

Giving Good Directions

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 obey (as opposed to making a suggestion) • Makes it clear that the child, not the parent, is to do the task 	<p><u>Direct</u>: Please sit down right here.</p> <p><u>Indirect</u>: Would you like to sit down?</p> <p><u>Direct</u>: Please pick up your toys.</p> <p><u>Indirect</u>: Let's pick up your toys, okay?</p>
Make commands single and small, not compound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<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 <u>to do</u> , instead of what <u>not</u> 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 • Avoiding criticism protects self-esteem and the relationship 	<p><i>Child</i>: (on kitchen counter)</p> <p><i>Parent</i>: Please get down. (instead of . . . Don't climb on the counter!)</p> <p><i>Child</i>: (bouncing ball)</p> <p><i>Parent</i>: Please get a book to read. (instead of . . . Stop bouncing that ball!)</p> <p><i>Child</i>: (runs away from parent)</p> <p><i>Parent</i>: Please hold my hand. (instead of . . . Don't run away!)</p>

Adapted From: *Parent-Child Interaction Therapy* by Hembree-Kigin, T. & Bodiford McNeil, C., 1995.

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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 obeyed (easier follow-through) 	<p>Please use your indoor voice. (instead of . . . Act nice!)</p> <p>Please walk. (instead of . . . Behave yourself!)</p> <p>Please wait for your turn. (instead of . . . Play nicely.)</p>
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 	<p>Please come sit next to me. (instead of . . . Sit here now!! or It would really make mommy happy if you would sit here, please!!)</p>
Be polite and respectful, while still being direct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions are more pleasant • Models good social skills • Less likely to cause an oppositional child to disobey 	<p><u>Please</u> hand me the crayon.</p> <p><u>Please</u> sit next to me.</p> <p><u>Please</u> put the toy in the box.</p> <p><u>Please</u> hold my hand.</p>
Save direct commands for things you're sure the child can do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's unfair to punish disobedience if the child was unable to obey • To encourage a child to try something new, use an indirect command or a suggestion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a picture. (instead of . . . Draw a stop sign.) • Would you like to try and sign it? (instead of . . . Write your name.)

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Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress 03

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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 	
Always provide a consequence for obedience and disobedience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is the fastest way to teach young children to mind better Compliance should not be taken for granted (or it may soon disappear) 	<p><i>Parent:</i> Please hand me the paper. <i>Child:</i> (hands paper to parent) <i>Parent:</i> Thanks for doing what I asked! You're a good helper. <i>Child:</i> (fails to hand parent paper) <i>Parent:</i> You have two choices. You can hand me your paper or sit in time-out.</p>
Use choice commands when appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages the development of autonomy and decision-making Doesn't take the "power" away from a child who tends to get in power struggles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<p style="text-align: center;">Poorly-timed . . .</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Put the crayons away. <i>Child:</i> Why? <i>Parent:</i> Because we need to go. <i>Child:</i> After I finish.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Better . . .</p> <p><i>Parent:</i> Our playtime is over and we need to go. Please put the crayons away. <i>Child:</i> Why? <i>Parent:</i> (ignores delay tactics because explanation has already been given)</p>