Getting Children to Follow Directions by Sandra Rief

It is frustrating for parents and teachers when children don’t listen and comply with what you ask (or tell) them to do. When a child with ADHD fails to follow your directions, you might assume that he or she is being deliberately defiant or oppositional. Remember that for kids with ADHD, they have much more than average difficulty:  - focusing on what you are saying without first getting their attention - stopping and disengaging from what they are in the middle of doing (especially if it is something fun and motivating) - with working memory and forgetfulness

Here are 6 tips to increase the likelihood that your child or student will listen, remember what you said, and comply:

**1. First, obtain their eye contact.** *Parents:* If your child is glued to a TV, computer or other screen, you need to first get your child’s attention and have him or her look up at you before giving directions. *Teachers:* Seating a student with ADHD so that he or she can easily and discretely be prompted to look at you before giving directions is important.

**2. Give clear, concise directions.** Use as few words as possible to communicate what you want your child or student to do. For example: “Open your math books to page 21, please.” or “Sarah, put your shoes on now.”

**3. Check that the child heard and knows your expectation.** One way is for the child to repeat back what you asked him or her to do.  You may also ask: “What do you need to being now?”

**4. Avoid multiple-step instructions.** Whenever possible, give one direction at a time. Working memory weaknesses in children with ADHD make it difficult for them to hold a lot of information in mind while carrying out tasks.  So, one step at a time is better.

**5. Use visual reminders.** If multiple step directions must be used, a visual reminder needs to be provided such as an outline of the steps and their sequence (1,2,3), a checklist, or pictures (e.g., on a poster, card, or post it note) showing exactly what needs to be done.

**6. Avoid vague directions that your child or student can interpret differently** than what you meant, such as “Clean up your room (or desk area).” Be specific in defining just what you mean and make the task reasonable and manageable. For example: 1. All dirty clothes in hamper. 2. Toys put away in their storage bins. 3. Hang your wet towel in the bathroom.” This can be in writing, in the form of a checklist, shown in pictures (or any combination of the above). This way, the expectations are crystal clear.

Adapted from: *How to Reach & Teach Children with ADD/ADHD, Second Edition* (2005) and *The ADD/ADHD Checklist: A Practical Reference for Parents & Teachers, Second Edition* (2008), by Sandra Rief. For more on this topic for parents, see the following link: [**Communicating So Your Child Will Listen Better and Pay Attention**](http://www.sandrarief.com/tips/tips-listen/)