

following directions

It's Not Defiance—It's ADD.

Don't assume that your child means to ignore you.



Is it expecting too much for my child to do as I say? If you've ever caught yourself muttering something like this, consider the skills involved in following directions. Listening, understanding, staying focused on a task—these don't come easily to kids with AD/HD. Your child may be listening to your instructions, only to be distracted by a barking dog outside. If what you're telling her to do involves several steps, she may remember only one or two.

The specific way in which you give instructions to an ADDer is a key factor in determining whether she'll comply. Keep in mind that, even at an age when most youngsters can work independently, children who have AD/HD may still need your guidance and support.

Don't Ask!

"I try to issue instructions in the form of a command, not a question. Some students interpret 'Would you open your math books to page 45?' as a choice. But when I skip 'would you,' all books are opened. The same is true with my own children. 'Why don't you wash up for dinner now?' never results in clean hands."

—KAREN SUNDERHAFT, fourth-grade teacher, Shaker Heights, Ohio

SOLUTIONS

IN THE CLASSROOM

- ▶ **Grab their attention.** Use a bell, chime, or gong to indicate you're about to give instructions. Vary the pitch and volume of your voice. Write instructions on the blackboard with colored chalk. Use props—a butterfly net, for example, if you're assigning a project on nature. Tell an anecdote or perform a pantomime—anything to keep all eyes on you.
- ▶ **Establish eye contact to be sure an ADD student is listening** when you give directions, or walk over and gently tap her on the shoulder. Whenever possible, provide instructions individually to the ADDer rather than to the entire class.
- ▶ **Avoid language that's open to interpretation, such as "behave appropriately."** Telling your class at dismissal to put their spelling notebooks and music folders in their backpacks is better than saying, "Pack up everything you need."
- ▶ **Each time you give an assignment, have three students repeat what you said.** Then have the class say it in unison. This gives the ADDer multiple opportunities to hear it.

AT HOME

- ▶ **Don't compete with music, video games, or the television when giving instructions.** Turn these off, if necessary, to get your child's full attention.
- ▶ **Tell your child what to do—and then stop talking.** Many parents continue to explain and elaborate, but this only distracts the child instead of allowing him to comply.

- ▶ **Break complex tasks into small, simple steps.** Give your child a single instruction, and tell her to complete it and report back for another. If the task is an unfamiliar one, demonstrate how it's done.

When your child becomes adept at following a one-step command ("Turn off the TV"), try her with two steps ("Turn off the TV and put on your pajamas"). Praise her accomplishment, and slowly make your commands more complex.

- ▶ **Create a checklist of daily routines.** Kids with AD/HD may need reminders to attend to routine tasks. A checklist will help your child operate independently.

For children who are not yet fluent readers, snap a photo—or draw a picture—to illustrate each step of a regular routine. Getting ready for school, for example, would include pictures of getting dressed, eating breakfast, brushing teeth, and packing a schoolbag. Post the pictures in the proper order to serve as a visual guide.

- ▶ **Make a game out of chores.** Play your child's favorite song, for instance, and challenge her to put away her toys before it ends.

- ▶ **Inspect your child's work.** Offer praise when he follows directions or tries his best. Reward deserving efforts with a favorite activity or snack.

- ▶ **If your child gets sidetracked, gently redirect him.** If you asked him to feed the dog but then found him outside playing basketball, say: "Remember, you're supposed to be feeding Beethoven right now. I'll hold on to the basketball, so you'll know where to find it when you're done."