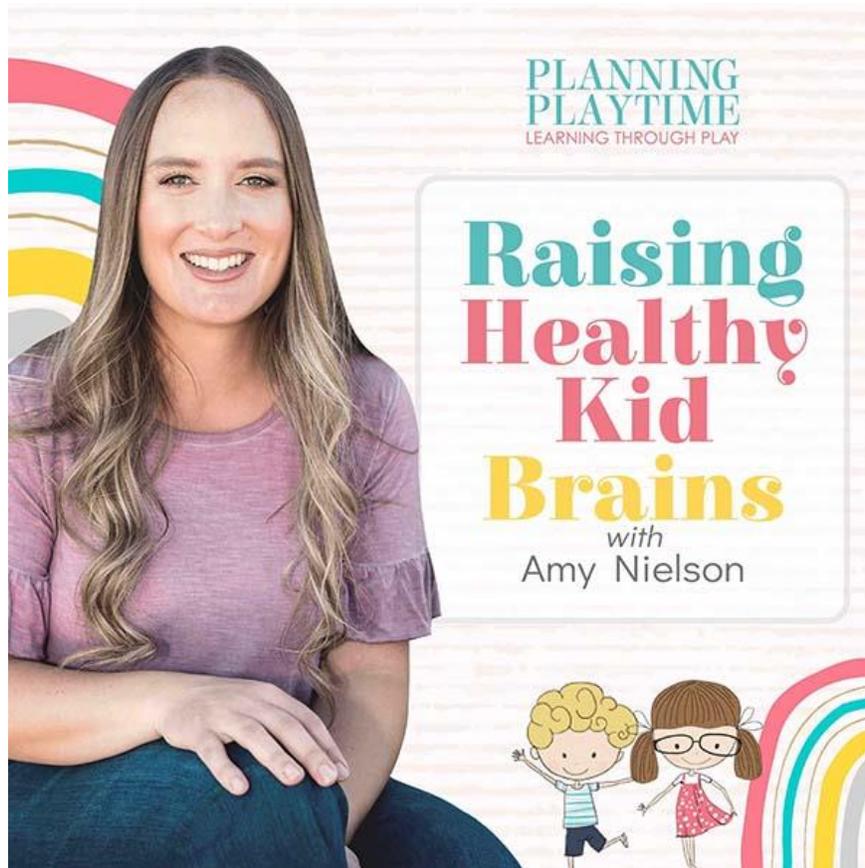**Ep #9: How To Use Less Negative Language With Your Kids**

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

<u>Amy Nielson</u>

Ep #9: How To Use Less Negative Language With Your Kids

What is negative language? Chances are you have probably used it with your child. Today we'll talk about what it is, how it affects a child's brain and how you can easily spot it and swap it out for something more effective. I'll even give you some quick examples in this upcoming episode coming right after this.

Welcome to the Raising Healthy Kid Brains podcast where moms and teachers come to learn all about kids' brains, how they work, how they learn, how they grow and simple tips and tricks for raising the most resilient, kind, smart, compassionate kids we can. All while having lots of grace and compassion for ourselves because you know what? We all really need and deserve that too. I am your host, Amy Nielson. Let's get ready to start the show.

Have you ever used a phrase with your child like, "Stop running in the hallway" or, "Don't hit your sister"? If you are a parent or you work with young children you have probably said phrases very similar to this, we all do it. And what it's called is negative language. When we're telling a child to stop doing something, or to not do something, or don't think about something, or no, those are examples of negative language. Now, research has shown us that negative language is actually very ineffective. And we're going to talk about two reasons why it's ineffective and does not work today.

And then we're going to talk about some alternative options and how you can easily flip it into something that's very effective. So example number one, there was actually a famous study done by Daniel Wegner about white bears. And what he did is he had some subjects come in and he told them, "Hey, we're going to sit here for five minutes and talk and I need you to not think about white bears. You can't think about white bears, if you do you need to ring this bell." And the subjects failed miserably, they thought about white bears actually a lot.

And then he tried something again at the end and he said, "Okay, now for the next five minutes I want you to think about white bears." And gave them that positive language, to think about white bears now. Now, there was another group that he told to think about white bears the whole time. And this first group that were told not to think about white bears actually thought about the white bears much more than the group that had been told to think about white bears

the whole time in that second five minutes when they were told to think about white bears.

