

WHAT IS DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE?

Declarative language is a communication style that focuses on sharing information, thoughts, feelings, or observations without requiring a direct response or specific action from the listener.

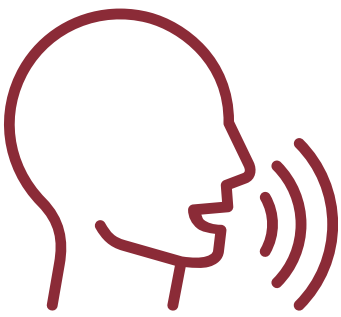
Instead of telling someone what to do (imperative language), declarative language involves making statements about the world or one's own experience. A directive like 'put your shoes on' becomes a statement like, 'I see your shoes by the door. We leave in 5 minutes.'

DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL LEARNING CHALLENGES

Kids and Teens with social learning challenges and who struggle with social cues and flexible thinking often benefit from declarative language.

Declarative language encourages more open-ended thinking and reduces the pressure to respond immediately, giving space to process information in a less stressful way.





How to use declarative language

IMPERATIVE LANGUAGE

Requires a correct response
Sounds like a question, demand or
an instruction

Clean your room

Put your shoes on

Hurry up and get ready
for school

Eat your breakfast now

DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE

No pressure for an immediate
response.

Sounds like a statement, or an
observation.

- I notice your room is messy.
- I hope you have time to do a quick tidy before bed tonight.
- I wonder what your plan is for tidying your room
- We leave in 5 minutes. I see that your shoes are by the front door.
- You're going to need your shoes on
- It's 7:20 am, I'm worried you are running out of time to be ready
- We leave in 15 minutes. I see your homework on the bench. Wondering what else you need?
- I wish there was more time in the mornings. I hope you'll be ready to leave in 10 minutes
- The cereal is on the bench. We leave in 15 minutes.
- I remember you've been enjoying cornflakes, they're on the bench
- I'm worried you're running out of time to eat breakfast

IMPERATIVE LANGUAGE

Go and have your shower

Look at me

What did I say?

Hug, grandma goodbye

Stop fighting or we'll stop the game

Email your teacher now to tell them you forgot your book

What should you be doing?

What are you forgetting?



DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE

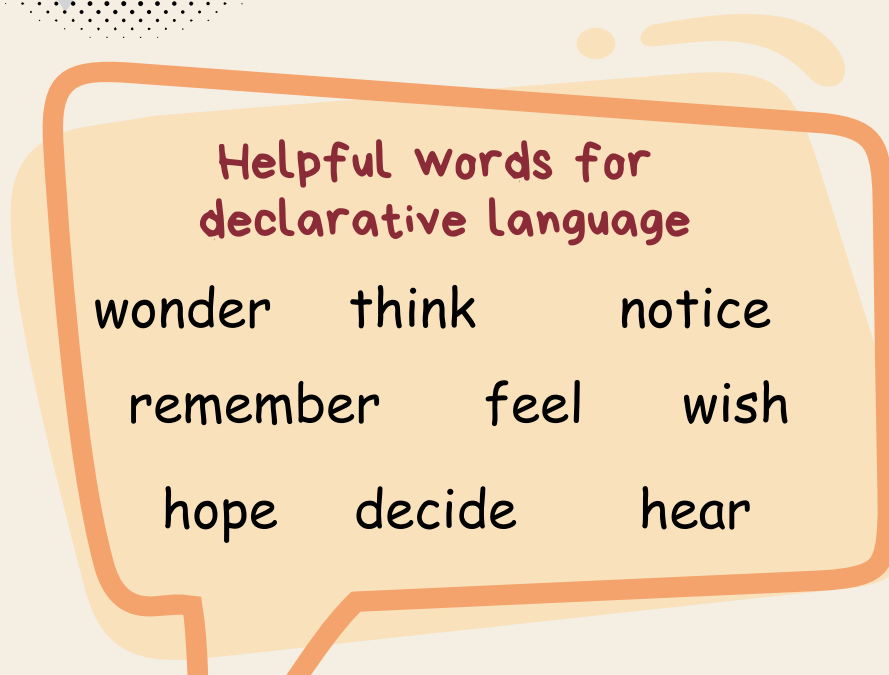
- I'm surprised to see you haven't showered yet
- I wonder if you'll have your shower before we eat
- I'm worried you might miss something important if you don't look at this
- I'm not sure you heard me
- I wonder if you forgot what I said
- Oh, grandma is leaving...
- We should say goodbye to grandma
- I'm wondering what could be a fair way to decide who goes first
- I remember what you did last time you had this problem
- I feel confident you'll figure this one out
- I wonder what you need to be doing...
- Now would be a good time to unpack your school bag
- I've noticed that you're missing your lunch box
- I wonder if you have everything you need for today





