

## Helping my child to listen and follow direction more often.

As parents we can often feel like we spend our days repeating ourselves, pick up your coat, take out your homework, stop hitting your sister, dinner is ready! It can feel like we are in Groundhog Day, saying the same things day in day out. Hopefully, this topic helps you feel like your children hear what you say and follow your instruction more often.

The reality is, it is normal for children not to follow commands all of the time! But there are ways we can help our children to follow our direction and listen more often.

### Avoid stop, no and don't commands

How often do we say stop, no or don't when giving a command? Stop hitting your sister, don't run, no you can't wear your pyjamas to the park. When we phrase things in the negative we actually don't help our children to know what it is they need to do, as we phrase it in such a way that we focus on what not to do. To help children hear and follow our command, phrase it in the positive. Say what it is you want them to do rather than what you want them to stop doing.

For example:

Walk slowly rather than stop running

Hands by your side, if their hands are by their side they cannot hit their sister

You can wear your pyjamas around the house, if you want to go to the park you must get dressed.

The easiest way to start talking this way is to start by simply taking note of the commands you give in the way you currently phrase them and then work out how to say it in the positive. Talking differently in the middle of parenting your children is going to frustrate you as you may find yourself getting tongue tied trying to think of what to say. I suggest trying it out at a time of day that you are calmest and choosing to try it for 15 minutes a day until you have mastered the skill of thinking on your feet.

### Routine charts

As adults we often write out a shopping list or to do list so that we don't forget something important, the same principal works for children. Having a step by step routine chart for getting ready in the morning, cleaning their room, getting ready for bed, study planning etc. Whatever you feel your child struggles with or a time of day you think you give lots of instruction, think about making a routine chart or to do list with your child, putting it up some place they see it often. It will really help you to give less instruction and support your child knowing what is expected or what comes next.

### **Choose your battles**

Ask yourself is what I am asking really necessary? For example, your child may choose clothes that you would not but together yourself, if it's a day off school or there is no important family occasion or it is weather appropriate, can you allow your child to express their individuality? Other times it maybe helpful to allow your child to experience the consequences of their choice, if for example your child puts their shoes on the wrong feet it will feel uncomfortable and they will learn why shoes go on a particular way. If they chose not to wear their coat outside on a cold day, you might bring it along without insisting they wear it, once outside they will feel cold and put it on.

### **Give choice where you can**

Giving choice really helps children to learn problem solving and to think ahead on what might happen if they choose a certain choice. It can be really helpful if siblings are fighting over a toy or game. "Come up with a plan to share together or I will remove it until you can get along."

### **First then or when then commands**

First then or when then helps a child understand the order of things and helps them to wait. "First we will post these letters and then we will go to the park" or "When I have finished this phone call then we will do something nice together."

### **Give one command at a time**

This might sound obvious but how many times do we call out lots of commands without knowing if they have completed the first one? Giving one command at a time, waiting for them to follow the instruction before giving the next one will help them keep up and remember.

### **Praise someone who is doing as you have asked**

If there is another child or adult who is doing as you have asked praise them. The child who is not, will start to do it just for the praise. If and when they do, make sure to praise them. "Well done for hanging up your coat!" "Thank you for doing as I asked first time I asked."

Lastly, no one likes hearing the word no, if your child is upset hearing no that is normal and expected. You can empathise with the feeling without changing your mind. I hope these ideas are helpful and don't forget you can pop into our parent drop in clinic any Tuesday morning.

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