

Declarative Communication

Definitions

Imperative Language:

Imperative communication uses language forms that are “instrumental” in their objectives, meaning that language is being used as a tool to accomplish a specific goal. Imperative forms of communication are about “means to an end” relationships. Imperative language presumes that there is a single, shared reality that is understood by both the speaker and the listener. Uses for imperative language include making demands or requests, asking questions, offering choices, and “socialized” or “scripted” language (hello, my name is _____). This type of language relies on concrete (or absolute) thought processing. Examples of imperative language are directives (“Pick up the red car”), choices (“Select the red or blue car”), right/wrong assertions (“One of these cars is the correct car”) and questions (“Do you like the red or the blue car?”)

Declarative Language:

Declarative communication uses language forms that involve relative thinking processes. Declarative communication implies that there can be different realities. Research shows that children with ASD use declarative communication less than 1% of the time, compared with neurotypical children who communicate using declaratives about 33% of the time. The importance of using declaratives in RDI® is that this is the language of experience sharing, perspective taking and allying. Declaratives are used for referencing, regulating, anticipating, reflecting, wondering, as well as serving many other important functions in making emotional connections with others. In addition, the non-verbal communication that accompanies declarative communication carries additional meaning and interest. It provides a window for your child into your inner world, encouraging curiosity about what you are thinking, feeling and experiencing.

RDI Goal

Increase the use of declaratives to 80% of all communication with your child. Many parents report a noticeable change in the quality of their child’s interactions almost immediately, once they make a consistent effort to communicate in this manner. Examples of declarative language include invitations (Let’s play with the cars”), declamations (I’m tired of playing with the cars!), self-narratives (“I’m walking over to the table to pick up some cars”), indirect prompts (“Now is a good time to choose the car you want to play with”), and celebrations (“We did it!).

Declarative Communication

That was the best one yet!
I am so tired.
Look, there’s a giant spider!
Watch out!
Here I come.
I hope it gets here soon.
Uh oh!
I just remembered something.
We can do it!
I’m not having fun.
Something is going to happen.
These strawberries look delicious!

Imperative Communication

Pick that up.
Which one do you want?
What did you do today?
Stop that.
Look at me.
Come over here.
Say “thank you”.
What do you call this?
Do you want to come with me?
What do you want to do next?
How was school?
Eat your strawberries.