

Declarative Language Cheat Sheet



What Is Declarative Language?

What you say and how you say it matters. The way you speak to your PDAer can either allow them to feel safe and engage with you or it can trigger a stress response.

Linda Murphy's, *Declarative Language Handbook*, is an excellent reference. It's a quick read with lots of real-world examples that can help you transform how you speak to your PDAer. She describes Declarative language as...

"A comment or a statement... Usually it is a statement that observes. For example, it may observe events in the environment, including people, actions, and changes. It can also narrate an internal event, such as thoughts, feelings, predictions, opinions, observations, or problem-solving dialogue."

Declarative language keeps the PDA nervous system feeling safe. At a brain level, it allows them to fully access their executive functioning systems, their ability to control impulses, keep feelings in check, adjust their behaviour, plan, organise, attend, apply judgement and recall things from their memory. Decelerative language helps them to notice what is happening around them and gives them the opportunity to learn and discover things for themselves, rather than just being told. Declarative language avoids asking questions, instead it invites your PDAer to notice, think and problem solve. There is no demand, there is no right or wrong way to respond.

Imperative language is when we give direct instructions, commands or requests that require us to do or say something in response. This type of language is perceived as a demand and can trigger a stress response, causing a child to become aggressive, avoidant, or shut down. Have you noticed your PDAer become non-verbal in high demand situations? Recently we had a visitor from out of town who was very enthusiastically trying to engage with our PDAer, however they went about this by firing off about a dozen questions all in quick succession. Their well-meaning attempts at connection were having the complete opposite effect.

Our cheat sheet includes a double sided page of real-world examples that have literally come out of my mouth when I've been speaking to my PDAer. This is certainly not an exhaustive list but hopefully gives you a starting point. For the examples that have a few statements, I would give the first and then pause and wait. Often the follow up statements aren't required.

I certainly don't get it right all the time, imperative language is so ingrained in us. It's pretty obvious when I slip up though, that's when I get responses like "No" (sometimes it's even a "No thank you" but even though it's polite, it still shuts down the conversation), "You do it", "I don't want to", "I don't know".

Switching to declarative language takes practise. Start out by just picking a few times of day where you are going to give it a try. See what happens. Eventually it will become second nature.



Declarative Language Day-to-Day Cheat Sheet

Turn Imperative Language... (demands and questions)	 ...into Declarative Language (Comments, thoughts, I wonder... I noticed...)
Have a bath	Your bath is ready. (Or if it has been a good few days)... Hmm I noticed your skin is starting to smell a bit. I wonder how you might get clean.
Get dressed	Your clothes are out. My skin is getting goose bumps, I'm going to put on a jumper.
Have you packed your bag?	I wonder what things you will need for the day. I think you might be playing outside. It might be sunny. I wonder if you will get hungry or thirsty.
Where is your hat?	I see there is something missing from your head. I'm worried that your head is going to get sun burnt. I wonder how we could protect your face.
Get in the car	I noticed it's time to go to _____. It's pretty far away, I think we'll have to go in the car.
Do up your seat belt	Oh, I noticed that you aren't safe yet.
Put this away	I noticed the toys are on the floor. It looks like something is missing from this shelf. Hmm I found a lost toy.
Are you thirsty	Your water bottle is here.
Stop at the end of the path	I can hear cars coming on the road. I worried about how we will stay safe. I'm wondering what our plan might be.
Clean that up	Hmm that's strange, I see water on the floor. This has happened before. I wonder if you can remember what we did last time.
Wipe your face	I noticed there is some sauce around your mouth.
Go wash your hands	Oh, your fingers got paint on them. I wonder how you will get that off.
Can you pick that up?	Oh no, the drink bottle fell off the table.
Get off the table	I see you are on the table. You are very high up. I'm feeling worried that you might fall.
You need to stay with me	The shops are busy today. There are a lot of people around. I'm a bit worried about getting separated.
Shut the fridge door	Hmm it feels cold over here near the fridge. Something looks strange about this door.
Flush the toilet	Hmm I didn't hear the toilet flush. It a bit smelly in here. I noticed there is still wee in the toilet.
Have you washed your hands?	Hmm I don't smell any soap on your hands. I wonder if they might still have germs on them.
Are you ready to go?	I notice that you are wearing your pyjamas. I see that you are playing. I wonder when you will be finished.



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What game do you want to play?	I see you have the trains out. I wonder what games we have in the cupboard. Oh look, new paints.
Can you take the bins out?	Yikes, look how full the bin is getting.
Brush your teeth	Your toothbrush is ready (Or if it has been a good few days)... Hmm I noticed your teeth are looking a bit yellow.
Hold my hand	We are in a carpark. I see there are lots of cars around. I wonder how we will stay safe.
Can you blow your nose	Oh, I can hear you sniffing. I see you have a bit of a runny nose. I wonder what might help you to breath better.
What happened?	Oh, I see that the toy got a little broken. Hmm I wonder if there is a way to fix it.
We don't have time for that	I'm thinking that we have _____ time before we need to go. I'm worried we don't have time right now for... I wonder when we might be able to do that.
Can I tell you what we are doing today?	I seems like you might be a bit nervous. I wonder if it would help if we talk through the plan for today.
You need to put on sunscreen	Hmm the sun it really hot at the moment. I wonder how we can protect our skin.
Don't draw on the table	(Before you get started)...I wonder where it is ok to draw.
Listen to your friend	I wonder if you heard that. I noticed that your friend is trying to tell you something.
You need to stop doing that	I noticed that your friend didn't like that. I heard them saying 'no'. I think they might have been frustrated/ scared/ worried.
You need to take your umbrella	I notice the clouds are getting really dark outside. The last time that happened it was right before it rained. I wonder if we should take something to help keep us dry.
Put on your shoes	It's a hot day. Hmm the concrete might be hot. I wonder how we'll stop our feet from getting burned.
What do you want to eat?	My tummy is grumbling, I'm going to have some breakfast. I wonder what your tummy is hungry for. It's been a while since lunch. I wonder if you need any food.
Can you shut the door?	Yikes, looks at all these flies. I wonder where they are coming from.
What's wrong?	I can see you are feeling upset about something. I wonder if I can help you work it out.
What do you want to do today?	It's a lovely day outside. It could be a nice day for a swim. I wonder how many bottles we have in the recycling bin. I think the recycling centre is open today. I wonder if any of your friends might be free today.

