



15 Cooperation Tools

A partial list of some of my favorite tools for inviting cooperation

For many but not all of the tools below, I've used my pet peeve, leaving wet towels on the floor, as an example.

1. **Slow Down:** Being in a constant rush puts pressure on everyone. Plan ahead, build in some time cushions, and take a deep breath before engaging with your child.
2. **Keep it Short and Simple:** Drop the planned lecture and make a simple and respectful request instead (10 words or less.) "Hello sweet boy. Please hang up your towel now."
3. **Eye-to-Eye:** Get down at your child's level before making a request. This doesn't mean a stare-down. Some kids get anxious with eye contact. The point is simply to be in the same room, at your child's level, before making a request.
4. **Routines / Routine Charts:** Ask your child to help you create a bath time routine that includes hanging up the towel. When it's time to hang the towel you can simply point to the routine chart. Or ask, "What's next in your bath time routine?"
5. **Draw a Picture or Write a Note:** "Hi! It's your towel here! Please put me on the rack!"
6. **Take Time for Teaching:** Sometimes, the reason your child is not cooperating is because they haven't yet developed the skills to be successful. During a calm time, teach your child how to hang up a towel. (And re-teach, and re-teach, because skill acquisition takes time and lots of practice and learning from mistakes)
7. **Describe what you see -- without judgment:** "I see a wet towel on the floor."
8. **Act (use nonverbal communication):** Take child gently by the hand into the bathroom and point to the wet towel on the floor.



9. **Clarify Expectations:** “As soon as _____, then you can / I will _____.” “As soon your towel is hung up, then you can read your book.”
10. **Laugh:** Use humor / Make it a game.
11. **Curiosity (What? and How?) Questions:** “What do we do with wet towels after bath/shower?”
12. **Limited Choices:** “Would you like to hang the towel on the rack or on the hook?” or “Would you like to hang it now or after you’re dressed?”
13. **Try a little “ELC™”** (Empathize, state the Limit, then give a Choice or ask a Curiosity Question): Empathize: “I know it’s a pain to hang up the towel.” Limit: “And towels belong on racks.” Choice: “Would you like some help or can you do it on your own?”
14. **Joint Problem Solving / Make Agreements:** During a calm time, ask your child to share their feelings about the problem, then you share yours, then brainstorm solutions for a win/win. Pick a solution you can both agree to and try it out for a week.
15. **Focus on Solutions** rather than blame, shame, and pain. Dr. Jane Nelsen of Positive Discipline notes that a good solution is *related* to the problem, *respectful*, *reasonable*, and *helpful*! In the wet towel scenario, a good “solution” might be to install a hook in the wall that makes it easier for child to be successful. Another “solution” might be to have the child draw a picture and post it on the bathroom wall as a reminder to hang their towel. Everything on this list of tools is also a “solution.”

Note: No tool works every time, with every child, in every situation. That's why you need many tools! And all tools “work” better when you have a strong, connected, mutually respectful relationship with your child as the foundation.

Sources: “Teaching Parenting the Positive Discipline Way” by Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott, and “How to Talk So Kids Listen and Listen So Kids Talk” by Mazlish and Faber. “ELC” is a mnemonic created and trademarked by Marcilie Smith Boyle’s Working Parenting.