GIVING EFFECTIVE COMMANDS

When giving directions or commands to a child, you may be able to improve compliance simply by following these guidelines.

• **Pick and choose when you give commands**
  - Only give commands when it is important
  - Ensure you have the time to follow-through and provide consequences for compliance/noncompliance

• **Get the child’s attention**
  - Make eye contact, say the child’s name
  - Be in the same room as the child
  - Reduce potential distractions (e.g., turn off the TV or other electronics)

• **Only give commands the child is capable of completing**
  - Do not command a child to complete a task that is too difficult

• **Make commands direct and simple**
  - Give commands as statements in a polite, matter-of-fact tone of voice
  - Do not phrase commands as questions or suggestions
    - Example: “Will you take out the trash?” “Do you want to put on your coat?”

• **Give only one command at a time**
  - Give one command at a time
  - Provide a consequence for compliance/noncompliance after each command

• **State commands positively**
  - Tell the child what to do instead of what not to do
    - Example: “Please get off the bed and go outside to play.” Instead of “Don’t jump on the bed.”

• **Make limited use of explanations for the command**
  - Answering too many “why” questions distracts from the command
  - If you do provide rationales do so either before the command or after the child complies with the command
    - Example: “We’re going to visit Grandma, and it’s cold outside, so you need to put on your coat now”
    - Example: Please put on your coat [Child complies]. Thank you for putting on your coat. We’re walking over to Grandma’s and it’s cold outside.”

• **If possible, give choice commands**
  - If the child can make a choice, let the child know that in the command (e.g., “Please put on your red coat or your blue coat.”)