

Listens and Follows Directions

What does “Listens and Follows Directions” mean?

This skill is about a child’s ability to do what a parent or teacher asks them to do. The child shows they are listening to the adult giving the directions by following the instructions as best they can. Directions with two or three steps are appropriate for children in kindergarten. For example, “Push in your chair and put your plate in the sink.” Directions with too many steps can be confusing for young children and shouldn’t be used. This skill is important because it shows that the child can pay attention to what adults say and can follow instructions.

TIPS for FAMILIES

How can I explain this skill to my child?

Use the game Simon Says to help your child understand the value of listening and following directions. Tell your child that this game has a leader who gives directions and others who follow the directions. When you listen and follow the leader, you win the game!

What are some things I can do to help my child learn this skill?

TIP1

Get your child’s attention before giving directions. Here are some things you can do to get your child’s attention:

- Make sure screens are paused or off (for example, TV, tablets, or phones).
- Call your child by name.
- Get down on your child’s level and make eye contact.
- Ask your child to do a few things they are likely to do first and then ask them to do something they are less likely to do. For example, you could say, “If you can hear me, clap your hands.” After the child claps, you could say, “Great, now pat your head.” After they pat their head, you could say, “Now touch your nose.” Finally, give a direction that they are less likely to follow like, “Please sit down.”

TIP2

Give clear and specific directions. Once you have your child’s attention, give clear and specific directions. Here are some examples of unclear directions and better ways to say them:

Unclear Directions	Clear and Specific Directions
Instead of this...	Say this...
“Let’s put away the toys.”	“Miguel, please put the blocks back on the shelf.”
“Why don’t you put your dishes in the sink?”	“Marcus, put your dishes in the sink.”
“Don’t make a mess!”	“Ava, please draw with your crayons on the paper.”

In addition, make sure you:

- Remember not to give too many directions at once.
- Give directions slowly so your child has time to understand what you are asking them to do.
- Give your child time to follow your directions and do not jump in too quickly to do things for them.
- Build time into routines to make sure you aren’t rushed to do things for your child. For example, before school, plan for an extra ten minutes so your child can put on their own shoes.

TIP3

Ask the child to repeat the directions you gave back to you. Asking your child to repeat directions back to you is an easy way to check that they listened and understood your instructions. After asking your child to do something you can say, “Miguel, can you tell me what I asked you to do?”

TIP4

Try modeling what you are asking your child to do. When you ask your child to do something, tell and show them how. You can say, “Like this, Marcus,” and then demonstrate what you want them to do. This can help them understand exactly what you are asking and give them a model to copy.

How can I encourage my child when I see them trying to learn this skill?

Acknowledge your child for their efforts! For example, tell your child, “Miguel, you are doing a great job listening right now,” or “Marcus, you worked hard to put your toys away after I told you to clean up!”

To learn more about the tips and where they came from, please visit our references page: ckphilly.org/citations