

Children's Speech and Language Service

Following Instructions

Following instructions are part of everyday life. At home, parents ask their children to do things around the house e.g. *"Put the cup on the table"* and at nursery they may be asked *"Put your coat on and line up by the door"*. When they are 4-5 they may give their friend's instructions in play e.g. *"Let's make the train go to the station"*.

Understanding a 1 key word instruction

- Put 3 or 4 everyday objects in front of your child. Use familiar items such as a spoon, ball, toy car, sock, teddy/ dolly.
- As you put each item down, say what it is.
- Then ask them for one of the items – "Where's ball?" This is still a 1 key word instruction as you don't need to understand the word where – it is implied that you would point/ pick up the object.
- Try not to look at the items.
- If your child gives you the correct items, praise them
- If they give you the wrong item, say what it is, put it back down and ask for the ball again. If they still select the wrong item, pick up the ball and name it again.

Once your child has got the idea of the task you can start making it harder. Here are some ideas to try.

- Rather than 3 or 4 items, try 6 items, adding a few new items at a time.
- Try using pictures rather than real objects. This means you can work on a much bigger range of vocabulary.

Build instructions into everyday activities;

Sorting clothes for washing – "where are the trousers?"

Putting the shopping away – "Where's the apple?"

Tidy up time – "Find the train".

Look at picture books and ask them to find an object.

Introduce verbs/ doing words. You can start by 'doing' the verbs with your child e.g. "let's jump", "Can you run?". Even though these have 2 or 3 words in the instruction they are still 1 key word instructions!

Below are some examples of activities to help support children in understanding longer instructions.

Understanding 2 key words

For the instruction to have 2 Key Words there has to be a choice on 2 parts or words in the sentence.

So if you have a selection of 4 or 5 toys out (spoon, teddy, ball, cup and book) and ask the child “Where’s the ball and the spoon” then the child has to understand ‘ball’ and ‘spoon’ to complete the instruction.

If you have a big and little doll and a big and little plate, you could say “Can I have the big plate”. as there is a choice between big and little for each item and a choice of two items, this is a 2 key word instruction.

There are a range of different 2 key word structures, and you may find your child understands some and not others. For example,

- “Let’s make teddy run”
- “Where’s Mummy’s cup?”
- “Give me doll and the car”
- “Can I have the blue cup please”

In each case the underlined words indicate that a choice is available. Again try and build activities into everyday situations and play

- Sorting clothes for washing – “*where’s Mummy’s socks?*”
- Putting the shopping away – “*Where’s the green apples?*”
- Tidy up time – “*Find the big train*”.
- Look at picture books and ask them to find two objects.
- “*Get teddy / dolly to jump*”
- “*Run to the tree and then the sign*”
- “*Draw a house and a tree*”

Support your child by giving them the first sound of the word they may have forgotten or say the instruction again to support them.

Understanding 3 key words

For the instruction to have 3 Key Words, again there must be a choice on 3 parts or words in the sentence.

So you could ask for 3 items from a selection of 5 or more, or use an early concept or colour.

Again, as with the 2 key word instructions, there are a range of structures. For example;

"Can you put the teddy under the bed"

"Let's make big dolly sit"

"Put the red apple on the plate"

"Give me the book, teddy and sock"

"Give me the apples, banana's and crisps"

Again, when a word is underlined this means that a choice was offered.

4 Key Words and beyond

Things start getting tricky here!

Here are some examples of longer instructions:

"Give me the teddy and make dolly run"

"Put the big, red train under the box"

"Find Mummys red socks and Daddy's blue top"