



Following Directions

Before you get started...

Separate your math and spelling pages, put the markers next to the scrapbooks on the middle shelf, and bring me your journals.

Have you ever stopped to think about all the skills you need to use in order to follow directions? You need to...

- pay attention to the speaker;
- hold the directions in your working memory;
- understand the vocabulary—separate, journal, scrapbooks;
- understand the concepts—next to, middle, before;
- understand the sentence structures; and
- be willing to comply with the speaker!

Inside, we will share our tried and true strategies to support these students in your classroom.

In this issue:

- Information about the skills needed to follow directions
- How students with difficulties following directions present in the classroom
- Strategies to try
- Ideas to send home to parents

Reminders

- School conferences are approaching and that means that you may have questions from parents about our services. If a parent brings up a concern about communication skills, please bring it forward to your speech-language pathologist (s-lp). The s-lp might be able to problem-solve a solution without needing to make a formal referral. If individual service is needed, please let parents know that there may be a wait for that service.
- Your next School Speech Language Services Summary will be sent to you in December. If you need an updated list, please talk to your s-lp.

Please share the last page of the newsletter with your families.

How to tell when a student has trouble following directions

Here is what you might see in your classroom...

The student:

- takes a long time to respond.
- does not respond at all to the direction.
- seems to be hearing what is said, but not listening.
- has trouble recognizing what's important and what isn't.
- misses key information in verbal directions.
- finds it hard to remember details.
- has difficulty responding to direct questions.
- mixes up the order in which things need to be done.
- misreads directions.
- gets lost when reading directions.

Recognizing where the student is breaking down changes how you will support him in the classroom. **Not all difficulties following directions are language-based.** Other breakdowns are related to:

Attention

The student may have difficulty slowing down and following directions. It might help if you...

- make sure you have her attention;
- give simple, actionable directions;
- chunk directions into manageable pieces;
- speak clearly and in a firm voice; and
- give the explanation before you give the direction.

For more information about supporting students with attention difficulties, go to www.canlearnsociety.ca.

Working Memory

Working memory is the brain's sticky note that helps to remember incoming information long enough to use it. You can support a student with working memory difficulties by...

- using visuals to help support completion of tasks with multiple steps;
- using checklists to complete multistep tasks;
- using key words written on a white board or smart board to support new information; and
- repeating, repeating, and repeating!

Helping Language Impaired Students Follow Directions

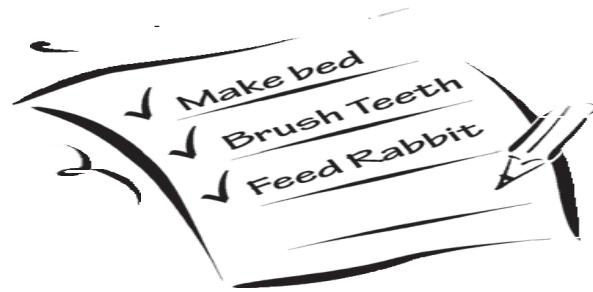
If a student is having trouble following directions and you are confident that these difficulties are not related to attention or working memory, the student may have a language delay or disorder. The student can hear fine but has problems processing and following through on incoming directions and information, especially verbal directions. Language-based problems include problems with reading and reading comprehension. This makes it difficult for him to follow written directions.

Here are some easy ways to make following directions easier for a student with a language impairment:

- **Face the student.** It is much easier for a student to listen if she can see your face. You will also have a better idea if she is not understanding part of the direction.
- **Repeat, repeat, repeat.** The student with a language impairments will need to hear directions more than once.
- **Avoid overly chatty directions.** Only include the information that is absolutely necessary.
- **Keep directions concise and simple.**
- **Number multiple steps,** if you need to give more than one step at a time. This makes it easier for the student to know how many things he has to do. You may also consider waiting for the student to complete the first step before giving the next one.
- **Keep your vocabulary simple.** Use words you know the student understands.
- **Word order counts.** Give the directions in the order you want them to be completed.
- **Consider using visual supports,** especially for rote tasks.
- **Teach the student that she is responsible for understanding what she hears.** Encourage her to ask questions or to ask for things to be repeated if she hasn't understood.
- **Avoid giving instructions over the classroom noise.** Try to quiet the classroom before starting.
- Some students may need some **concepts taught to them directly.** Students need to be able to

Helping Children Follow Directions at Home

Some children have problems following directions. You can help your child learn how to follow directions by creating an environment that encourages the child to listen and learn. Here are some suggestions:



- Noises, such as the television, radio, dishwasher and other people talking, make it hard for your child to listen and follow directions. Before you give your child a direction, turn off the noise or take him somewhere quieter. If you cannot turn off or move away from the noise, stand close to your child so that other noises are less distracting.
- Let your child know when it is time to listen. Call your child's name and say, *Time to listen*. You can also give your child a signal such as pointing to your ear.
- Use actions with words. The action makes it easier for your child to understand and follow directions. For example, pretend to wash your hands while saying, *Go wash your hands*.
- Ask your child to repeat directions after you give them.
- Speak clearly and slowly. Emphasize important words in the direction. For example, you might say, *Bring me the red blanket, please*.
- Give one direction at a time. Wait for your child to finish doing the first direction before you give another direction.
- Give your child extra time to understand and carry out directions. Be patient.
- If your child does not follow a direction, it may be because he did not understand. Make your direction easier to understand by using simpler words or shorter directions.