

Giving Effective Instructions

Use This:

To teach the parent how to give instructions in a way that will improve the child's follow-through.



Goals

- The parent will understand *when* to give instructions so that they will be more effective
- The parent will understand *how* to give instructions in terms of both their verbal and nonverbal aspects so that they will be more effective
- The parent will rehearse a “follow-through training” and agree to practise more at home

Materials

- ***Fear Thermometer*** and ***Fear Ladder*** (2 unrated copies, for anxiety/trauma), ***Feelings Thermometer*** (for depression) (pp. 318, 320, 342)
- ***Giving Effective Instructions*** parent handout (p. 399)
- ***Checklist of Strategies*** (p. 391)
- ***Weekly questionnaires*** and ***Monitoring sheet*** (see pages 277-293)
- ***Therapist Note Taking Sheet*** (p. 276)

If time is tight: Teach the parent the basic steps for giving instructions more effectively and introduce “follow-through training” periods.

Main steps

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|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set an Agenda | Remember to start by setting an agenda together and reviewing any practice assignments. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain Weekly Ratings | If the main focus is traumatic stress or anxiety, use the 0 to 10 scale of the <i>Fear Thermometer</i> to obtain <i>Fear Ladder</i> ratings from both the child and his or her parent. If the main focus is depressed mood, use the <i>Feelings Thermometer</i> to take a rating. Review <i>Weekly questionnaires</i> and <i>Monitoring sheet</i> in detail, in particular, examples of active ignoring and how it worked/didn't work. |

<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Effective Instructions	<p>Explain the importance of giving effective instructions. Build the parent’s enthusiasm for this module by letting them know that this is one of the simplest, most efficient, and most effective things a parent can do to improve a child’s behaviour. Following instructions is one of the most important things a child can learn, and doing well at this generally means a child will improve in lots of other areas.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss When to Give Instructions	<p>Explain that one problem common among children who do not follow instructions is that they end up getting more instructions than the average child and this is particularly true of young people with epilepsy and developmental delay. They may go around all day with parents and teachers making and repeating all kinds of requests (e.g., stop this, do that). For instructions to be more effective, the parent needs to use them more sparingly and be prepared to enforce those that are given. The parent must first make sure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The instruction is for something that is really important. Not all instructions are equally important. For example, take your medication is more important than clean your bedroom. • The parent is willing to see the request to completion
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss How to Give Instructions	<p>Explain that once the above conditions are met, it is important to pay attention to <i>how</i> an instruction is given. Two things can make instructions more effective: (1) the words we say, and (2) the way we say them.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Less Effective “Words We Say”	<p>Introduce the <i>Giving Effective Instructions</i> handout. Review for the parent several kinds of instructions that are less effective. It might help to write these down. They are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Let’s” instructions: those that start with the word “let’s” 2. “Vague” instructions, which don’t spell out a clear behaviour for the child to perform 3. “Question” instructions, which involve parents asking the child instead of telling 4. “List” instructions, in which parents string together a long list of instructions all at once <p>Review the examples on page 1 of the handout, and see if the parent can come up with another example in each of the four categories.</p>

- Discuss More Effective “Words We Say”** Then review with the parents how these instructions could be said more effectively. First review the examples on the right side of page 1 of the handout, then come up with more examples together. These could include:
- Less effective: Would you please stop teasing your brother?
[question] More effective: Stop teasing your brother.
 - Less effective: Let’s clean up some of your toys now.
[let’s] More effective: Please clean up your toys now.
 - Less effective: Behave yourself on the way to school.
[vague] More effective: Stay in your seat and face forward when you are on the bus this morning.
 - Less effective: Get ready for dinner. [vague] Less effective: Come on! Get ready for dinner and get in the kitchen right now – it’s your turn to set the table. [list] More effective: Please wash your hands (wait for task to be done). Now please put the cutlery on the table.

