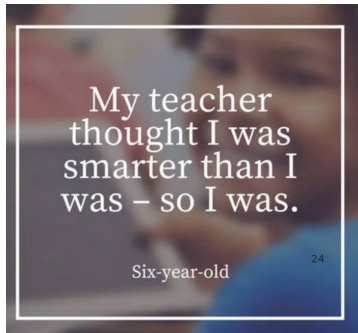




SAY IT WITH CERTAINTY

RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION



TE PAEROA RTLB CLUSTER 34

CATHERINE BARRIE, SARAH GORDON & JODI SIMPSON

FEBRUARY 2026



THE WHAT, THE WHY, THE HOW

Introduction- Why does language matter?

1. Declarative and Imperative Language
2. Active constructive responding (ACR)
3. Positive reframing - strengths based alternatives

"I believed I could, so I did"

Reflections





CONNECTION OVER CORRECTION

Some Boys Have Mullets

Be my metronome. Help me belong. I need a felt sense of safety, secure relationships, and predictable routines. Limit change or let me know ahead of time what is going to happen. Give me a sense of control.

S - See me

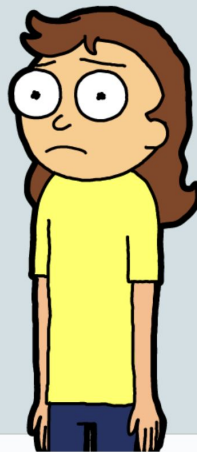
B - Give me a sense of belonging

H - Let me know what is happening

C - Let me feel in control

M - Preserve and uphold my Mana

Kathryn Berkett. ENGAGE Training, 2022



We discussed how this researched, strengths based, culturally inclusive framework underpins everything we do.

Book recommendation:
Berkett, K. (2025). *What's Going on in There?*. Mary Egan Publishing.



DJ Pryor and Kingston; LINK - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY35eXTKVLV>



WHY DOES LANGUAGE MATTER?





WHAT IS DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE?

IMPERATIVE STATEMENTS

Examples:

"Put on your shoes, it's time to go."

"Stop yelling."



DECLARATIVE STATEMENTS

Examples:

"It's time to get ready to leave. I'm going to put on my shoes. I wonder what you're going to do to get ready."

"I hear your voice is getting really loud. I wonder what's going on."



KEY FEATURES DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE

Commonly Use First Person Pronouns

“I went to the park yesterday. I wonder what you did”

“I wonder if your friend likes chips”

“Let’s go get our bags”.

Observation

“The dog looks hungry.”

“I heard your friend asking you something.”

“I notice everyone is ready for our story.”

Cognitive Verbs

“The stairs aren’t a safe place to play. I’m afraid you’ll fall and get hurt.”

Words that Invoke Uncertainty (expert level)

“We might go outside later”

“Maybe your friend wants to play too.”



Declarative Language for Executive function, Lori Flynn [Link](#)



WHY DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE MATTERS

BENEFITS FOR NEURODIVERGENT & ANXIOUS TAMARIKI AND RANGATAHI

- Lowers demand & pressure
- Models internal states
- Invites thinking, not just doing
- Fosters co-regulation: Because DL statements are *not* commands, they help reduce the fight/flight/freeze response, shifting from control to co-regulation.
- Relational tool

CARE & CHALLENGES

Take care that Declarative Language doesn't undermine:

- Building trusting relationships
- Safety
- Exploring bias
- Co-regulation

*“Try to approach each opportunity with a **giving** over getting mindset, use open and inviting body language, and speak using a neutral tone of voice.”*

Declarative Statements that can help when emotions are escalating!

SILENCE
Sometimes it is best to NOT say anything & give your child some space.

VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS
I hear you.
I understand why you are frustrated.
I know this is not what you want.
I can see you are upset.
I get it.

MIRROR WHAT THEY ARE COMMUNICATING
You don't think this is fair.
You want more screen time.
You really want to buy that game.
You don't want to do this assignment.

HAVE SOME FUN
When kids are regulated, they are better able to think, reason, problem solve, perspective take, etc. Just like all of us! Use these opportunities to practice different statement types, and become comfortable yourself with this new speaking style!

And always balance your statements with silence.

declarativelanguage.com



WAYS TO START USING DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE

Create Your Own Statements...

"I notice..."



Describe what you see.



Share the plan rather than direct it.



"I'm wondering..."

"I'm feeling
ready when..."

"I can see..."

"Looks like..."

"I'm thinking..."

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. **Use "I notice" or "I wonder" statements:**
 - Example: "I noticed you walked away when we started math. I wonder if something about it feels tricky today."
2. **Narrate your own thinking:**
 - Example: "I'm thinking we might need more time to finish this, so maybe we shift it to tomorrow."
3. **Invite shared attention:**
 - Example: "Oh wow, look at this. This is interesting." (Builds joint engagement)
4. **Replace commands with observations:**
 - Instead of "Clean that up," try: "I see the puzzle pieces are still out. What could we do about this?"

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I've learned that people
will forget what you
said, people will forget
what you did, but
people will never forget
how you made them
feel.

Maya Angelou



te paeroa RTL B



The Power of Relationships in Schools [Link](#)



WHAT IS ACTIVE CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONDING?

ACTIVE CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONDING (ACR) is a communication technique for celebrating others' good news with authentic enthusiasm, curiosity, and support, which strengthens relationships and boosts trust.

KEY ELEMENTS OF ACTIVE CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONDING

- High Energy/Enthusiasm
- Curiosity/Engagement
- Validation

- "That is fantastic news! I am so happy for you. Tell me more about it!".
- "I knew you could do it! What was the best part of the experience?".
- "You worked so hard for this. You really deserve it!".



