

SESSION

4

GIVING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONS TO CHILDREN

SESSION TOOLS

The following materials are included for you to utilize during Session 4 of this module:

Handout: Parent-O-Meter

Handout: Goal Line

Handout 4.1: Giving Good Instructions to Your Children

Handout 4.2: And Life Can Be Humorous...Really Funny
Instructions That Won't Work

Handout 4.2 continued: And Life Can Be Humorous...Really Funny
Instructions That Won't

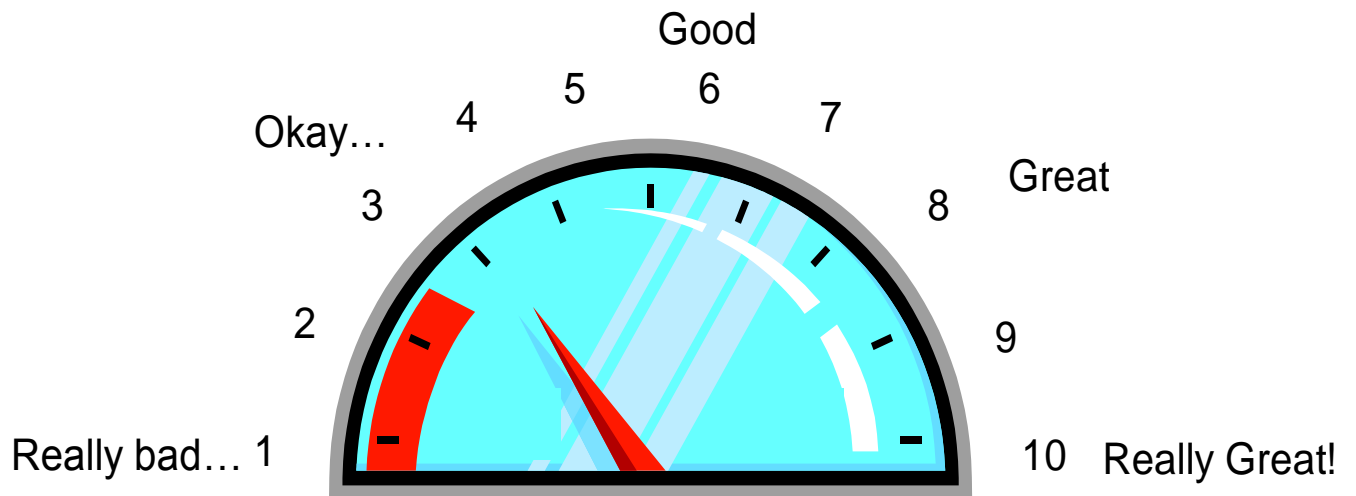
Work

Parent-O-Meter

This Week's Goals: _____

How did my parent(s) do?

CIRCLE A NUMBER!



Goal Line



Directions: Place a check mark in the “Progress” Box each time a Goal is completed.

Number	Goal	Progress						
		M	T	W	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								

Rewards for Goals Achieved:

Ex., 4 checks for homework done before TV time = One hour of an activity with Mom or Dad

Giving Good Instructions to Your Children

Instructions That Work

Good instructions are instructions that children are most likely to obey. The characteristics of good instructions are as follows:

- **Direct and specific.**
- **Stated clearly.**
- **Limited to only one or two at a time.**
- **Followed by 10 seconds of silence.**

Instructions that Don't Work

Poor instructions are instructions that children are most likely to disobey. The characteristics of poor instructions are:

- ❖ **Buried Instructions.** Too much talking or explaining after giving an instruction. Instead, instructions should be followed by 10 seconds of silence.
- ❖ **Chain Instructions.** Chaining too many instructions together all at once.
- ❖ **Question Instructions.** Stating the command in the form of a question. Technically, the child has the right to say “No” since you are only asking a question.
- ❖ **Repeated Instructions.** Repeating the same instruction over and over again.
- ❖ **Vague Instructions.** Commands that are not specific. They do not state exactly what it is you want done.
- ❖ **“Let’s...” Instructions.** Beginning a command with the word “Let’s” The child thinks you are going to help him or her and then they may become angry when you do not.
- ❖ **Distant Instructions.** Instructions that are yelled from a distance. If you are in another room, it is less likely that the child will “get” the instruction.

