

Behavior Momentum

This tactic is designed for children who do not follow the teacher's directions to perform tasks they have already learned. This might include putting away a favorite object or giving the teacher an item. This tactic can also be used during transitions from activities that a child enjoys (for example, free play, centers) to activities that may be perceived by the child as less desirable (for example, instructional group).

Procedure:

1. The requests/directions that a child does not typically comply with are called low-probability requests. In other words, there is a low probability that the child is going to do as you request. Before this tactic can be used, you must identify those directions that the target child typically does not follow or comply with. If this tactic is used during transitions, you will need to identify the problem transition(s) (e.g. fun activities to more work-oriented activities) and the associated request or direction you make or give. This would be the low-probability request.
2. Also identify those directions or requests that the child enjoys doing and will complete within a few seconds most of the time (that is, approximately four out of five times). These requests/directions are called high-probability requests because there is a high probability that the child is going to do as you request (e.g. "Give me five," "Touch your head," "Point to your shirt," etc.)
3. Immediately prior to delivering the direction to which the child does not usually comply request the child to perform three high-probability requests, being sure to praise the child after he or she performs each direction. It is important to praise the child after he or she completes the high-probability and low-probability requests/directions.
4. Each direction/request should be given within five seconds of the child performing the previous request. That is, there should not be a large amount of time between requests.
5. If the child does not respond to one of the high-probability requests, wait five seconds and deliver another high-probability request. Stop delivering high-probability requests if more than two high-probability requests are not followed, or if you have to deliver more than five high-probability requests for three consecutive requests the child will perform.

Tips: If the rate of following low-probability directions is not increasing, first make sure that those directions selected as high-probability requests are: 1) actually complied with at least four out of five times, and 2) easy and quick to perform. Second, make sure the child is praised for following all the directions. If necessary, the type of praise could be made more distinct by touching and smiling at the child while verbally delivering praise. Finally, ensure that the whole sequence is delivered quickly with no more than five seconds between the child performing the direction and the next direction/request from the teacher. If more than five seconds lapse between requests, the effectiveness of this tactic could be greatly reduced.¹

¹ Adapted from Beck (2000) Project RIDE: Early Childhood Version. See also Davis, Brady, Williams, & Hamilton (1992).