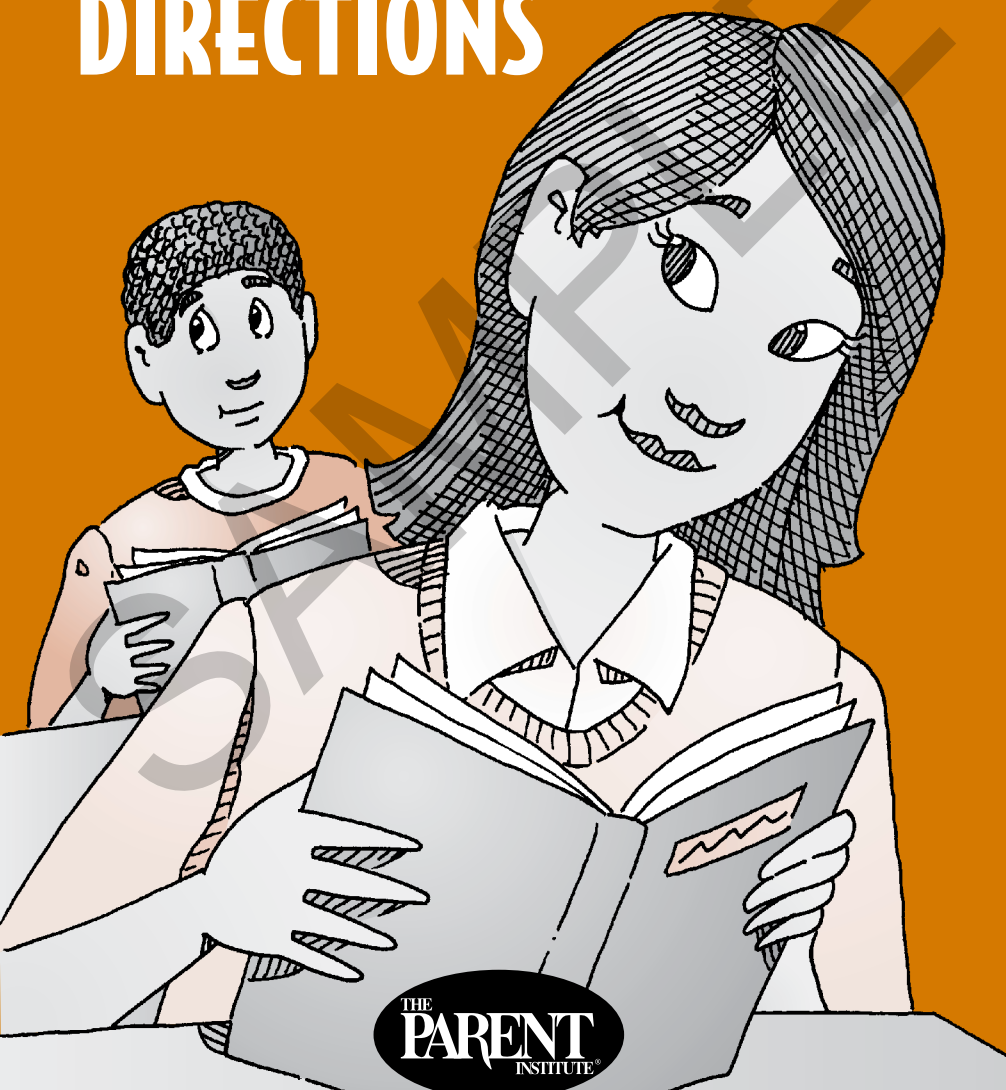


Skills *for* School Success

Ways Parents Can  
Help Their Children  
Do Better in School

# LISTENING WELL & FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS



THE  
**PARENT**  
INSTITUTE

One of a Series of Booklets for Parents



## Listening well and following directions are essential skills for school success!

In most schools, students spend over half their time *listening*. In fact, students spend more time listening than they do reading, writing, answering questions—or anything else.

