



Special Needs Tip: Things to try at home based on strategies we use in school to help support your child's learning. We hope that these ideas might be helpful, but there is no obligation or expectation for you to use them.

Ideas to help children follow instructions

Many children struggle to follow instructions. This can be for different reasons including

- Difficulties with focus and attention, so they lose focus before the instruction is finished
- Difficulties with understanding and processing the words
- Difficulties with memory, so that they struggle to remember what they are being told.

For most children it will be a combination of these reasons.

Check that your child is listening before you start

In school, we often find that children can't remember what to do because they are not listening. To support this, we use 'name tagging' where we say the child's name to get their attention before we start speaking. Even at home, if your child is involved in an activity or is not wanting to engage, it may be helpful to check that they are listening before giving them instructions. For some children it can help to encourage them to look at you and make eye contact before you start speaking.

Information Carrying words and using gestures and facial expressions to support understanding

In school, we talk about 'information carrying words' (ICW). An information carrying word is a word that carries meaning in a sentence. If what we say is supported by gestures and visuals there may be no information-carrying words in an instruction. If there are fewer information carrying words, instructions are easier to follow. For example, if you say 'Give me the toy car', the words in the instruction your child needs to understand can be reduced if you are sitting at a table with a toy car on it, and you hold out your hand for the toy and look at it. However, if you don't look at the car, this becomes a one-ICW instruction. If you ask your child to 'put the car on the table', there are two words they need to understand. The child can be expected to understand 'put' 'the' and 'on' from their previous experience.

So, by reducing the information carrying words in instructions by using pointing and other gestures you make instructions easier to understand. If your child has speech and language difficulties, it is particularly important to use gestures (e.g. pointing) to reduce the language they need to understand and process in instructions.

Add a physical element

When your child is trying to remember a list of instructions ask them to touch their nose or forearm as they say them. Alternatively, ask them to count off the parts of the task or items to remember on their fingers. This simple touch can act as a memory prompt.

Keep it simple

Particularly when we are in a hurry, it is very tempting to give a long list of instructions or make our instructions overly complicated. It is important to keep instructions simple. It is better to break them down into small steps that children can follow. For example: 'Get your pyjamas on and then come downstairs' can be more effective than 'Get your pyjamas on, clean your teeth, wash your face and get your book.'

Also try to keep your instructions separate from general chat. It is easy to confuse children by giving them instructions intersperse with other information. They can then become confused about which bits they are supposed to follow.

Ask your child to repeat the instructions

The simple process of repeating the instructions as you say them, helps children to remember and process what you are saying.

Use visual or written prompts

If you are asking your child to complete a series of tasks, try to make this visual for them. For those who are good readers this might be a written list that they can work through and tick off the jobs as they are completed. For most children it is easier to have visual list with either pre-printed pictures or a series of quick sketches on a piece of paper to remind them of what to do.

Other hints

- If you need to repeat the instructions try and say them in the same way. If your child is trying to process what you are saying and then you repeat it differently, they can struggle to identify if what you have said is the same or different. This makes it more difficult for them to process and follow.
- Allow your children thinking time. Children often need time to process the information before they can act on it.
- Use the [memory games](#) I shared earlier to build and support your child's skills.

Task management boards

In school for some children we use a task management board to support them to work through tasks. This breaks down each stage of a task, so your child knows what to do and in what order. For many children, the simple process of going through this is enough to help them to remember what to do. There is an example at the end of the sheet. At school, we laminate task management boards and use a white board pen, so the board can be reused. At home you can simply create a checklist like a shopping list and ask your child to tick off as each stage of the task is complete.

TASK BOARD

Task:		
Equipment needed		
	Job	Done
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		