



Giving Effective Instructions

Rule	Reason	Examples
Make commands direct, not indirect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct commands tell the child that the parent expects him/her to listen (as opposed to making a suggestion) • Makes it clear that the child, not the parent, is to do the task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct: Please sit down right here. • Indirect: Would you like to sit down? • Direct: Please pick up your toys. • Indirect: Let's pick up your toys, okay?
Make commands single and small, not compound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is easier for children to comply with small commands • Some children can't remember multiple-part commands due to developmental level • The child gets more opportunities for praise • Helps parents stay on track 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please put your shoes in the closet (instead of . . . Clean your room) • Please put on your pajamas. • Please brush your teeth. • Please use the bathroom. (instead of . . . Get ready for bed.)
State commands positively (tell child what to do, instead of what not to do)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children often "rebel" against "stop" and "don't" commands • Tells child what (s)he can do instead • The child gets more opportunity for praise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child: (on kitchen counter) • Parent: Please get down. (instead of . . . Don't climb on the counter!) • Child: (bouncing ball) • Parent: Please get a book to read. (instead of . . . Stop bouncing that ball!) • Child: (runs away from parent) • Parent: Please hold my hand. (instead of . . . Don't run away!)

Rule	Reason	Examples
Make commands specific, not vague	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lets child know exactly what is expected ● Eliminates confusion ● Makes it easier to decide whether the child has listened (easier follow-through) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Please use your indoor voice. (instead of . . . Act nice!) ● Please walk. (instead of . . . Behave yourself!) ● Please wait for your turn. (instead of . . . Play nicely.)
Use a neutral tone of voice, instead of pleading or yelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children need to learn to respond to commands given in a normal tone of voice ● Prevents escalation ● Models self-control for the child ● Makes interactions more pleasant for both the child and the parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Come sit next to me. (instead of . . . Sit here now!!) ● Hold my hand. (instead of HOLD MY HAND RIGHT THIS MINUTE!)
State commands positively. (tell child what to do, instead of what not to do)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interactions are more pleasant ● Models good social skills ● Less likely to cause an oppositional child to disobey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Please hand me the crayon. ● Please sit next to me. ● Please put the toy in the box. ● Child: (runs away from parent) ● Parent: Please hold my hand. (instead of . . . Don't run away!)

Rule	Reason	Examples
Avoid giving too many direct commands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Neither adults nor children like to be told what to do constantly ● If parents give too many direct commands in a day, it is hard to follow through consistently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make time each day to play “their way” ● Only give instructions when necessary – give choices the rest of the time ● Stand up vs. do you want to clean up now or finish another puzzle
Provide consistent consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This is the fastest way to teach young children to follow rules better ● Compliance should not be taken for granted (or it may soon disappear) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parent: Please hand me the cup. ● Child: (hands cup to parent) ● Parent: Thanks for listening! You’re a good helper. ● Child: (fails to hand parent cup) ● Parent: Two choices.. hand me cup or sit in time-out.
Use choice commands when appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourages the development of autonomy and decision-making ● Increasing choice has shown to decrease problem behaviors ● Doesn’t take the “power” away from a child who tends to get in power struggles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You can watch TV or color quietly. ● Do you want to put on your white socks or your blue socks? ● Use your indoor voice or play in the backyard.