So here's what happens. We tell people not to think about something, guess what they think about? The thing we told them not to think about because that's what they heard in their brain and that's what their brain's focusing on. Try it on yourself, you can say something like, "Hey, don't think about sugar." And then exactly what's happening in your mind right now, what popped in your head? It was sugar and now you're probably going to think about sugar for the next couple of minutes. So using negative language requires something called double processing. So first a child has to process what we've told them not to do.

So the first thing we said, "Don't do this." They have to think about that, process that. Then they have to try to figure out what they're supposed to do instead. So it's a two part process which requires more work for them. If we use positive language instead we remove half of the cognitive work that they have to do because now they only have to think about doing the thing about we asked them to do. Here are just a couple of examples of what that might look like. So instead of, "Don't run down the hallway", "Can you walk when we're in the hallway, please?" Instead of "Don't hit your sister", "Keep your hands to yourself, please."

Or here's why I like to actually get a little fun because kids love fun, and they love silly, and they love ridiculous. And so you could do something like, "Hey, can you keep your hands on your left toe." And this is going to capture their attention and make them giggle, and kind of have a positive happy experience instead of the negative experience of please stop hitting your sister. You could try something like, "Hey, can you touch both of your elbows. "And just give them something else to think about or focus on.

What we're doing with this is drawing the child's attention to what we actually want them to be doing and thinking about. And what we are eliminating is this double process, first focusing on and thinking about, overly thinking about the thing that we want them to stop doing. And then we're also cutting down the amount of work that they have to do to be able to accomplish the task that we want them to do.

[Raising Healthy Kid Brains](#) with Amy Nielson of Planning Playtime

Ep #9: How To Use Less Negative Language With Your Kids

Okay, we talked about there being two really good reasons why this negative language doesn't work. The second one is that when a child is told no, or given a lot of negative language repeatedly, their fight or flight response kicks in. Their amygdala's at work and they kind of start to respond more with anger, with tears, they might shut down. This is kind of a stress response that they're having. On the other hand when a child is hearing positive phrasing we start to engage their prefrontal cortex which means that they are more curious, they're more resilient and ready to problem solve.

Here are a couple examples of what that might look like. So instead of, "No, you can't have ice cream", you could say, "You can have dessert after dinner", or even something like, "Hey, instead, let's go for a bike ride together." Another option might be instead of saying, "I can't help you right now", you could say, "Can you find 10 red things in the living room and then I could help you as soon as I finish on this phone call." Doing this work to really support the child's development of the prefrontal cortex is so important because children are developing their prefrontal cortex up until age about 26.

And so the more we use that and the more of those connections we build, we're actually helping them develop that part of their brain faster and better. This is also so good for your relationship with the child because it's based in positive language, positive interactions instead of maybe defaulting to negative talk and negative language. Negative language can also have an impact on our child's self-worth.

Often when we're using negative language it's accompanied by non-verbal cues that we might not even be aware of, facial expressions or body language, things like that, that are helping a child feel maybe rejected or feeling a threat to their secure attachment to us. On the other hand, positive language has more of a calming effect on children and can help boost their self-worth and self-assurance.

So just as a recap, negative language actually doesn't work very well. It makes kids work twice as hard to be able to do the behaviors that we want them to do. It increases their stress levels and puts them into fight or flight instead of into their curious, resilient ready to problem solve brain. Now, this doesn't mean that

we have to be perfect but if you can start noticing when you're using negative language or negative language phrases with your child and just try to just swap out the words a little bit to something positive.

You'll start to see an impact in your relationship with your child as well as their response to the things that you're asking them to do. Give it a shot, we'd love to hear all about it. You can leave a note here in the comments or tag us on Instagram @planningplaytime.com and we'd love to hear about your experience.

Thank you so much for spending some time with me today and listening to this episode of the Raising Healthy Kid Brains podcast. We are a brand new podcast which means we are harder to find than the perfect LEGO in a big box full of LEGO. And we need your help so that we can reach more moms, and parents, and teachers with this information about their children's brains. So how can you help? You can follow this podcast wherever you listen to podcasts and leave us a rating and a review. That would mean the absolute world to us.

And hey, we want to make it fun because at Planning Playtime we are all about fun. We made a very special gift for you and your kiddo. And your follows, ratings and reviews are going to unlock different parts of that gift over the next few weeks. It's going to be so much fun so after you follow, rate and review the podcast, head over to planningplaytime.com\podcastlaunch to find out where we are and how much of that gift you can go and get for your child right now. Thanks a million and I will see you on the next episode of the Raising Healthy Kid Brains podcast.

[Raising Healthy Kid Brains](#) with Amy Nielson of Planning Playtime