

Giving Instruction: A Guide

What is it?

How you say something is as important as what you say. Here are tips on how to give your child instruction so s/he can follow your direction.

Why should I use it?

Children with autism are especially prone to misreading body language or instruction that is not direct. Often times, parents will say they have to yell in order for their child to listen. Try these tips instead of yelling.

How do I teach it?

1. Get the child's attention by being physically close to him. Be on his level. If he is sitting, sit with him. Don't require eye contact, but do make sure the child is not engaged in another activity.
2. Be direct; don't phrase your instruction as a question. For example, "Please get your shoes." Instead of "ready to get your shoes?" If you phrase your instruction as a question, you might get an answer you don't like!
3. Tell her what you want to see. For example, "Remember to walk" instead of "Don't run."
4. Follow through. When you give an instruction, consider it a law and enforce what you asked the child to do. If the child doesn't respond within 5 seconds, give the instruction again and add prompts if needed.
5. Make sure the child can do what you are instructing him to do. If it's a mastered skill, you can expect full compliance with your instruction. If the child occasionally needs assistance with the task, expect some resistance to your instruction and be close by to help.
6. Reduce the number of words you use if your child has difficulty processing information or is a younger child. For example, if you want her to pick up a ball, say "Ball, please" instead of "Sarah, pick the ball up for mommy, please."
7. Give one instruction at a time until the child is able to follow multi-step instructions.
8. No one really likes to be told what to do. Sometimes give instruction that is fun and easy for the child. This will help the child respond more positively to your instructions as a whole and help build a positive parent-child relationship.
9. Give choices. Sometimes giving instructions and getting cooperation can be easier if it is framed as a choice between two acceptable options. For example "Time to clean up! Books or the blocks first?" Or, "we need to head up the stairs now. Do you want to crawl like a crab or hop like a frog?"



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