ACTIVITY
Labelling Ineffective Instructions

Once the parent understands the difference between ineffective and effective instructions, engage in a brief game. Issue several ineffective instructions to the parent, and have him or her identify what kind of mistakes they are. For example, call out things to them like, “Why don’t you clean your room?” to which they should reply, “a question.” Once the parent is doing well at this game, ask him or her to restate your instructions in a more effective way. For example, when you say, “Let’s get dressed for school,” a parent should say, “That’s a ‘let’s’ instruction. The better way to say it is “Please get dressed for school.” For a parent doing really well, you can increase the challenge with some doubly ineffective instructions. For example, you can say, “Why won’t you behave?” [question AND vague] or “Let’s pick up these toys, get dressed for school, brush your teeth, and get your lunch ready.” [Let’s AND too many]. Remember to have the parent restate these instructions in a more effective way.

- Discuss “How We Say Them”** Explain to the parent that having now covered the *words we say*, it is time to cover *how we say them*. Review common problems with how instructions are said. Turn to the second page of the handout.

- Discuss Eye Contact** Point out how making eye contact when issuing instructions can increase the child’s follow-through. The parent should be aware that he or she needs to look directly at the child when giving instructions to ensure the child’s undivided attention, particularly when children have difficulties with attention. It may also help to kneel or sit, to get down to the child’s level. Calling out an instruction from across the room – or from another room – is less likely to be successful.

<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Distractions	<p>When issuing instructions, the parent should also make every effort to reduce significant distractions. For example, if there is music playing or the TV is on, the first instructions should involve getting the TV or music off before giving instructions for something else.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Prompts for Transitions	<p>Point out that if a request involves stopping one activity to start another, it will work better if the parent first gives a prompt. For example, rather than saying, "Please brush your teeth now" when a child is watching TV, it is more helpful to say, "In 5 minutes, you will need to turn off the TV." The parent should return in 5 minutes, make sure the TV gets turned off, and then issue the next instruction: "Please brush your teeth."</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Tone	<p>Point out that instructions are more likely to be met with resistance or a struggle if the child is aware that the parent is angry. The more calmly something is said, the better.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Check-Ins	<p>Let the parent know that when issuing instructions, it is also helpful to have the child repeat the instruction back to the parent to ensure that the child has understood the request.</p>
<p>Example script</p>	
<p>Parent: <i>(in calm tone) Brian, please wash your hands. (making eye contact) What do I want you to do right now?</i></p>	
<p>Child: <i>Wash my hands.</i></p>	
<p>Parent: <i>Yes, that's right. Please wash your hands.</i></p>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid Explanations	<p>Explain that it is not necessary to 'teach' your child at every opportunity by explaining the reasons behind your instruction. You can discuss the reasons another time. In the moment, just issue a simple, clear effective instruction and don't go on too much.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> ACTIVITY Practise Giving Instructions	<p>Role-play with the parent how to give simple instructions, followed by praise (adapt for telephone delivery). First play the role of parent, so that you can model effective instructions for about 2 minutes. Then, inform the parent that you will play the role of his or her child, and he or she will act as the parent, issuing simple instructions. Pay close attention both to what is said and to how it is said. Provide lots of praise when the parent gets it right, and support the parent with feedback when needed.</p>

<input type="checkbox"/> Introduce Follow-Through Training	<p>Discuss the importance of a child’s being able to comply with an instruction – what we will call “follow-through.” For the child to become more successful at following through with parental instructions, it will help to create extra learning opportunities for the child. Thus, it will be useful to have the parent actually increase the rate at which they give instructions to their child during a brief follow-through training period, thereby providing the child with more opportunities for learning. These should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last 3 to 5 minutes • Occur 2 or 3 times each day • Include a series of very simple tasks (e.g., pass the salt) • Be followed with praise <p>Remind the parent that the increased instructions are to occur only during the training periods for now. The parent should continue to choose carefully when issuing instructions outside of these training periods.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Pick a Time for Training Periods	<p>Suggest to the parent that these training periods be tried during times of the day when the child is not already engaged in some really fun activity, but instead when the child appears to be between play activities. Waiting to conduct the training periods during such “down times” is likely to increase the chances of success.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT <i>Follow-Through Training at Home</i>	<p>Explain to the parent that before the next session you would like him or her to practise these follow-through training periods described above, as often as twice a day. The parent should be reminded to provide praise to the child when instructions are followed successfully.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Send the materials for the next session	<p>Tell the parent/s you will send a written summary and the <i>Weekly questionnaires, Monitoring sheet</i> and <i>Checklist of Strategies</i> which need to be completed for the next session.</p>
<p>Confirm date and time of the next call.</p>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Summarising	<p>Ask if they would like you to summarise the session, if they want to summarise or if you should do it together.</p>

