give choices, as long as both choices work for you – say "Block center is full right now. You can go to table games or art center."

Adapted from: Webster-Stratton, C. (1999). *How to Promote Children's Social and Emotional Competence*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Inc.