



Giving Effective Instructions

Children's Developmental and Behavioural Support



To aid in your child's understanding of instructions and to support their follow-through, try doing the following tips:

- 1.** Before you give the instruction, make sure you are prepared to follow-through!
- 2.** Get close, establish eye contact, and/or touch the child to gain their attention.
- 3.** Make the instructions easily understood. Break the task down into parts if necessary.
- 4.** Describe the desired behaviour. Tell the child what you want them **to do**, not just, what the child is to stop doing.
- 5.** Be specific, avoid vague descriptions (e.g., say, "put the trains in the bin" instead of, "tidy up").
- 6.** Use a calm and neutral voice.
- 7.** Phrase the instruction as a directive not a question (e.g., say, "put the trains in the bin", instead of "can you put the trains in the bin?").
- 8.** Use "first-then" language (e.g., "first put the trains in the bin, then you can watch a show").
- 9.** Give the child time to respond. Remember, children have a slower response time than adults do.
- 10.** Ask the child to repeat the instruction back to you if you are unsure whether they have understood it.
- 11.** Praise the child for their efforts and be specific about what they did well!

References

Child Mind Institute. (2023, April 14). *How to Give Effective Instructions*.

<https://childmind.org/article/how-to-give-kids-effective-instructions/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. n.d. *Quick Tips: Six Keys to Giving Good Directions*.

<https://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/toddlersandpreschoolers/directions/quicktips.html>

Stephenson, K. M., & Hanley, G. P. (2010). Preschoolers' compliance with simple instructions: a descriptive and experimental evaluation. *Journal of applied behavior analysis*, 43(2), 229–247. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.2010.43-229>

Information

If you need more information, visit www.durham.ca/CDBS

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