But educators say many students are poor listeners. It's one of the greatest problems children have in class. Information seems to go "in one ear and out the other."

Teachers point out that children who are poor listeners often have trouble following directions—and usually have problems in school.

Listening and following directions are skills. And like other skills, they get better with practice. This booklet will show you how to help your child succeed in school by improving her\* listening skills and her ability to follow directions.



\* *Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate using "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.*

## Listening is More Than Just Hearing

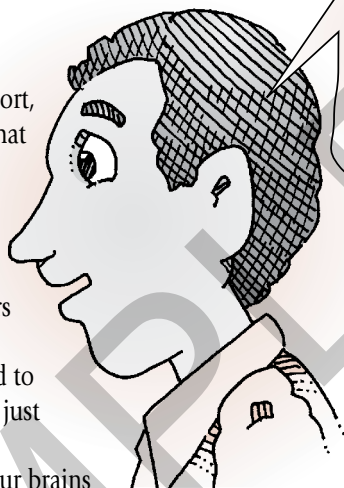
**H**ave you ever turned on the radio to get the weather report, then realized after it was over that you had no idea what the announcer said?

This is a perfect example of the difference between *hearing* and *listening*. If your ears were working right, the sounds from the radio were transmitted to your brain. You “heard” it. You just didn’t pay any attention to it.

One reason for this is that our brains *think* up to three times faster than most people *talk*. That means it’s easy to get bored while the speaker slowly gets to the point! It’s easy to become distracted. It’s hard to focus on what is being said. But it’s important to learn how.

To listen, your child must first “hear” the sounds and then convert those sounds into meaning. He has to *think* about what he’s heard and *understand* it before he can say he is listening.

*The problem is not always poor listening skills. Some children have physical problems hearing sounds. If you suspect a hearing problem, ask your school about how to have your child tested. There are many ways to help correct or overcome poor hearing.*



Our brains think up to three times faster than most people talk.

# How Well Are You Teaching Your Child to Listen?

The best way to teach good listening skills is to model them. Are you a good role model? How well do you listen? Respond to the following statements with *yes* or *no*:

- \_\_\_ **1. I show respect.** I don't interrupt when my child is speaking. I don't finish her sentences for her.
- \_\_\_ **2. I give my full attention.** I ignore the radio and the TV. I don't let my own thoughts get in the way. I lean forward, bend down or do what's needed to look her in the eye while she's talking.
- \_\_\_ **3. I'm encouraging.** I nod and say "uh-huh," "I see," and so on to show I'm interested. I ask questions.
- \_\_\_ **4. If I don't understand, I admit it.** Then I listen patiently until I do understand what she is saying.
- \_\_\_ **5. I keep an open mind.**  
I don't judge or react negatively to what is being said.

## How Did You Do?

Mostly *yes*? Great! Want to do even more to encourage good listening skills? Try some of the ideas in this booklet.



# Try These 10 Ways To Make Your Child a Better Listener



## I. Practice 'Active Listening' Together

This fun yet powerful listening technique is great for home and school. Here's how it works:

- **Take turns speaking.** Only one person can talk at a time.
- **Speaker #1 talks about something.** "Here's what I did today." "This is what I think I'll do this evening." "Here's why I think cats are the best."
- **Speaker #2 listens** and concentrates on what the first speaker is saying.
- **Speaker #2 summarizes** what was just said. "You said ... (review the main points—no judging or evaluating). Is that right?"
- **Speaker #1 approves** the second person's summary.
- **Speaker #2 can now express his opinion**, while speaker #1 listens carefully.

