

The Most Effective Way
to Teach Your Kids to
Follow Directions





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If you're a parent, you know that children don't come with a handbook. There are many challenges that come with helping a person along the road from childhood to adulthood. But while there's no simple guide, there are many time-tested skills that every parent can benefit from learning.

Giving good directions is the first of twelve skills taught in the Parent Management Training- Oregon (PMTO)

model and shared by the **KVC Institute for Health Systems Innovation**. ([click to learn more](#))

This evidence-based model is developed on forty years of research and practice with the belief that parents are their best teachers. KVC teaches these parenting skills to parents and caregivers involved in the child welfare system, but the lessons learned from this model can be beneficial for anyone.

How parents typically give directions:

- *Drive By*

Parent rushes quickly past the child saying, “Go get your coat on. It is time to go.” Parent is gone and out the door before completing the direction.

- *Too Many Words*

“Now, after you are finished with what you are doing, you’re going to need to...and don’t forget to...”

- *Nag/Scream*

(in a very loud voice) “You never do what you’re supposed to do. Why can’t you be like other kids?”

- *Unclear/Vague*

“Let’s not do that anymore.”

- *Hostile/Sarcastic*

“You call this clean?”

- *Question*

“How about turning off the TV?”

- *Depressed*

(very flat with downcast eyes) “All I need is for you to go and sit at the table.” (sigh)

- *Long Distance*

(from the other room) “Go get ready for school.”

- *Threats*

“If you don’t pick up your toys, I’m going to throw them in the trash.”

- *Begging/Pleading*

“Will you just do what I ask?”

- *Stop Commands*

“Stop yelling! Don’t do that!”

*Minimize stop commands. Pair with a start command: “Stop yelling. Use an inside voice.”



Most parents can identify with these less than effective ways of giving directions.



How to give your child good directions

• If the typical ways of giving your child directions has proved to be less than effective, test out the following tips to strengthen your ability to give a good direction:

- **1. Tell your child what you want them to do.**
- **2. Be pleasant, polite, respectful, but firm.**
- **3. Act like you expect cooperation.**
- **4. Make a clear, short statement.**
- **5. Stand and hold for 10 seconds.**

• If the child does not comply, repeat the direction a second time.
• Once the direction is followed, express a positive reaction.



See these examples:

Typical direction

- “How many times do I have to tell you about your bed?”
- (yelling across the room) “Get those books picked up NOW!”
- “How about putting away your dirty dishes?”
- “Stop doing that!”

Try this...

- “Make your bed now, please.”
- “Put your books back on the shelf now, please.”
- “Put your dirty dishes in the sink now, please.”
- “Stop running. Walk slowly, please.”

Remember to...

- Make a clear, short statement that tells the child exactly what you want them to do.
- Use good timing. Be close at hand and get the child’s attention.
- Be calm, positive or neutral. Use a pleasant, respectful yet firm voice.
- Stand and hold after giving the direction. When the child complies, follow through with a positive reaction.

Now you try!

Read each of the typical directions below and improve them using the tips we’ve shared.

Typical direction

- “You know you’re supposed to eat your snack at the table!”
- “Should your toys be scattered on the living room floor?”
- (yelling from the kitchen) “Time to put your coat on!”
- “Stop shouting!”

Better direction

Do NOT...

- Tell the child what NOT to do or ask a question.
- Give directions from a distance or at a bad time.
- Give directions with negative emotion or in an angry, impolite or begging tone.
- Ignore the child when they comply with the direction.

Track your progress:

Identify a 15-minute period of time over the next week that you will plan to track the directions you give to your child. Mark if you used a common approach or tried a new one along with the child's response.

Common Approach Used	Child's Response	New Approach Used	Child's Response
	<input type="checkbox"/> Complied <input type="checkbox"/> Did not comply		<input type="checkbox"/> Complied <input type="checkbox"/> Did not comply
	<input type="checkbox"/> Complied <input type="checkbox"/> Did not comply		<input type="checkbox"/> Complied <input type="checkbox"/> Did not comply
	<input type="checkbox"/> Complied <input type="checkbox"/> Did not comply		<input type="checkbox"/> Complied <input type="checkbox"/> Did not comply
	<input type="checkbox"/> Complied <input type="checkbox"/> Did not comply		<input type="checkbox"/> Complied <input type="checkbox"/> Did not comply
	<input type="checkbox"/> Complied <input type="checkbox"/> Did not comply		<input type="checkbox"/> Complied <input type="checkbox"/> Did not comply

Which of the new approaches did your child respond to? _____



The mission of the KVC Institute for Health Systems Innovation is to transform the experience of childhood for all children through the advancement of health and wellness. It is part of a healthcare network that directly touches the lives of over 61,000 people each year through in-home family support, foster family care, adoption, behavioral healthcare, substance abuse treatment and psychiatric hospitals.



KVC Institute
for Health Systems Innovation

The KVC Institute focuses on expediting research into direct practice. It offers training and consultation to a wide range of public and private agencies and has earned international recognition for integrating trauma-informed care into child welfare and related systems. Through its neuroscience initiative, the KVC Institute is educating communities about the link between childhood adversity and life-long health problems and leading efforts to address it through prevention and innovative treatment. Learn more at www.kvc.org/institute.

Want to help a child or teen in need?

Foster parenting is one of the best ways

You can make a difference! Foster parenting provides a child or teen who has experienced abuse or neglect with a safe, loving environment. It will also enrich your life, giving you the opportunity to grow emotionally, mentally and spiritually as you teach life skills and give support.

We'll guide you every step of the way, providing:

- Free ongoing training and support 24/7, 365 days/year – in person, by phone and on a KVC MyLink™ iPad
- A sense of community with other foster parents who share your passion
- Assistance finding local resources
- A fun weekend away at our Resource Family Conference, which provides a fantastic learning experience for parents and children
- And of course, monthly reimbursement to meet the child's needs plus assistance with back-to-school supplies and holiday gifts.

Choose KVC as your agency:

Each year, KVC touches the lives of over 61,000 children and families by providing in-home family support, foster care, adoption, behavioral health, youth substance abuse treatment and psychiatric hospital treatment. We are dedicated to providing high-quality, effective support to children and families, transforming foster care into a positive, life-changing experience for everyone involved.



Learn more at www.kvc.org