



BE DIRECT

IMPROVING COMPLIANCE Giving Effective Commands

The first step in getting compliance is to “**BE DIRECT**” with your child. Being direct helps your child understand exactly how you expect him or her to behave.

Be Specific With Your Commands

Make commands specific rather than vague. It is important to tell your child exactly what you want him/her to do. Providing a child with a specific command likely will result in getting the desired behavior. For example, instead of saying, “Now behave in the store,” a parent could say:

- “Please keep your hands to yourself.”
- “Please hold onto the shopping cart.”

Every Command Positively Stated

Avoid using **No – Don’t – Stop – Quit – or Not**. These words may cause some children to respond negatively, doing exactly what you’ve told them *not* to do! Instead, provide a command that tells the child what to do rather than what not to do. For example, many children enjoy jumping on the couch or their beds. A common response would be to tell the child to “Stop jumping on the bed”, or “quit it”. A positively stated command would be to instruct the child as to what you want them to do, such as:

- “Please sit on the couch.”
- “Please put your feet on the ground.”

Developmentally Appropriate

It is important that you give commands that your child is able to follow. Children are able to understand and do more as they get older, so our expectations for younger children should be different than for older children. Also, certain commands may be too difficult for young children. For example, a three-year-old may have difficulty neatly pulling up the covers when making their bed. In comparison, most seven-year-old children should be able to do this easily.

Individual Rather than Compound

Instructions should be given one command at a time, rather than stringing several together. Many younger children and children with attention problems have a hard time remembering more than one or two commands. In fact, when given instructions, some children may not recall anything other than the first or last thing you said! So, give one command at a time. For example, the first command for cleaning up the room might be, “Please put your Legos back in the box” (praise compliance). Then, “Now please put your dirty clothes in the hamper” (praise compliance). Then, “Please finish by putting the pillow back on the bed” (praise compliance). And so on...

Respectful and Polite

Starting most instructions with the word “**please**” is respectful and provides an example of using good manners, models appropriate social skills, and increases the likelihood that children will listen to commands.

- “Please hand me the blocks.”
- “Please share the toy with your sister.”

Essential Commands Only

Because some children often fail to comply with a command, parents spend more time giving commands – about everything! When children hear too many commands, they are more likely to tune them out; they simply become overloaded with commands! So save commands for times when it is important for your child to comply.

Carefully Timed Explanations

Children often require a reason or rationale for complying with a parent’s command. Giving the reason before giving the command will reduce the child’s attempts to negotiate or delay compliance. For example, you might say:

- “We are going to the store. Please put on your shoes.”
- “It’s time to eat lunch. Please come to the table.”

Tone of Voice is Neutral

Parents often say that they have to raise their voice if they want their children to obey. Repeatedly giving commands in a loud, stern voice can be stressful to parents, causing frustration and irritation. Give all commands in a neutral, “matter-of-fact” manner, avoiding angry, frustrated, pleading, or loud tones.

Predictable and Consistent Response Command → Comply → Praise !!!

In all instances, after you give a command and your child complies, follow up with praise! Consistency is key, it teaches the child that your responses are predictable. When children understand what they are supposed to do and know how you will respond, they are much calmer and happier. So, when your child behaves appropriately, respond positively! When the child misbehaves, you will have specific strategies for handling that behavior to insure that you can get back to having fun together as quickly as possible.