

# After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* A social skills enrichment programme for primary students



## Lesson 3: following instructions

In this lesson your child learnt how to follow directions and what the benefits are. Here are a few tips for parents to improve their children's capacity to follow instructions.

### Learning how to look, listen and wait take time

Do what you can to model the best listening and observing skills. For example, if your child wants your attention while you are busy let them know you will help them in a few minutes once you are finished. This shows respect and that you do care about what they want. It also models healthy communication which helps to reduce stress!

### Strategies to strengthen looking and listening skills

- Every so often invent opportunities to brainstorm what good listening and looking actually look like. Watch others and highlight how they show essential looking and listening skills under the headings of; head, eyes, ears, face, voice, arms, hands, body. Display them on a checklist for everyone in the family to see.
- Play listening games to identify animal or environmental sounds. Listen to readymade CD's to do this.
- Have fun with musical instruments or get your children to copy clapping rhythms.
- Playing a quick burst of 'Simple Simon' can raise looking and listening readiness. Build out the degree of complexity by using 3 and 4 instructions such as, clap your hands, click your fingers and stamp your feet.
- Read to children. During the story, pause and ask questions to ensure they are tuned in and listening.
- Play the good fun listening game; "When I went to the shop .... I bought some bread". The next person says, "When I went to the shop ... I bought some bread and a pizza". Then, the next repeats the previous items and then adds their own, and so the game builds.
- As you deliver an important instruction hold up a visually impressive object to cue children into knowing that right now is a critical time to listen.
- Count down from five to zero with children knowing that by the time you reach zero they need to be tuned in ready to look and listen.
- When giving the instruction, get down on their level and make eye contact with your child.
- If necessary, gently touch them on the arm so their attention turns to you.
- Ask them to repeat the instruction.

### Give the instruction once

Most of us all fall into the trap of repeating instructions because our children actually condition us to do it! In the event that they can't remember the instruction, and you must repeat it, use only key words i.e. "socks, undies, washing machine".

### Chunk instructions

Break instructions into small parts, keeping them short and simple. As an example, one way to reduce conflict over bedroom tidiness up is to chunk instructions. Try saying:

"Put your shoes back into your cupboard before your T.V. show?"



"Restack the books into your bookshelf. Come on, I'll help you start."  
"I want you to tidy your top drawer. Call me if you need some help."

Chunking tasks helps to avoid overload which so often leads to refusal or avoidance. Start small and be careful how you instruct your child to clean up their bedroom. *"Go and clean up your bedroom right now!"* is likely not to get the best result.

### **Visual strategies**

A visual strategy is virtually any visual way to support someone's understanding about what to do, when to do it and how to do it; schedules, timetables, planners, stamps, charts, posters, post-it stickers with reminders, a text message, picture prompts, PowerPoint presentation, dot point instructions, lists, checklists, tick lists, calendars, the same silly smile, notes, signs, messages, cue cards and even a string tied to a finger. These are all visual strategies and the only limitation is our imagination! They are truly invaluable. Whatever you decide to trial set it up with your child and use it every day!

Well-developed visual strategies provide children with a permanent and personalised way to improve social and organisational skills. They are brilliant little anxiety savers because they give reassurance about how a desired behaviour, routine or skill should be tackled. Children can carry their visual helpers with them in the forms of business cards, key tags and wallets. For greater security they can even attach them to lanyards and wear them.

### **Praise!**

Always praise children for listening and responding well. Praise is the most effective shaper of behaviour!

### **Practice makes perfect**

Work with your child to help them practice following an instruction each day. Try some of the ideas presented below. The best idea is to head into this wanting to make it successful and build their skills.

Place the clothes in the washing machine and turn it on  
Hang out the clothes to dry  
Put the wet clothes in the dryer and turn it on  
Iron a few carefully selected items  
Load the dishwasher  
Wash the dishes  
Dry the dishes  
Pack the dishes away  
Start homework when asked  
Vacuum, sweep or mop the floor of a room  
Help wash the car  
Tidy up a mess somewhere  
Clean a window  
Tidy up the bedroom  
Make a bed  
Tidy up the playroom  
Take out the garbage



"Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art - it has no survival value; rather is one of those things that give value to survival."

*C. S. Lewis*