Additional Considerations

1. Do not give an instruction if you are not willing to follow through with a punishment procedure when the child does not comply.
2. Do not give an instruction that the child does not have the skill or capacity to complete.
3. Respect the child’s ongoing activities. Do not give him or her an instruction if he or she is in the middle of something that you have given permission to do. Wait until that activity is completed.
4. Show respect for your child. Use a pleasant (not hostile or sarcastic) tone of voice.

HANDOUT 4.2

And Life Can Be Humorous...Really Funny Instructions That Won't Work

- ❖ **Buried Instructions:** Instructions that are followed by too much talking on the part of the parent. The talking usually takes the form of too much explaining and rationalizing about why the task should be done but can also take the form of a lot of scolding or criticizing after the command is given.

EXAMPLE:

"John, go put on your sweater, because it's cold outside. You know how you always get chilled and then you catch a cold. Then, you have to stay home from school, and this gets you behind in your schoolwork."

- ❖ **Chain Instructions:** Stringing or chaining too many commands together. If more than two commands are given at once, the child may not be able to sustain his attention through the entire string. The child may also begin to obey the first command in the string but become distracted and lose track of the latter commands in the string.

EXAMPLE:

"Get to your room, and clean up that mess on the floor, and make up your bed, and take out the garbage, and then get in there and fix a sandwich for your little brother."

- ❖ **Questions Instructions:** Giving the command in the form of an interrogative statement (questions) instead of an imperative statement. Stating the command in question form conveys that the child is being given a choice and may choose to answer "No." Punishing a child for noncompliance after he has been given a choice is not fair and it elicits further noncompliance.

EXAMPLE:

"Don't you think you should turn off the TV and do your homework now?"

- ❖ **Repeated Instructions:** Repeating the same command over and over again. Parents often have a "magic number" that defines how many times they are willing to repeat a command before they reach their limit. After repeated experiences with their parents, children learn the "magic number." This teaches the child that he may ignore his parent until she begins to get close to the "magic number." Then and only then does the child have to listen and then may comply. This kind of experience teaches the child to tune the parent out.

EXAMPLE:

"Take out the garbage. I said, take out the garbage. Didn't you hear me? I said take out the garbage!"

...And Life Can Be Humorous...Really Funny Instructions That Won't Work

- ❖ **Vague Instructions:** Vague commands that are not specific. They do not state exactly what the parent wants the child to do. Examples are:

EXAMPLES:

"Stop that!" "Behave yourself!" "Be good." "Calm down." "Grow Up!" "Act Your Age!"

- ❖ **"Let's..." Instructions:** Commands that begin with "Let's ...". These commands imply that the parent and child are going to do the task together when, in fact, the parent wants the child to do the task independently. In addition to conveying a lack of confidence in the child's ability to perform the command independently, they elicit noncompliance. This is probably because the child feels tricked into complying when the parent does not help.

EXAMPLE:

"Let's go clean up your room."

- ❖ **Instructions Yelled from a Distance:** This is when the parent may yell an instruction to the child from another room in the house. In this kind of scenario, the parent may not be aware of what the child is doing and may be interrupting the child in the middle of a highly absorbing task. In addition, it is more difficult to keep your tone of voice respectful when a command is being yelled from another room. All of these conditions make it less likely that the child will comply with the instruction.

EXAMPLE:

"Emily! I am waiting in the laundry room for you to bring me your clothes! Go to your room and get your clothes right now!" Meanwhile, Emily is heavily engrossed in her Nintendo game. She is beating her older brother Al for the very first time and the two have made a deal. If she wins this game he will take her out for ice cream on Saturday. Unfortunately, Emily hears her mother screaming from down the hall, she becomes upset, and loses the game. Emily begins to cry and her brother begins teasing her that she will not get any ice cream on Saturday.