Leave ‘Em Laughing

End the session on a positive note with the parent by perhaps talking about things that are unrelated to his or her child, or discussing an area of interest you have in common with the parent. Also, the parent might be feeling overwhelmed by the challenging tasks he or she is undertaking; it can sometimes be helpful to leave a few minutes at the end of the session for the parent to share concerns or the challenges he or she has faced with the child since the previous session. The end of each session should be used to praise the parent’s efforts and to convey support and encouragement.

Share with Child (if possible)

At the end of the session, if the child is available, it can be helpful to brief him or her on the materials covered.

<input type="checkbox"/> Review Concepts	If the child is available, tell the child that for the next week, his or her parent will be asking the child to do things, such as chores and other small tasks. Indicate to the child that his or her parent will also be providing him or her with praise when he or she follows through on these instructions. Ask the child if he or she has any questions about the new way that requests will be handled at home.
<input type="checkbox"/> ACTIVITY <i>Practise Instructions with Child</i>	Ask the parent to try a follow-through training with his or her child, similar to what was assigned for practice at home. Ask the parent to give instructions to engage in an easy task, such as bringing an object to the parent or performing a small job for the parent. Make sure that the parent issues one instruction at a time, waits for follow-through before issuing another instruction. This exercise should last approximately 2 minutes. Pay close attention to both what is said and how it is said. Also note whether the parent persists with the instruction he or she issues (e.g., does the parent repeat the instruction if it was not followed the first time?) and note the strategies the parent uses to address poor follow through (e.g., does the parent attempt to make eye contact with the child, ask the child to repeat back the instruction?). Finally, note the parent’s use of praise following the child’s follow-through. After the role-play has been concluded, excuse the child from the room, and discuss what the parent thinks about his or her performance. Give lots of praise for any success as well as for the parent’s efforts! Provide the parent with specific feedback about his or her ability to issue commands and to follow them with praise. Make specific suggestions about how the parent can improve his or her ability to give instructions, and provide support and reassurance.

Helpful Tips

- The parent can create “chore cards” for extended tasks, such as when asking the child to clean his or her room or do his or her homework. When the parent has created “chore cards” for extended tasks, he or she can write down the steps involved so that the child can carry the card with him or her while performing the job. Using “chore cards” can help to ensure that there is no debate from the child over the exact steps of the task assigned. For example, a Chore Card for “Cleaning Up Room” might say, “1. Put toys in closet. 2. Make bed. 3. Put books on the shelf. 4. Pick up dirty clothes and put in basket.”
- The parent may also wish to assign time limits for certain instructions. When assigning time limits for completion of tasks (e.g., cleaning up room), the parent should set a specified time on a kitchen timer to let the child know the time limit as well as the consequences that will occur if the time limit is not met.
- Parents should be reminded that even instructions delivered in the most effective way possible may not work when they first try this at home. If that happens, parents should be encouraged to handle the child’s noncompliance as they typically have done in the past. Discuss with the parent that in subsequent sessions, you will be discussing alternative ways to handle the child’s lack of follow-through.

How’s Your Style?

- Did you praise often?
- Did you review often, by asking questions?
- Did you simplify the steps as needed?
- Did your pace match that of the child or family?
- Did you stay on track?