



Pathways to Success

Helpful Strategies for Parents and Caregivers of Young Children

Helping a Child Follow Directions

Help a child learn to follow directions by minimizing distractions and helping the child focus on what you are saying.

Here are some ways you can create an environment that encourages a child to listen and learn:

- 1. Get rid of distractions.** Noises, like the television, radio and other people talking make it hard for a child to listen and follow directions. Before you give a child a direction, turn off the noise or take the child somewhere quiet.
- 2. Prepare a child to listen.** Let them know when it is time to listen. Encourage the child to look at you. Call their name and say, “Time to listen.” You can also give the child a signal such as pointing to your ear.
- 3. Pair actions with words when you give a child a direction.** The action makes it easier for the child to understand and follow directions. Natural gestures will give the child cues about what you want them to do. For example, say, “Give it to me,” while holding your hand out.
- 4. Speak clearly and slowly.** A slower-than-normal rate of speech and pauses between ideas will help a child understand what you want them to do. Emphasize important parts of the direction by saying those words LOUDER and L O N G E R.
- 5. Repeat instructions to help a child remember.** However, if you often repeat directions three or four times, the child might learn they do not need to listen the first time. Encourage the child to ask you to repeat a direction if they need more help.
- 6. Give the child time.** Wait for 3-5 seconds to allow the child time to think about and understand the request before you repeat the direction.
- 7. Give one direction at a time or group directions that are similar.** For example, say, “Wash your face and brush your teeth” (group 1); then get your book and we’ll read it together” (group 2).
- 8. Use pictures.** For example, use a picture of scissors or glue when beginning a craft activity.

(see over)



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9. **Use words the child knows and understands.** If you must use new words or concepts, use these words in a variety of ways to help the child understand their meaning. Compare them to words the child already knows, for example, “The elephant is huge; huge means very big.”
10. **With older children, encourage the child to repeat the directions back to you.** Saying the directions out loud allows the older child more time to think about (process) the directions.
11. **Be positive.** When the child follows all or part of a direction, praise the child. Provide positive feedback to help the child learn from both successes and failures.