

Giving Great Instructions

All kids struggle to follow instructions sometimes. It can seem like they are disobeying on purpose, but sometimes the issue can be more about *how* we are giving instructions.

Benefits of Giving Great Instructions

- Good instructions help your child know what you want and expect.
- Good instructions are helpful when you need your child to do something specific or need to stop your child from misbehaving or doing something harmful.
- Good instructions can prevent misbehaviors.
- Good instructions decrease how often parents and caregivers feel frustrated.

Keys to Giving Great Instructions

- Make sure you have your child's attention when you give an instruction. Be sure that you are in the same room with your child when you give an instruction and make eye contact with your child.
- Be clear about what you want your child to do and when to do it.
- Keep it simple.
- Give one instruction at a time.
- Ask your child to repeat the instruction back to you to make sure they understand.
- Praise your child right away when they listen to you.
- Model good listening skills during one-on-one time and give your child positive attention for good listening.

Things to AVOID!

- Asking questions
- Giving instructions from another room or when you don't have the child's attention
- Giving unclear instructions
- Giving too much information
- Giving multiple instructions at once

Alternatives to saying "No!" and "Stop!"

When you are a parent, it can seem like every other word is "no" or "stop" some days. These are really important words for our kids to listen to, especially when there is something dangerous they are about to get into. The problem is that if we overuse these words, they lose their importance and kids start to tune these words out. One way to avoid this is by telling your kids what they CAN DO instead of what they should stop. For example, instead of saying, "Stop jumping on the couch," try saying, "Jump on the floor, please."

Try Adding a Boost to Your Instructions with These Ideas

INSTRUCTION + CHOICE

"It is time for dinner. Do you want a piggy back ride or do you want to walk all by yourself?"

INSTRUCTION + YES

"Yes, you can definitely play another game tomorrow. Let's get your teeth brushed so we can read a book."

INSTRUCTION + TIME

"It's time to go inside." Confidently walk inside and wait.

INSTRUCTION + INVITATION TO COOPERATE

"I need your help and you are such a good helper. Please put your lunchbox in your backpack and then it's time to put your shoes on for school."

INSTRUCTION + WHEN/THEN

"When the toys are back in their bins, then we can start dinner."

INSTRUCTION + GIVING POWER

"It's time to clean up. Do you want to set the timer for how long you think it will take?"

INSTRUCTION + NONVERBAL LANGUAGE

"It's time to get dressed." Put a gentle hand on your child's shoulder or take your child by the hand and lead them to get dressed.

INSTRUCTION + LOGIC

"Mom is on her way home and I want you to have time to play with her before bedtime. It's time for a bath."

Check Out This Video!

Giving Great Instructions
www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwvoHFeT2bY&t=135s

References:
CDC: Parenting Essentials for Toddlers and Preschoolers Positive Discipline (Nelson, 2006)
Video provided by Central Oregon Pediatric Associates