

# LADC Behavior handout

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## Giving Effective Requests

Learn how to provide effective requests to improve your child's compliance to directions.



Always give a labeled praise statement after compliance to requests!



## How to Give Effective Requests

Too often requests or commands are implemented incorrectly, which decreases the likelihood that your child will comply with the request. We often talk too much when making a request, we repeat the request (nagging), or we give too many explanations about the request. Research shows that when requests are given correctly, you can increase compliance by about 30%.

Another mistake that can often be made when making requests is to state it in a question format. When you phrase it in a question form, you are opening up the opportunity for your child to say no. Avoid phrases such as "Wouldn't you like to...?", "Isn't it time to...?", "Don't you want to make mom happy and...?" or "Can you...?". Instead, you should make a polite direct request such as "Please put your pajamas on" or "Please sit with your pockets on the chair and your feet on the floor". By learning how to give effective commands, you can increase the likelihood that your child will listen the first time asked, as well as, prevent future problem behaviors from occurring.

### State the Request Positively

One common error is that parents often make requests to children for them to stop doing something rather than telling them what to do. This is a form of criticism for their behavior and also provides attention to the inappropriate behavior. Instead, decide what you want to see them doing and give that request. Encourage an appropriate substitute so that they can learn for next time. Instead of "stop running", your direction should be to say "please stand by my side". You want your new command to be the positive opposite of their inappropriate behavior. When "standing next to a parent" a child also can't be running around. Therefore, that was an appropriate positive opposite behavior for the request.

More on Page 2

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## Effective Requests

### Use Respectful and Polite Language

By starting all of your commands with *please*, you can teach model for your child how to request things politely, have good social skills, and also increase the likelihood that they will listen. Starting each request with please also provides an auditory cue to your child that you will be asking them to do something. Finally, by starting the request with please, you will be able to make sure you are providing the request in a calm, neutral tone, even when your child is displaying inappropriate or frustrating behavior.

### Use Individual Rather Than Compound Requests

Instructions should be given one at time, rather than putting many requests all together at once. The younger a child is, the harder it is for them to sustain attention to all parts of a direction, making it less likely for them to comply to all of the requests. If you want to have your child help clean up their playroom, break up the work into individual commands and provide them one at time. You will find that less time is spent nagging your child or reminding them to do the rest of your request if you use individual requests for more complex tasks. For example, rather than “put your boots, coat, mittens, and hat on so that we can get into the car”, you can break those up into individual requests and wait to give a new request until they have finished the initial request.

### Use Essential Requests Only

Often parents overuse requests, which will decrease the likelihood that your child will respond to your requests. If your child feels overloaded with too many requests, they will begin to tune you out or engage in a behavioral outburst. By saving the requests for essential times, it will make it more likely that your child will comply when you need it to happen the most.

### Be Specific with Requests

You also want to make sure that when you provide a request, you are specific enough, to make it more likely that you are going to see the desired response. Instead of “Settle down”, you could say “Please sit down in the chair”. Instead of “Please clean up”, you could say “Please put the caps on the markers and the markers in the container”. The more specific you can be with a direction, the more likely your child will display the desired behavior.

### Carefully Timed Explanations

When providing your child with a direction or request, by providing the explanation as to why you are telling them to do something before the request is given, you can decrease the arguing, dawdling, or asking of questions. When you give explanations following questions or arguing from your child, you have just reinforced dawdling behavior. It is important to teach your child that they have to follow requests, even if they don't always understand why.

### Decrease the Distance

The average request is made from 10 to 15 feet away; however, being about an arms-length away is the best distance. One thing to be aware of is that the distance increases as the potential emotionality of the situation increases. But if you want compliance, get closer! Being closer also helps to make sure you can maintain eye contact while giving the request. Compliance increases once eye contact has been made. Say their name and wait for the eye contact before continuing with the request.

### Praise After Compliance

It is important to always remember to follow your child's compliance to a request with a labeled praise statement. The saying “Where Attention Goes, Behavior Grows” helps to highlight that if you want to increase your child's compliance to requests, then you need to provide attention towards their compliance behavior. Some good statements to use include: Thanks for listening and following directions; I like how you listened so quickly; Great job putting your coat on the first time I asked; or That made me so happy to see how fast you listened. The more you praise your child's compliance, the more your child will comply.