

Following directions involves several other skills. It requires a child to pay attention, understand what has been asked, remember what has been asked, and take or stop actions.

First, check how you give directions, modify as needed.

- Are your directions clear about what you expect children to do?
- Watch out for hidden steps in your directions. When you say, “Wash your hands,” you are actually asking them to do several steps: go to the sink, turn on the water, get soap, wash, rinse, dry with a paper towel, and throw the towel away?
- Use clear and specific commands. Instead of “Get started,” say, “Please, go start your reading homework.”
- Be direct. Make statements instead of asking questions. Say, “Please sit down,” instead of “Are you ready to sit down and eat?”

Help your child pay attention. Alert them when directions are coming and they should listen.

- Call their name. Say, “Listen. I’m going to tell you what to do. Are you ready?”
- Ask for your child’s attention by saying, “Look toward me, please. I need you to listen now.”
- Give instructions when you are near the child, rather than calling out from across the room.
- Help your child use self-talk. That means they should repeat the directions to themselves to keep the steps in mind.

Make sure your child understands your directions.

- Check for understanding. Ask your child to repeat your directions back to you or explain your directions in his own words.
- Give your child a chance to ask questions. This will also give you a chance to clarify what you said in case he misunderstood anything.

Give cues to help your child recall directions.

- Say things like “There are three things you need to do,” or use words like first, second, then, next and last.
- Help your child follow multi-step directions by actually putting a number to them. Typically, people can hold up to four things in their working memory at a time.