QUICK TIP

Anytime you are about to ask a question, take out the question word e.g. what, why, where etc. and replace with '**I wonder**' or '**I'm thinking**'



Helpful words for declarative language

wonder	think	notice
remember	feel	wish
hope	decide	hear

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Like any new skill, using declarative language becomes easier with practice. Start using declarative statements in low-pressure situations to get comfortable with the approach.
- Understanding that declarative language promotes independence, critical thinking, and emotional regulation can help parents shift their mindset from managing compliance to fostering growth and learning.
- Learning more about how and why declarative language works can help parents feel more confident in using it, even when immediate results aren't visible.



Why it can be hard to shift to declarative language

WE DEFAULT TO OUR OWN CHILDHOOD

Most parents are familiar with giving direct instructions like 'stop that' or 'do this now' because it's likely how they were spoken to as a child and feels like an efficient way to manage behaviour.

In busy or stressful moments, when parents desire immediate compliance, they may fear losing control if they don't give direct orders. Cultures that emphasize obedience also play a role, making declarative language seem too lenient.

WE DOUBT THE EFFECTIVENESS

Declarative language is a more indirect form of communication, and parents may be unsure if it will actually work in prompting desired behavior. The lack of an immediate command might make parents feel that the child will simply ignore the statement or fail to act.

Children who are used to being given commands may not immediately understand or respond to declarative language, leading to frustration for parents. It takes time for children to adjust to this new way of communicating, and parents may feel discouraged if the change doesn't result in immediate behavioral improvements.

WE GET IMPATIENT OR FEEL JUDGED

Parents may feel judged by others—family, friends, or even in public—if their child isn't immediately compliant. Using declarative language, which can take longer to elicit a response, may make parents feel like they're not being "firm enough" or "in control."

Declarative language often takes more time and patience than imperative language. Parents might feel that they don't have the time to wait for their child to process the statement and respond accordingly, especially when they are dealing with multiple responsibilities or in high-pressure situations.

Ultimately, the transition to declarative language requires patience, practice, and a shift in mindset, but it can lead to stronger, more cooperative relationships between parents and children.

Benefits of declarative language



REFLECTIVE THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Declarative language invites kids and teens to think about their own behavior, the situation they are in, or the feelings they may be experiencing. It helps develop problem-solving skills because the child is given space to consider options and think critically rather than being told what to do.

INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY

Declarative language encourages kids and teens to take ownership of their actions rather than relying on being told what to do. It supports their development of self-regulation and decision-making.

REDUCES PRESSURE AND ANXIETY

Children and teens with anxiety, especially social anxiety, can feel overwhelmed by directives or demands. Declarative language is less confrontational, reducing the pressure to immediately comply. It allows kids to process information in a more relaxed way, lowering anxiety and defensiveness.

IMPROVES EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND EXPRESSION

Declarative language often names emotions, helping children and teens build emotional awareness and vocabulary. It can encourage them to think about and express their emotions more clearly, which is beneficial for emotional regulation and social interactions.

ENHANCES SOCIAL SKILLS AND COOPERATION

Declarative language models appropriate social communication by encouraging dialogue and reflection instead of issuing commands. This helps children and teens learn how to engage more cooperatively in social situations.

REDUCES POWER STRUGGLES

Because declarative language is not directive or authoritative, it minimizes resistance that can arise from feeling controlled or forced into action. This is particularly helpful for children who have oppositional behaviors or those who resist authority.

IMPROVES RELATIONSHIPS

Declarative language fosters more open, respectful communication between adults and children. By using this approach, parents and caregivers can build stronger, more trusting relationships, as children feel listened to rather than controlled.