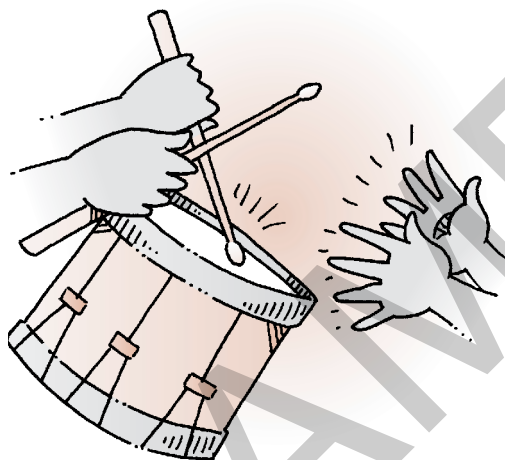
It's amazing how well this works, and it's not limited to two people. Try it with the whole family. Have fun—and learn to listen better, too!

## 2. Try 'What in the World Is That?'

Have your child close her eyes. Make familiar sounds and ask her to identify them. Try knocking on a door, crushing paper, slurping a drink or cracking nuts.

## 3. Play 'What's the Difference?'

Help your child listen to differences in sounds. Is it a car or truck she hears? Is it near or far? Is a sound loud or soft? High or low? Now you try it.



## 4. Drum It Up!

Beat on a drum, a table, a box or any other item a certain number of times. Have your child clap back the same number of beats at the same pace.

## 5. Play 'Echo'

Have your child repeat exactly what you say—word for word. How long a message can she remember? Can you do as well?

## 6. Find the Missing Word

Read or tell a story. Let your child fill in the word where you pause. For example: "One day, Billy's dad had to go to the grocery (store). When he went to his car, he noticed that it had a flat (tire)." This fosters purposeful listening.

## 7. Play the '10 Questions' TV Game

Choose a television program to watch together. As you watch, think of questions about the program (which require careful listening) you can ask your child when it is over. Have your child make a list of questions for you at the same time.

After the program, each person can ask the other 10 questions about the show:

"Why did the main character say she wanted to go to the party?"

"Who first mentioned the letter?" See who can get the most questions right! Then try it again with another show.



## 8. Try the Magic of 'Car Time'

Try bringing up something you want to talk about with your child while you're riding alone in the car. Turn off the radio—you probably won't be able to agree on the station anyway. Then bring up the subject. Or ask your child if there is anything *he* wants to talk about. There is something almost magic about car time that makes it easier to listen and really hear what the other person is saying.

## 9. Take 'Talk Walks' With Your Child

Like "Car Time," taking a quiet walk together can create a special time with your child and provide good listening practice, too—for both of you. Remember, listening is a skill that gets better with practice. And many parents have found that a daily walk allows them to keep in touch with their children.

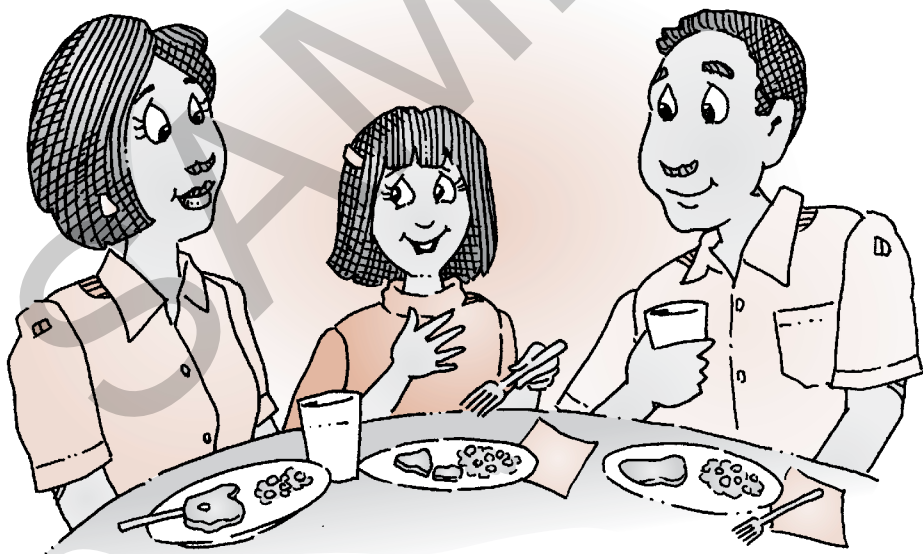
## 10. Make Dinner Time 'Conversation Time'

The family dinner table is a great place to have children practice listening. Choose a topic that will interest every member of your family.

