

Giving Directions to Your Child

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Introduction

All children need to learn how to follow directions. It is an important skill that children learn through repeated experience and practice.

Language impaired children may have problems following directions because they have difficulty understanding language. So it is important to give clear, simple directions. Then you can help your child learn how to understand language and how to do a specific job at the same time.

How can parents improve their direction-giving?

1. Try to eliminate distractions before giving directions.

Distractions, including a radio, TV, or others talking, make it harder for your child to listen to your directions.

2. Make sure your child is listening when you give directions.

It is important that you have your child's full attention when you give directions. Get down to your child's eye level so the child can see your facial expression. Squat down if you have to.

3. Pair gestures with directions.

At first, children learn how to follow directions by watching the cues you present through hand gestures, such as pointing to objects and their locations. These cues help your child understand your message. For that reason, when you give directions, try to use a natural gesture at the same time. For example:

"Come here" paired with the hand gesture.

"Give it to me" paired with your hand reaching for the item.

"Go to your room and get your coat" paired with pointing to your child's room.

4. Speak clearly and not too rapidly.

5. Use repetition.

Repeating directions for your child is very helpful. When you give your child directions, the child must do some mental work before acting.

First, the child must understand the meaning of the words and sentence structure. Then, the child must remember the directions while acting. You can help your child remember by repeating your directions. Give your child time to think about the directions before you repeat them.

With older children, you can ask your child to repeat your directions after you. This "activates" your child's memory. It also tells you if the child actually understood your directions.

6. Use chunking when possible.

Chunking is useful when you are giving your child two or more directions at one time. Chunking means saying related directions in one breath. It may seem easier to remember a string of directions if you pause between each one. Actually, it is easier to recall information if it is chunked according to similarities. For example:

"Wash your face and brush your teeth.
(chunk #1);

Then get your book and I'll read it to you."
(chunk #2)

Give your child directions with only the number of chunks the child can understand.

7. Select words at your child's level of difficulty.

Use words that your child consistently understands when giving directions. Use short, simple sentences.

8. Know what to expect of your child.

If you know what to expect of your child, you will not give directions that are too difficult to follow. Your *speech and language clinician* can help you determine your child's ability to understand directions. The box below shows how more complex directions can be given as your child develops. Use this sequence as a guide to help you in giving directions that the child will be able to follow.

9. Give your child clear feedback.

When your child completes your directions, let the child know exactly what was done correctly. You may want to tell your child the directions the child just completed. If your child did not

complete your directions, show or tell exactly what needed to be done. If an attempt is partially successful, praise whatever your child did correctly.

Use these tips consistently to help your child understand and follow directions.

Vocabulary

Chunking—Grouping related directions to aid recall, by saying them in one breath.

Cue—An aid to improve understanding. Cues such as hand gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice help your child “get the message” and respond appropriately.

Feedback—Information about correctness/incorrectness of speech allows the speaker to correct mistakes.

Language impairment—Any difficulty in understanding and using language.

Speech and language clinician—A person who is qualified to diagnose and treat speech, language, and voice disorders.

For more information:

Barach, C. 1983. *Help me say it — A parent's guide to speech problems*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.

Hatten, J.T., and F.W. Hatten. 1981. *Natural language — A clinician guided program for parents of language-impaired children*. Tucson, AZ: Communication Skill Builders.

Hebald, B., and V. McCready. 1976. *A book about talking — Principles of language stimulation for parents, teachers, clinicians*. West Tremont, ME: Rhino Press.

Shepard, L. 1981. *Parents helper — Ages: 1-5*. Palo Alto, CA: VORT Corporation.

Refer to:

2.1 Language Development

4.10 Improve Your Child's Listening Skills

GIVE DIRECTIONS YOUR CHILD CAN UNDERSTAND

Your child can understand and follow more difficult directions as language skills develop:

1. First, your child understands simple directions paired with a gesture: “Give it to me” while extending your hand.
2. Your child understands simple directions without gestures: “Stand up.” “Get the _____.” “Sit down.”
3. Your child understands two simple related directions about the same object: “Get your coat and put it on.”
4. Your child understands two-part directions about unrelated objects: “Go to your room and get your shoes.” “Give me the bowl and the spoon.”
5. Your child understands two-part directions involving two actions: “Give me the toy and put your glass on the table.”
6. Finally, your child understands three-part unrelated directions involving three actions: “Put your toys away, go wash your hands, and get in the car.”

