

Giving Effective Instructions

Use This:

To teach the parent how to give instructions in a way that will improve the child's follow-through.

Teach the parent the basic steps for giving instructions more effectively

Main

Discuss More

Discuss Distractions	When issuing instructions, the parent should also make every effort to reduce significant distractions. For example, if there is music playing or the TV is on, the first instructions should involve getting the TV or music off before giving instructions for something else.
Discuss Prompts for Transitions	Point out that if a request involves stopping one activity to start another, it will work better if the parent first gives a prompt. For example, rather than saying, "Please brush your teeth now" when a child is watching TV, it is more helpful to say, "In 5 minutes, you will need to turn off the TV." The parent should return in 5 minutes, make sure the TV gets turned off, and then issue the next instruction: "Please brush your teeth."
Discuss Tone	Point out that instructions are more likely to be met with resistance or a struggle if the child is aware that the parent is angry. The more calmly something is said, the better.
Discuss Check-Ins	Let the parent know that when issuing instructions, it is also helpful to have the child repeat the instruction back to the parent to ensure that the child has understood the request. Example script <i>(in calm tone) Brian, please wash your hands. (making eye contact) What do I want you to do right now?</i> <i>Wash my hands.</i>
Avoid Explanations	Explain that it is not necessary to 'teach' your child at every opportunity by explaining the reasons behind your instruction. You can discuss the reasons another time. In the moment, just issue a simple, clear effective instruction and don't go on too much.
ACTIVITY Practise Giving Instructions	Role-play with the parent how to give simple instructions, followed by praise (adapt for telephone delivery). First play the role of parent, so that you can model effective instructions for about 2 minutes. Then, inform the parent that you will play the role of his or her child, and he or she will act as the parent, issuing simple instructions. Pay close attention both to what is said and to how it is said. Provide lots of praise when the parent gets it right, and support the parent with feedback when needed.

Introduce Follow-
Through Training

Discuss the importance of a child's being able to comply with an instruction – what we will call “follow-through.” For the child to

Helpful Tips

The parent can create "chore cards" for extended tasks, such as when asking the child to clean his or her room or do his or her homework. When the parent has created "chore cards" for extended tasks, he or she can write down the steps involved so that the child can carry the card with him or her while performing the job. Using "chore cards" can help to ensure that there is no debate from the child over the exact steps of the task assigned. For example, a Chore Card for "Cleaning Up Room" might say, "1. Put toys in closet. 2. Make bed. 3. Put books on the shelf. 4. Pick up dirty clothes and put in basket."

The parent may also wish to assign time limits for certain instructions. When assigning time limits for completion of tasks (e.g., cleaning up room), the parent should set a specified time on a kitchen timer to let the child know the time limit as well as the consequences that will occur if the time limit is not met.

Parents should be reminded that even instructions delivered in the most effective way possible may not work when they first try this at home. If that happens, parents should be encouraged to handle the child's noncompliance as they typically have done in the past. Discuss with the parent that in subsequent sessions, you will be discussing alternative ways to handle the child's lack of follow-through.

How's Your Style?

Did you praise often?

Did you review often, by asking questions?

Did you simplify the steps as needed?

Did your pace match that of the child or family?

Did you stay on track?