Set a time limit. Start with a short time—30 seconds or one minute. Give family members a chance to say what's on their minds. Later, ask people to summarize what *other* family members have said. Your 10-year-old could restate what her father thought. Your teenager could repeat what his younger brother had to say.

Make up your own topics, or use these to get started:

- The best thing that happened to me today.
- My favorite book.
- What I'd like to eat if I could plan a menu.
- How we should spend time as a family.
- One place I'd like to visit.
- A famous person I'd like to meet.





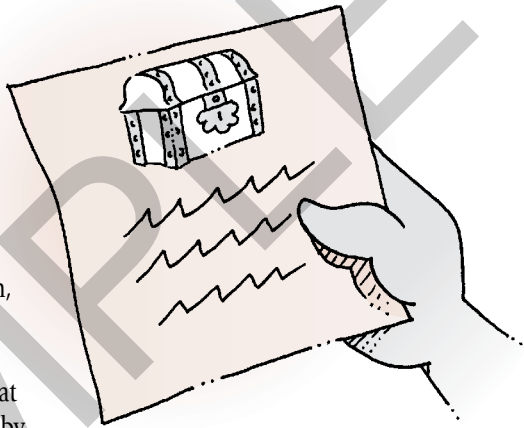
# Help Your Child Learn to Follow Directions

Following directions is an important skill for school success, too. It's easy to teach your child to follow directions if you make it into a game. Try these seven ideas:

## 1. Have a Treasure Hunt

Write directions on cards or small pieces of paper. For example, one might say, "Look under your pillow." The next clue says, "Look on top of the coffee table."

As the child follows each direction, he finds another clue that gives him more information. A favorite snack, an inexpensive toy, or some other treat can be the "treasure" he finally finds by following directions.



## 2. Play 'Simon Says'

Did you ever play "Simon Says"? It's a great way to encourage your child to follow directions. Choose one person to be "Simon." That person gives everyone else directions—always preceded by the words, "Simon Says." For example: "Simon says touch your toes."

Whenever a direction *doesn't* start with "Simon Says," the rest of the players *should not* do what follows. Anyone who is caught gets to take a turn at being Simon.

This game teaches your child to listen carefully—and follow directions exactly. It's also a lot of fun!

### 3. Get Cooking—Directions Can Be Delicious!

Cooking with your child is a great way to teach her to follow directions. Have your child choose a favorite recipe. Then together, follow the directions in the recipe carefully. Talk about what happens if you don't follow directions. (If you leave out the sugar, the cookies won't taste sweet.) Enjoy your treat together!

Here are some tips to make sure your cooking experience is safe and enjoyable:

- **Allow plenty of time.** Cooking with your child will take about twice as long as preparing the same recipe by yourself.
- **Read the recipe out loud before you begin.** Discuss any directions your child may not understand. Encourage her to write down unfamiliar words in her own cooking notebook.
- **Collect all ingredients before you begin.** Then get out all the equipment you'll need.
- **Teach your child to handle hot pans.** Have oven mitts and potholders nearby at all times. Make sure you—and your child—use them every time you handle a hot pan.
- **Tie back long hair.** Roll up sleeves. Wear old clothes or an apron.
- **Remind her that cooking isn't over until the cleanup is finished.**



## 4. Have Fun With Hobbies

Working on hobbies is a great way to teach your child how to follow directions. For example, if you put together a model airplane or a model car, you'll need to follow the directions provided. If you want to sew a dress, you'll have to follow the pattern directions. Set aside some time to work on a favorite hobby with your child. Talk about the importance of following directions.



