

Listens and Follows Directions

What does “Listens and Follows Directions” mean?

This skill is about a child’s ability to do what a parent or teacher asks them to do. The child shows they are listening to the adult giving the directions by following the instructions as best they can. Directions with two or three steps are appropriate for children in kindergarten. For example, “Push in your chair and put your plate in the sink.” Directions with too many steps can be confusing for young children and shouldn’t be used. This skill is important because it shows that the child can pay attention to what adults say and can follow instructions.

TIPS for TEACHERS

How can I explain this skill to children?

You can explain the meaning and value of listening and following directions by talking to children about how important it is to pay attention to traffic lights. Traffic lights tell us when to stop and when to go. They help us stay safe when crossing the street. Tell children that the teacher is the traffic light for the classroom. The teacher tells you what to do so everyone stays safe and can focus on learning.

What are some examples of best practices from educational experts and fellow teachers?

TIP1

Teach children to listen and follow directions through games and activities. At the beginning of the year, introduce games and activities focused on listening and following directions to develop and practice this skill. Revisit these games and activities all year to “tune up” children’s ability to listen and follow directions. Games and activities to grow this skill:

- Simon Says or the Freeze Dance game.
- Tell and show children the “right way” to follow common directions. Talk through and act out what children should do when you say things like, “line up for lunch” (for example, push in my chair, walk to the line, and stand quietly keeping my hands to myself). Ask children WHY what you did was the “right way.” This helps ensure children know HOW to follow directions before you give them.
- Practice whole-group guided drawing. Give a sequence of directions to the class so each child can draw something like a flower. Pause between each direction to give children time to complete it (e.g., “First draw a circle at the top of the page.” [Pause] “Now, draw one line from the circle to the

bottom of the paper”). Each child must follow your directions to draw the picture correctly and make sure that the class can create a larger picture, like a garden of flowers.

- Play a game where the class gets a point for every direction they follow as a group. If they get a certain number of points, the whole class gets a reward. For example, if everyone walks quietly in the hall on the way to lunch, the class gets a point. Once the class reaches 10 points, they get 10 extra minutes at recess.

TIP2

Get children’s attention before giving directions. It is important to make sure children are listening before giving directions. Make sure you have their attention before asking them to do something. One good way to get a group of students to listen is to give them a few easy and fun practice instructions to follow. For example, you could say, “If you can hear me, clap your hands.” After the children have clapped, you could say, “Great, now pat your head.” After they pat their head, you could say, “Wonderful, now touch your nose.” Now that you have their attention, give them more important directions, such as, “Great, now sit quietly at your seat.”

TIP3

Give clear and specific directions. Once you have children’s attention, give them clear and specific directions. Here are some examples of unclear directions and better ways to say them:

| Unclear Directions | Clear and Specific Directions |
|--|---|
| Instead of this... | Say this... |
| “Let’s put away the toys.” | “Elijah, please put the blocks back on the shelf.” |
| “Why don’t you put your names on the paper?” | “Please write your name on the top of the paper Aiden.” |
| “Don’t make a mess!” | “Isabelle, please draw with your crayons on the paper.” |

In addition, make sure you:

- Remember not to give too many directions at once.
- Give directions slowly.
- Give children time to respond (for example, try counting to ten to see if they will respond).
- Ask children to repeat the directions back to you.
- If a child does not follow your directions, try modeling it for them by saying, “like this” and demonstrating the direction.

How can I encourage children when I see them trying to learn this skill?

Acknowledge children for their efforts! For example, say, “Miguel, you did a great job listening to my instructions at circle time,” or “You worked really hard to clean up the room when I asked everyone to put the toys away, Marcus!”

To learn more about the tips and where they came from, please visit our references page: ckphilly.org/citations