

Giving Effective Instructions

Why gaining cooperation from your student may be challenging:

1. Your student may have difficulty in understanding the instruction that was given to them. This is often interpreted as ignoring the request. Remember that Autism Spectrum Disorder is a social communication disorder.
 - There may be too much information given to them, or too many instructions given at once
 - The instruction or task may be too difficult
 - The instruction may not be clear, or not understood.
2. Your student may not have the skills to appropriately manage their feelings of frustration, anger or anxiety when asked to do something that they don't want to do, or leave a preferred task or activity that they would rather continue with. This is often displayed as problem behaviour, such as throwing objects, hitting others, yelling, or crying.
3. There may be sensory issues that interfere with your student's ability to cooperate with your request. For example, consider the environment such as the noise, texture, and competing visual interference, and how that may affect your student. This is often displayed as problem behaviour in the form of refusal, running away or screaming / crying.
4. Children or youth with ASD may be rigid in their thoughts, ideas or behaviour. It may be difficult to shift from one activity to another. This may often be displayed as problem behaviour in the form of ignoring the request, refusal, throwing objects, or screaming / crying.
5. Children or youth with ASD may not be internally motivated to follow instructions or complete tasks. Examples include: tidy up, make bed, shower, etc. This may be displayed as negative behaviour in the form of refusal, stalling / negotiating more time, refusal, or screaming / crying.

How to deliver effective instructions:

1. Ensure you have your student's attention **BEFORE** giving an instruction
 - Gain eye contact
 - Get down to their level
 - Remove competing tasks or materials (for attention)
2. Use positive language. Tell your student what you want them to do, rather than what not to do. For example: "put your toys in the toy box" rather than, "don't make a mess"

3. Use clear and simple language
4. Allow your child time to process the instruction
5. Prompt if necessary to assist with cooperation
6. Reinforce all attempts at cooperation

Specific Strategies to enhance cooperation:

1. Offer choice: Offer choice of how to do the task (order of steps), when to do the task (now or after snack).
2. Use visuals to assist with predictability and structure.
 - Create a visual schedule of daily chores or tasks and refer to it throughout the day.
 - Use a first / then visual to assist your student to understand what is expected and what happens **AFTER** that task is completed.
 - Use a timer or visual timer to assist with processing time.
3. Set consistent limits. Having clear expectations helps your student understand which expectations are non-negotiable. For example implementing consistent class rules, predictable class schedule etc., will help to teach your student that you mean what you say.
4. Use reinforcement following success (or attempts at success). This is when a behaviour is followed by something that is valued (a reward), a person is more likely to repeat their behaviour in similar, future circumstances. Over time, this is likely to encourage positive behaviour change.

Reference

Cooper, J. O., Heron, & T. E., Heward, W. L. (2007). *Applied Behavior Analysis* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.