

Following Directions

Getting your child to comply

Getting small children to do what you want them to do is not always easy. They may ignore you, or, if they're old enough, simply say, "no." Sometimes, they may say they will do what you want, then never get around to doing it.

This kind of behavior can make you angry and frustrated.

Parents get frustrated when asking their children to do things becomes a power struggle. Yelling and getting angry doesn't help solve the problem. You have to teach your child to comply.

There are simple ways you can increase the chances of your child doing what you want them to do. You may have to work on your skills for giving directions. And you'll certainly need to be patient.

But, eventually, your child will learn to comply with what you ask him or her to do.

On Back

What you can do to teach your child to comply.

You & Your Child



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Getting your child to comply

Limit your requests

Keep it simple. Give your child only one or two requests at a time.

Younger children between ages 2 and 5 years cannot remember things a lot of the time. Consider that fact when giving instructions. Say, “Go get a paper towel, please.” Then, when your child returns, say, “Now, wipe up the spilled milk.”

Don’t yell or get angry

Anger and yelling will only worsen a power struggle.

Don’t do the job for your child

If your child balks at doing something, like cleaning his or her room, don’t you clean the room for your child. If you do, it will only teach your child that you are not serious when you make requests or that if he or she waits long enough you will do the job yourself.

Sharpen your direction-giving skills

The best way to get your child to comply is to give clear and firm directions.

- Be specific when giving directions. Sometimes, a young child may not understand what “set the table” means. Spell it out for your child. Say, “Please put the plates, napkins, and silverware on the table.”
- Make eye contact. Speak with your child face-to-face and have your child repeat what you told him or her to do.
- Don’t ask a question when you mean to give a direction. When you say, “Could you set the table?” you are giving your child the option to say, “No.”

Use praise and rewards

Praise your child immediately after he or she does what you requested. Rewarding your child after he or she does what you asked also helps.

Appeal to your child’s imagination

Try to make a job fun.

With setting the table, for example, have your child pretend he or she is a waitress or a waiter. If you want toys picked up, have your child pretend he or she is a magician who can make the toys disappear.

Supervise the first time around

When setting a routine, such as having your child clean up his or her room, make sure you supervise your child’s first try at it.

It isn’t fair to tell children to do something, then disapprove when they don’t do it correctly because you didn’t show them how.

Once your child knows how to do something, ask that he or she do it, and then leave the room. Give your child a chance to do the task by himself or herself.

Only use punishment when necessary

If your child won’t follow directions, wait five seconds to make sure he or she is really refusing to do so.

Count out loud.

Then, if your child still refuses, give him or her a choice between following your directions or being punished.

Don’t bribe your child

Don’t offer your child a treat if he or she follows your directions after first refusing.

When you do, you put your child in control and you teach that there are rewards for refusing to follow directions.

Try using a chart if the problem is severe

Post a chart that scores the number of times your child does what you ask.

You can set certain point levels for small rewards. This may help encourage your child to comply and work toward a goal.

