Increasing Cooperation

Five reasons why children/youth may not listen to what you ask:

1) I can't do it!
2) I don't understand!
3) I can't hear you!
4) I have never done this before!
5) What is in it for me?

I Can't Do It!

Are there any barriers in the way? Is your instruction appropriate for the situation? There may be environmental, cognitive, medical or physical barriers preventing your child/youth from following your instruction. For example:

- asking child/youth to put away a book on a shelf that is too high

- teaching 5-year-old child about quantum physics

- asking a constipated 12-year-old to cut the lawn

- asking a 3-year-old to cut a full page of shapes

Solutions

- Decrease barriers when possible (change the environment, know your child/youth's current cognitive abilities, change expectations if child/youth unwell)

- Increase prompting: give more help

- Decrease the amount of effort required from your child/youth

    o If a task seems too hard because of how much you expect your child/youth to do, or how much effort is required, you can have him/her complete some aspect of the task independently and help with the rest

We help kids be kids!

I Don't Understand!
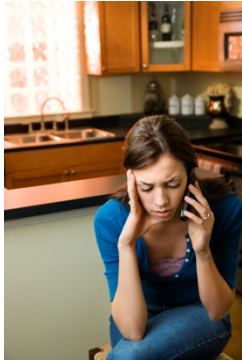
Are the instructions/expectations clear? May not follow if message is unclear, not specific, or formed as a question (rather than statement).

For example, what if you said, "John, can you please clean up your room and put your clothes away?"

- John can say, "no", which is a valid and appropriate answer
- Saying "clean up your room" implies John knows all the things involved in that (e.g., making his bed, vacuuming, putting away games/toys, picking up clothes, dusting, etc.)
- You are asking John to do multiple things with this one request

Solutions

- Make sure message is clear on what you expect your child/youth to do
    - o Use as few words as possible
    - o Give one demand at a time ("John, vacuum your room")
- Instruction is specific and says exactly what you want him/her to do
    - o Instead of "clean up your room", you could say "put toys on the floor into the bin"
- Use questions ONLY when child/youth can answer yes/no

I Can't Hear You!

Children/youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders often have a hard time processing a lot of stimuli at the same time. If your child is watching TV, while looking at a book and rocking, it is not likely he/she will hear your instruction.

Solutions

- Decrease distractions in the environment
  - Turn off noise and background stimuli (TV, video games, cause/effect music toys)
  - Close curtains, put away distracting items
  - Pay attention to things that may be bothering your child/youth's senses, like itchy clothing, tight or loose clothing, wet clothes, etc.

I Have Never Done This Before!

Child/youth may never have done what you are asking. The thing you are asking might be too difficult. Ask yourself, "Have I ever seen him/her do this before?"

Solutions

- Show your child/youth what you want him/her to do
- Help your child/youth by using prompts
- Break a larger skill down into smaller skills
  - If you want to teach your child to do the laundry, you need to teach all the smaller steps involved first

What's In It For Me?

If your child/youth benefits from following through with your request, cooperation is more likely. If the task is not naturally reinforcing for your child/youth, you will have to add something fun after the completion of the behaviour to make it more enjoyable and worthwhile.

Solutions

- Positive reinforcement: give social praise (e.g., tickles, attention, high-five), an item (e.g., toy, food, TV), immediately after the child/youth follows through with your instruction (EVEN if you had to help)
    - Needs to happen RIGHT after the behaviour
    - Avoid giving reinforcement for behaviour you do not want to keep happening
    - Make it fun, genuine and specific to what the child/youth did (e.g., "I love how you sat at the table. Great job!")
    - You want to give enough reinforcement to keep the child/youth motivated to cooperate in the future

Services and supports offered in partnership with: