## Giving Good Directions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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</table>
| **Make commands direct, not indirect** | • Direct commands tell the child that the parent expects him/her to obey (as opposed to making a suggestion)  
  • Makes it clear that the child, not the parent, is to do the task | **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** | • It is easier for children to obey small commands that are not overwhelming  
  • Young children can’t remember multiple-part commands  
  • The child gets more opportunities for praise  
  • Helps parents stay on track | • 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) | • Children often rebel against “stop” and “don’t” commands  
  • Tells child what (s)he can do instead  
  • The child gets more opportunity for praise  
  • Avoiding criticism protects self-esteem and the relationship | **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!) |

Harborview 03
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<tbody>
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<td>Make commands specific, not vague</td>
<td>• Lets child know exactly what is expected</td>
<td>Please use your indoor voice. (instead of . . . Act nice!)</td>
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<td>• Eliminates confusion</td>
<td>Please walk. (instead of . . . Behave yourself!)</td>
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<td>• Makes it easier to decide whether the child has obeyed (easier follow-through)</td>
<td>Please wait for your turn. (instead of . . . Play nicely.)</td>
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<td>Use a neutral tone of voice, instead of pleading or yelling</td>
<td>• Children need to learn to respond to commands given in a normal tone of voice</td>
<td>Please come sit next to me. (instead of . . . Sit here now!! or It would really make mommy happy if you would sit here, please!!)</td>
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<td>• Prevents escalation</td>
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<td>• Models self-control for the child</td>
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<td>• Makes interactions more pleasant for both the child and the parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be polite and respectful, while still being direct</td>
<td>• Interactions are more pleasant</td>
<td>Please hand me the crayon.</td>
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<td>• Models good social skills</td>
<td>Please sit next to me.</td>
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<td>• Less likely to cause an oppositional child to disobey</td>
<td>Please put the toy in the box.</td>
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<td>Please hold my hand.</td>
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<td>Save direct commands for things you’re sure the child can do</td>
<td>• It’s unfair to punish disobedience if the child was unable to obey</td>
<td>• Make a picture. (instead of . . . Draw a stop sign.)</td>
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<td>• To encourage a child to try something new, use an indirect command or a suggestion</td>
<td>• Would you like to try and sign it? (instead of . . . Write your name.)</td>
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Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress 03
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| Avoid giving too many direct commands | • 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 | |
| Always provide a consequence for obedience and disobedience | • This is the fastest way to teach young children to mind better  
• Compliance should not be taken for granted (or it may soon disappear) | Parent: Please hand me the paper.  
Child: (hands paper to parent)  
Parent: Thanks for doing what I asked! You’re a good helper.  
Child: (fails to hand parent paper)  
Parent: You have two choices. You can hand me your paper or sit in time-out. |
| Use choice commands when appropriate. | • Encourages the development of autonomy and decision-making  
• Doesn’t take the “power” away from a child who tends to get in power struggles | • Please watch TV or color quietly.  
• Please put on your white socks or your blue socks.  
• Use your indoor voice or play in the backyard. |
| Use well-timed explanations (before the command or after the child has complied) | • Children who ask for explanations are usually more interested in stalling than knowing the answer  
• Give the child the impression that he/she might be able to talk their way out of it  
• Explanations given before the command can head off arguing and improve compliance | Poorly-timed . . .  
Parent: Put the crayons away.  
Child: Why?  
Parent: Because we need to go.  
Child: After I finish.  
Better . . .  
Parent: Our playtime is over and we need to go. Please put the crayons away.  
Child: Why?  
Parent: (ignores delay tactics because explanation has already been given) |