

## Giving Demands

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Very often when parents bring their children into therapy they report that their child does not “listen.” This usually means that the child does not follow through with instructions or demands very well. One of the first steps to successfully change things around and get their child to finally start to listen is to **give “fun” demands**. For example, if your child likes to play on the computer, and they have not played on the computer for a couple of hours, you can say, “Hey, go play on the computer for 15 minutes,” or if they have not had a snack yet, before they ask, you could say, “Please your ice cream at the table.” Giving such demands may seem out of place since you are asking them to do a fun activity and not a task or chore, like washing dishes or throw out the garbage. **However, if you start by giving demands to things your child already enjoys then you will likely start to increase trust and rapport (e.g., you gave them something enjoyable), as well as increase parental control (e.g., you ask them to do something and they follow through and do it).**

The second step is to make sure you reward them for following through with the “fun” demand. For example, after the above child has played on the computer for 15 minutes (presumably without getting into trouble), you can reward them with something, “Hey, thanks for playing on your computer for 15 minutes. As a reward, you can choose your own snack.” Rewarding a child for doing a “fun” demand may seem odd, but again, you are setting up the parental control and reward system.

Parent places a demand → Child completes task → Parent rewards task completion

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The third step is to gradually introduce “authentic” demands while still giving occasional “fun” demands. Depending on your specific child, you may be able to move more quickly (e.g., a couple fun tasks and a couple authentic tasks per hour) or more slowly (e.g., several fun tasks and a few authentic tasks per day). When deciding how to progress with practicing demands, consider how your child has been following through with previous tasks. If they typically have had a difficult time following and completing demands, then go slower. If you start too fast, then you will likely overwhelm them and you will not see improvement.

A fourth step is to start from focusing more heavily on one-step demands and gradually move into more complex tasks. For example, “put your dish in the sink” or “hang your shirt up” are much easier to understand and complete, then “do the dishes” or “put away your clothes.”

There are several other factors to consider when giving demands to children and wanting them to listen and follow-through. Please read two of my other articles that will help as well: [Establish Realistic Expectations of Behavior](#) and [Getting More Positive Behaviors](#). When you are ready to start working with your child and helping them follow-through with your demands, please use my free worksheet, [Giving Demands](#).

Good Luck!