## 5. Try Drawing By Remote Control

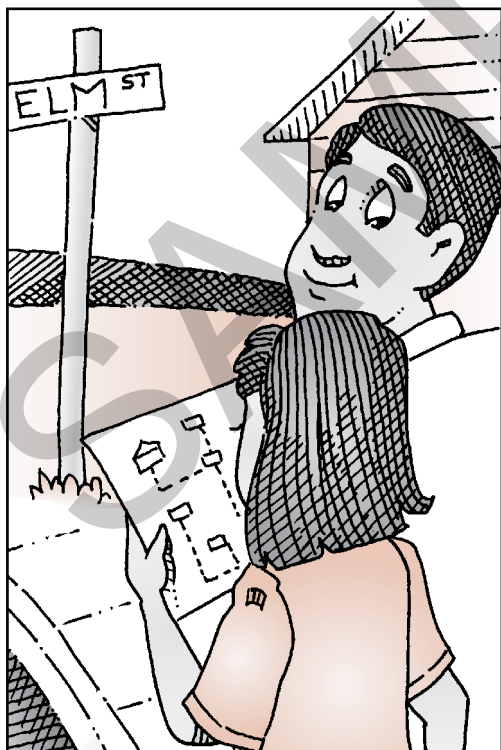
Ask your child to make a simple drawing on a piece of paper. It might be a square inside a circle resting on a triangle, for example. Then, *without* showing it to you, have him give you directions for drawing it yourself. Afterwards, compare your drawing with your child's. Then switch roles and repeat.

## 6. Practice Reading Maps

Reading maps is an important skill by itself, and it will help your child learn to follow directions precisely. Before taking a trip (even a walking trip to the library), look at a map of where you are going and how you plan to get there. Ask your child to plan another route, and then lead *you* there.

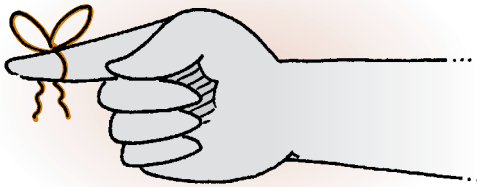
## 7. Have Fun Writing Directions

Here's another great way to teach your child the importance of following directions carefully—while also improving writing skills. Choose a place your child knows well—a friend's house, the corner store or a favorite park. Then have her write down directions from your home.



Next, go with your child as she follows her own directions. Make sure she does *nothing* except what she's written. (If she forgets to write "Turn left at Elm Street," keep going straight.)

Did she end up where she had planned? If not, does she know *why* she went astray? This is a good way for your child to learn that *everything* in a set of directions is there for a purpose. If your child ignores one of the directions, she may not end up where she wanted to go!



## Remembering is Also Part of Following Directions

"I forgot to bring my homework to school." "Spelling! Mom, where's my spelling list?" "My jacket? I guess I forgot it."

If your child has difficulty remembering things, you have two choices:

1. You can spend the rest of your life picking up, following up and catching up. Or ...
2. You can teach your child the skills of remembering and planning ahead. Here are some tips:
  - **Teach your child to stop** before he leaves the house and ask, "Do I have everything I'll need today?"
  - **Use tricks like the head-to-toe checklist.** Before your child goes anywhere, have him run through a checklist: "My hat's on my head, my coat's on my body. My gloves are on my hands, my boots are on my feet, and my backpack's on my back."
  - **Write it down.** Have your child write down a checklist of everything to take to school on a typical day. Post it by the front door.
  - **Don't make it easy to forget.** If your child has forgotten homework yet again, don't be too quick to drive him to school to retrieve it. If he's lost another soccer ball, don't rush out to buy a replacement.

## Learning to Listen and Follow Directions Takes Work ...



### ... But It Pays Off in School Success!

The suggestions in this booklet are designed to help you teach your child the skills of listening and following directions. The ideas are simple, inexpensive and take very little time.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that both listening and following directions are skills that improve with practice. The fact that the practice can also be enjoyable for the whole family is an added bonus.

Have fun with these ideas and watch your child do better in school, too!

**"A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he gets to know something!"**

— Wilson Mizner



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