4 WAYS OF RESPONDING

According to research by [Shelly Gable](#), there are four ways people respond to good news:

- **ACTIVE-CONSTRUCTIVE:** Enthusiastic, joyful, and engaging (strengthens relationships).
- **PASSIVE-CONSTRUCTIVE:** Understated, quiet, or low-energy support.
- **ACTIVE-DESTRUCTIVE:** Dismissive, pointing out negative aspects, or bringing down the mood.
- **PASSIVE-DESTRUCTIVE:** Ignoring the news, changing the subject, or making it about oneself.

4 WAYS OF RESPONDING

ACTIVE

Quashing the event!
Dismissive
Demeaning

I don't believe you! It sounds stressful.



Enthusiastic support
Eye Contact
Authentic

Great news! I knew you'd do it. How do you feel?



PASSIVE

Turns focus inward
Avoiding
Ignore Speaker

Huh. Well, I just got a new video game.



Low Energy
Delayed Response
Quiet

Oh cool, that's nice...good for you.



DESTRUCTIVE

CONSTRUCTIVE

Illustrated by GoStrengths.com

THINK - GROUP - SHARE

The Power of Active Constructive Responding

4 March 2020 | Relationships



[The Power of Active Constructive Responding](#)

Task:

- Read blog
- Jigsaw then report back in groups





THINK : "WARM + CURIOUS + INVITING DETAIL"



Think of an example from your own context.

Record 4 different types of responses to the statement.



"Hey Miss, I won the running race at the school sports yesterday".

Passive Constructive: "That's nice"

Active Constructive: " Well done- you have been training so hard for that. How did it feel when you reached the end?"

Active Destructive: "That was yesterday. You need to concentrate on today".

Passive Destructive: I used to win all my races at both primary and secondary school.



ACTIVE CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONDING



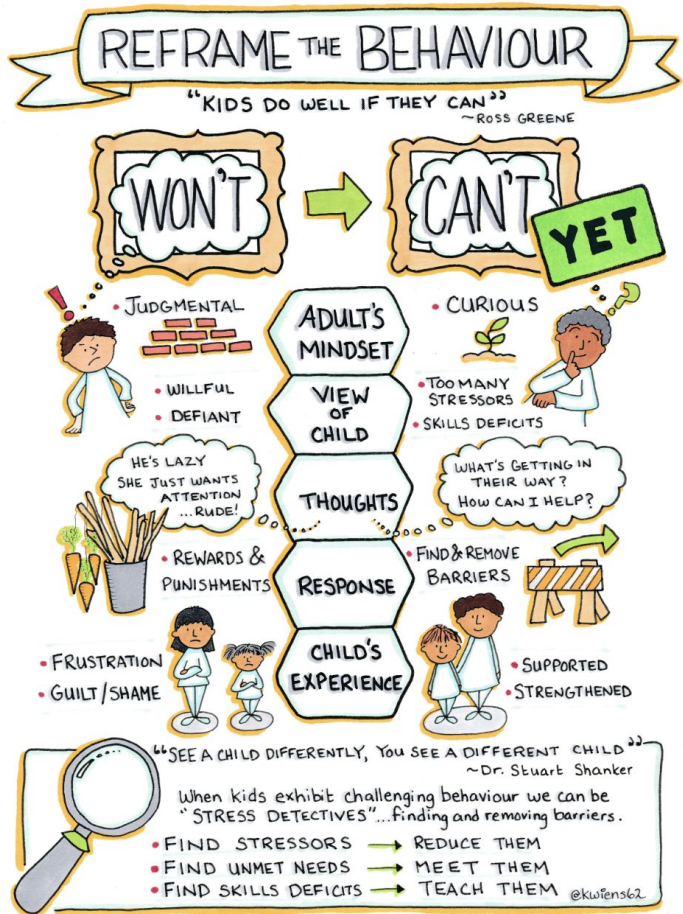
Active Constructive Responding [\(LINK\)](#)

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WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT IN SCHOOL?



STRENGTHS- BASED COMMUNICATION



“SEE A CHILD DIFFERENTLY
 SEE A DIFFERENT
CHILD”
 -DR ROSS GREENE

TERMINOLOGY

Māori terms for neurodiversity, often derived from the [Te Reo Hāpai](#) (language of enrichment) project, focus on strengths and diverse ways of being.

- Kanorau ā-roro (neurodiversity/many faces of the mind)
- Takiwātanga (autism/in one's own time and place)
- Aroreretini (ADHD/attention goes to many things).

Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori

Kupu Māori for neurodiversity

Takiwātanga - "in their own time and space"

Kura urupare - "treasure in around your head"



REFRAMING



*“What window
are we looking
through?”*



REFRAMING LANGUAGE

fearful →



REFRAMING LANGUAGE

fearful



cautious, careful, protective



WHAT WAS SAID AT OUR WORKSHOP: REFRAMING LANGUAGE

“Say sorry”

- I am sorry that happened to you....when ___ is calm let's talk about...

“Get to class”

- What's happening?
- Would you like to walk with me? Shall we go together?
- What's next? Can I help ...
- Everyone's in class; I wonder what they're doing?

“Start writing”

“I can see you using that special Harry Potter pen...”

“Lets see if you can try...”

-address the whole class: “does everyone have a pen?”

When a child is experiencing a stress response:

One kaiāwhina shared a strategy of putting their own hand up for the teacher, sharing their frustration (mirroring what they felt the child' was feeling) then asking for some time out with a friend.

This was an effective way of modelling strategies to the whole group and also protecting the child's mana - as they were able to leave the class for a break in a positive way.



REFLECTIONS

Applying ideas covered to our own context:

CHANGE
HAPPENS
ONE STEP
AT A TIME

- What strengths do I already bring to the ideas covered today?
- Possible areas I could develop further...
- First steps and resources needed for action....

