

# Giving Effective Instructions

Giving effective commands makes it *more likely* that your child will comply. We often soften our commands because it feels or sounds too direct. However, following directions and complying with commands are necessary skills children need to learn and a requisite part of life for everyone.

**Remember, always praise your child's compliance. Praising increases the frequency of the behavior!**

## Get your child's attention before giving a command.

- Reduce distractions- turn off the TV or whatever activity they are doing
- Go to your child
- Make eye contact

## Use a neutral tone of voice.

- You don't want to teach your child that they only have to listen when you raise your voice
- Commands should be stated calmly and confidently

## Direct the command to your child.

- Make it clear that the expectation is for your child to comply to the command

“Let's clean up your toys” → “Please put your toys in the bin”

“We're putting the dishes away” → “Please put your dishes in the sink”

## Be specific, avoid vague directions.

- Make commands as specific and clear as possible

“Behave” → “Please sit in your chair”

“Be good today” → “Listen to your teacher at school”

“Clean your room” → “Put your dirty clothes in the hamper”

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When giving effective commands, we are focusing on what we say and how we say commands. Kids who struggle to follow directions end up getting more commands than the average child because we are repeating ourselves. Make commands more potent by using them more sparingly and when needed.

**Remember, only give an effective command if you really mean it and can follow through!**

## Make it a command, not question

- You are not asking your child, you are telling them what to do
- If you ask, “no” is an acceptable answer

“Would you sit please?” → “Please sit down next to me”

“Come over here okay?” → “Come stand next to me”

## Tell your child what TO DO, not what not to do

- Often tell kids what not to do without a replacement behavior
- Think of the “positive opposite”  
“Stop running” → “Use walking feet”  
“Don’t hit your brother” → “Please put your hands by your side.”  
“Stop yelling” → “Use an indoor voice”

## Only give ONE command at a time

- Multi-step commands make it less likely your child complies
- If it is a bigger task, break it down into one step at a time

Ø “Hang up your coat, put your bookbag away, then start homework.”

Ø “Clean your room” → “Put your dolls in the toy bin.” Then, next step.

## Make sure your child understand the instruction

- To avoid “I didn’t hear you” or “I didn’t know that’s what you meant,” have your child repeat back the command

“Please go turn off the TV. What did I ask you to do?”

**We are helping to teach our children that they can listen!**