

Providing Instructions

There are many reasons why a child may not follow through with a provided instruction. Understanding the reasons behind this can help you choose the most appropriate strategies to provide support.

Why may a child not follow an instruction?

Sensory differences

- Hearing difficulties.
- Auditory processing differences.
- Competing auditory or visual distractions.



Attention differences

- Hyperfocus on a current activity.
- Attention not gained.
- Difficulty switching between activities.



Language & thinking

- Difficulties understanding spoken language.
- Difficulty remembering instructions.
- Takes longer to process information.



Connection & regulation

- Poor trust and connection with the person giving the instruction.
- Dysregulated and instruction causes stress.
- Strong desire for autonomy.
- Activity or instruction is not of interest.



Strategies to support a child to follow an instruction:

- ▶ Keep calm and use a steady, neutral tone.
- ▶ Simplify your language.
- ▶ Break steps down (one step at a time).
- ▶ Use 'what-to-do' language which involves a simple explanation of the expectation rather than 'don't' language:

E.g. **"Feet on the floor please."** rather than: **"Don't climb on the table."**

- ▶ Offer choices: E.g. **"Do you want to sit at the red table or blue table today?"**

- ▶ Incorporate interests: E.g. **"Shall we skip like a kangaroo to the room?"**

- ▶ Use statements, comments, and observations which do not require a response to reduce demands: E.g. **"I notice our friends are sitting down for lunch..."**

E.g. **"I wonder what activity you will choose first when we go inside..."**

- ▶ Be playful and/or use humour:

E.g. **"I wonder if your muscles are strong enough to carry both your lunch and your water bottle to the table."**

- ▶ Provide extra processing time (count to 10 in your head before asking again).
- ▶ For a child who likes helping with jobs, consider how the child can help while following through with an instruction.
- ▶ Incorporate visual supports as much as possible to support spoken language.
- ▶ Build strong connections with a child first as the child is more likely to accept guidance from an adult with whom they have a strong connection.
- ▶ Respect a child's autonomy and choice to decline an instruction if there are no safety concerns.
- ▶ Provide support for children prior to, during, and following a challenging instruction (such as during transitions).



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