



## How To: Manage Problem Behaviors: Precision Requests

Teacher requests are an important everyday tool for behavior management. The *precision request* structures communication with the student in a concise, predictable, respectful format that preserves adult authority and increases the likelihood of student compliance. Here are guidelines for using this communication tool (De Martini-Scully, Bray, & Kehle, 2000; Musser, Bray, Kehle, & Jenson, 2001):

**Preparation.** In preparation for using the precision request:

- the teacher selects appropriate consequences for student non-compliance. Examples of appropriate consequences include loss of free time, phone call to a parent, loss of a point or token, or restriction of activities at recess.
- the teacher meets with the student to reinforce the need to comply with adult requests and to inform the student of the consequences for non-compliance.

**Procedure.** When making a precision request, the teacher follows these steps:

1. **Make first request: "Please..."**. The teacher states a brief request that starts with the word 'Please' and -- whenever possible--frames the request as a goal behavior rather than as a behavior to stop (e.g., "Rick, please open your math book and begin the assignment written on the board"). The teacher then waits 5 seconds for the student to comply. If the student complies, the teacher praises the student (e.g., "Thank you for starting your math assignment") .
2. **Make second request: "I Need..."**. If the student fails to comply with the first request within 5 seconds, the teacher repeats that request. This time, the teacher starts the request with the phrase "I need..." (e.g., "Rick, I need you to open your math book and begin the assignment written on the board"). Again, the teacher waits 5 seconds for the student to comply. If the student complies, the teacher praises the student (e.g., "Thank you for starting your math assignment") .
3. **Deliver consequence for non-compliance.** If the student fails to comply to the second request within 5 seconds, the teacher follows through in delivering the pre-determined consequence for non-compliance.

**Integrity Check.** It is very important when using this strategy to preface the first request with "please", to start the second request with "I need...", to praise the student for compliance, to wait a full 5 seconds after each request for student compliance before advancing to the next step, and to deliver consequences consistently for non-compliance.

### References

De Martini-Scully, D., Bray, M. A., & Kehle, T. J. (2000). A packaged intervention to reduce disruptive behaviors in general education students. *Psychology in the Schools, 37*(2), 149-156.

Musser, E. H., Bray, M. A., Kehle, T. J., & Jenson, W. R. (2001). Reducing disruptive behaviors in students with serious emotional disturbance. *School Psychology Review, 30*, 294-304.