



Region A Partnership for Children  
Promoting Social and Emotional Competence

## What to do When...

### Helping a Child to Follow Instructions

(“What to do When...” provides short term advice for teachers and parents when they are confronted by common challenging situations. Refer to the Additional Resources to learn more about preventing and managing children’s challenging behavior.)

#### When a child has difficulty following instructions:

1. Make direct eye contact with the child to assure that you have his or her attention and determine whether (s)he responds to this first instruction, “Please look at me.” It is helpful to get to the same level of the child.
2. If the setting has distractions that affect your engagement with the child, try to limit or remove the distractions, or move to another location.
3. Be clear about the instruction by using specific, developmentally appropriate words to communicate what you expect. You may need to break the message into short phrases one at a time (such as “Put the dolls on the doll shelf” ... “Now go to the sand table” ...), rather than using vague statements (such as “Be calm” or “Time to clean up”) or long strung-out sentences (such as “I want you to clean up this mess before we go to circle time so that we’ll have everything put back in place because...”).
4. Be prepared with pictures or objects that illustrate step-by-step actions.
5. Encourage and praise the child when (s)he follows through to complete the instruction.



**Additional Resources available online at [www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel)**

**What Works Briefs:** Summaries of Effective Practices for Supporting Children's Social-Emotional Development and Preventing Challenging Behaviors. The Briefs describe practical strategies, provide references to more information about the practice, and include a one-page handout that highlights the major points of the Brief.

#### **Brief 2**

*Understanding the Impact of Language Differences on Classroom Behavior* by R. M. Santos, M. M. Ostrosky

[HTML](#) | [PDF](#) Handout: [HTML](#) | [PDF](#) Additional Sources: [HTML](#)

### **Brief 3**

*Helping Children Understand Routines and Classroom Schedules* by M. M. Ostrosky, E. Y. Jung, M. L. Hemmeter, D. Thomas

[HTML](#) | [PDF](#) Handout: [HTML](#) | [PDF](#)

### **Brief 7**

*Helping Children Learn to Manage Their Own Behavior* by L. Fox, S. Garrison

[HTML](#) | [PDF](#) Handout: [HTML](#) | [PDF](#)

### **Brief 18**

*Logical Consequences* by L. Fox and S. Langhans

[HTML](#) | [PDF](#) Handout: [HTML](#) | [PDF](#)

**What Works Training Kits:** Based on the What Works Briefs topics, short training packages are available that include PowerPoint slides with accompanying note pages, activities, and handouts, which provide a trainer with the materials needed to conduct a short staff development program on a focused topic.

#### **Training Kit 2**

*Understanding the Impact of Language Differences on Classroom Behavior* by R. M. Santos, M. M. Ostrosky

[PDF](#) | Handout: [PPT](#) | Presenter: [PPT](#)

#### **Training Kit 3**

*Helping Children Understand Routines and Classroom Schedules* by M. M. Ostrosky, E. Y. Jung, M. L. Hemmeter, D. Thomas

[PDF](#) | Handout: [PPT](#) | Presenter: [PPT](#)

#### **Training Kit 7**

*Helping Children Learn to Manage Their Own Behavior* by L. Fox, S. Garrison

[PDF](#) | Handout: [PPT](#) | Presenter: [PPT](#)

#### **Local Resources to contact online:**

Region A Partnership for Children at [www.regionakids.org](http://www.regionakids.org), for a list of resources to promote social emotional competence and prevent challenging behavior in your county and in Region A.

