

1. Gain Attention

Before you give an instruction, ensure you gain the child's attention by getting close, saying their name prior to the instruction and looking at the child. Attempt to have the child look toward you while you give instructions.

2. Short Concise Instructions

Present instructions in a clear, direct and concise manner. Often, only two of three words (including the child's name) are necessary in an instruction (i.e., "Joe come sit", "go to desk", "come to circle", etc.).

3. Small Steps

If an instruction or task is lengthy, break it down into small steps that are clearer to the child (e.g., eating lunch: "Joe come", "Get your lunch", "Sit at table", "Time to eat", etc.).

4. Decrease Questions

Present instructions and requests as commands rather than questions (e.g., Instead of, "Joe are you coming in the classroom?" use "Joe come in." This will help you to present more clearly and firmly.

5. Normal Tone of Voice

Keep your directions firm and clear but try to maintain a normal tone and volume level in your voice.

6. Use Gestures

It is beneficial to accompany instructions with a gesture or cue. This can include pointing towards the object, holding the item up, or touching the item for the child to see. If the child is able to understand, writing the instruction down or using pictures is also helpful for clarification and as an additional reminder.

7. Be Consistent

Try not to change your mind during an instruction (e.g., "Put the book on the shelf, not on the table.") The child may confuse the entire instruction and do nothing, try to follow through on both or follow through on the incorrect option.

Also, keep rules consistent. This will assist the child to understand set rules and independently follow through on them. It also adds structure to the situation, which will help the child to feel secure in knowing what to expect.

8. Be Positive

Instead of focusing on what the child should not do, focus on what you want (e.g., When the child leaves the table say, "Joe, sit at the table" instead of "No running away.") This will help the child to understand the behaviour you want them to engage in.

9. Reinforcement

Reinforce the child any time he does follow through on instructions. Try to keep this reinforcement as specific to the child's behaviour as possible (i.e., "Great, you listened", "Nice sitting", "Eating with your fork, great", etc.). The more specific reinforcement is to the child's behaviour, the clearer the child will be about what you want.

10. Allow Time to Follow Through

When you make a request, allow ample time for a response. Often children need at least 5-10 seconds to comprehend and begin to follow through on an instruction. Try the verbal, gestural physical procedure to enhance follow through.

For Example:

Verbal – Give clear, short, specific instruction after ensuring you have the child's attention.

Wait 5 – 10 seconds.

If the child followed through specifically reinforce.

If the child did not follow through, go on to...

Verbal/Gestural – repeat the instruction but also use a gesture (e.g., point or touch the chair to sit on.)

Wait approximately 5 seconds.

If the child followed through reinforce.