Practice Guide

Commands or Effective Instructions

Objectives:

- to provide the caregiver with strategies to clearly and consistently communicate instructions to the child
- to provide the caregiver with strategies to demonstrate to the child that caregiver will see the task through to its completion
- to minimize discord between the child and caregiver regarding directives

Steps:

☐	**Provide rationale**	Increasing a child's compliance with instructions involves managing what happens before the command (antecedents), addressing the form and content of commands, and managing what happens after the command (consequences).
☐	**Set the stage for success**	Instruct the caregiver to optimize the likelihood of compliance by managing certain setting events, including: • minimizing distractions (e.g., turning off television), • getting the child's attention by saying the child's name, making eye contact, and standing near the child, and • providing a transition warning when appropriate (e.g., "In two minutes it will be time to put the toys away").
☐	**Example: Tone of voice**	Instruct the caregiver to use a firm, but calm, tone of voice. A critical tone or one that conveys frustration may increase the likelihood of noncompliance.
☐	**Example: One at a time**	• Instruct the caregiver to provide commands one at a time. • This helps increase compliance by minimizing the number of things the child has to remember to do and by providing caregiver with opportunities to praise compliance after each task is successfully completed. • Example: "Brush your teeth." [Wait for compliance.] "I like how you brushed your teeth when I asked. Now wash your face."
☐	**Example: Simple is better**	• Provide simple, clear instructions (e.g., "Put on your coat."). • Avoid vague requests (e.g., "Get ready to go."), or general criticisms (e.g., "We're leaving soon and you are not ready!").
☐	**Example: Tell, don't ask**	• Instruct the caregiver to provide commands in statement form ("Put away your toy truck") • Avoid question form (e.g., "Would you put away your truck?" "Would you do me a favor and put away your truck?) • Avoid using the word "Let's" if the caregiver does not intend to participate (e.g., "Let's put away the toys now.")
☐	**Example: Tell child what to do**	The caregiver should instruct the child about what to do (e.g., "Walk in the hallway"), rather than what to stop doing ("Don't run!"). Telling the child what to do is more positive and informative than telling the child to stop doing something.

Steps:

☐	**Example: Avoid explanations**	The caregiver should state the command quickly and avoid lengthy explanations about why the child must comply. Explanations provide the opportunity for the child to try to negotiate or escape the instruction.
☐	**Example: State the consequences of compliance and noncompliance**	• When applicable, the caregiver should use "If-Then" statements to inform the child what will happen if the child complies or does not comply with the caregiver's instruction. • Example: "If you put on your shoes, then you can go outside. If you do not put on your shoes, then you must stay inside."
☐	**Follow up: Provide time for compliance**	The caregiver should know to provide ample time for the child to comply with an instruction. Avoid repeating the instruction quickly if the child has not complied.
☐	**Follow up: Mean what you say**	Explain that it is necessary to see commands through to their completion to teach the child that the caregiver means what he/she says. It is better to not give a command rather than to give a command and not back up compliance or noncompliance with appropriate consequences.
☐	**Follow up: Provide appropriate consequences for compliance**	Caregivers should provide praise consistently when the child begins to comply with instruction, as well as while and after the child completes task. When applicable, the caregiver should provide stated reward for compliance (e.g., the child is permitted to go outdoors after she puts on her shoes).
☐	**Follow up: Provide appropriate consequences for noncompliance**	Instruct the caregiver to follow through with the stated consequence regarding noncompliance.

Helpful Tips:

- Remember to praise often
- Remember to review often, by **asking questions**
- Remember to use examples to explain concepts
- Remember to practice often and provide corrective feedback to the caregiver
- Brief any other caregivers, teachers, or other adult figures who may be involved
- Simplify these steps if you have to
- This material can be covered in more than one session/meeting