# TEACHER QUICK START GUIDE

# Preschool Life Skills

Respond to Name, Follow Simple Instruction, and Functional Communication

## WHY THESE SKILLS MATTERS

Research shows that children often hear their names most when they are in trouble - which means name calls can feel like a warning rather than an invitation. These guides help change that pattern by building skills during positive, calm, and easy moments throughout the day. When children learn to respond to their name, follow directions, and use words to ask for what they need, challenging behavior goes down - because they now have better tools. Kindergarten teachers consistently say these are the skills they most want children to walk in with. Teaching them early, in order, and with lots of warm practice is one of the most powerful things you can do for a child's school success.

**The first two skills build on each other. Teach them in order.**

## SKILLS INCLUDED

1. **RESPOND TO NAME**
2. **FOLLOW A SIMPLE INSTRUCTION**
3. **FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING (FCT)**

**TEACHER NOTES**

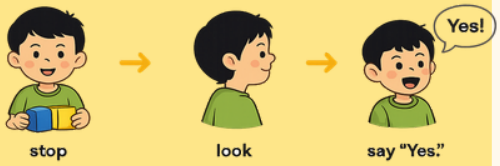
- These skills can be taught class-wide while providing additional practice for children who need it most.
- If the all the children consistently respond to their name, move on to **Skill 2: Follow a Simple Instruction**

SKILL 1

# RESPOND TO NAME

## The Goal

Within 2 seconds of hearing their name called, the child stops what they are doing, looks toward the teacher, and says "Yes."




## Introduce at Circle/Group Time

Say: "When I call your name, stop what you are doing, look at me, and say 'Yes.'"
Model with a child.
Have the child call your name, then you model stopping, looking, and saying "Yes."
Then say, "Now it's your turn" and have each child practice with you one at a time.
Tell the children you will practice with them throughout the day.

## When and where to practice

### Meals

Call name before passing food or offering more

### Free Play

Call name while child is engaged with a toy or activity

### Transitions

Call name while children are getting ready to line up or move

## When the Child Responds Correctly (stops, looks, says "Yes")

Give enthusiastic, specific praise immediately:

"Well done stopping and looking when I called your name!"

Then provide the natural next thing - food, access to the activity, permission to move.

## When the Child Does NOT Respond

Gently stop the activity.

Say: "When I call your name, stop what you are doing, look at me, and say 'Yes.' Let's practice."

Call their name again. Wait 2 seconds.

If they respond: Praise!

If not: Move on to the next child. Try again soon.

**IMPORTANT**

Any time you call a child's name in the classroom - not just during planned practice - follow through with the same feedback. Consistency is what makes the skill stick

### Challenging situations to build up to

being called from across the room, during a highly preferred activity, or in a noisy environment.

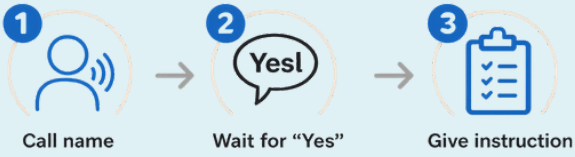
SKILL 2

# FOLLOW A SIMPLE INSTRUCTION

## The Goal

Within 3 seconds of a one-step instruction, the child begins to complete it and finishes in a timely manner.

## ALWAYS USE SKILL 1 FIRST




Call the child's name, wait for "Yes," THEN give the instruction. This gets them ready to listen.

## Introduce at Circle/Group Time

Say: "When I give you an instruction, do it right away."
Model with one child, have them tell you to do something, and then do it right away.
Have each child practice at least once before moving on.

## Examples of instructions across the day:

| Mealtime | Free Play | Transitions |
|---|---|---|
| "Pass the [food] to [name]." | "Put the block on the shelf." | "Walk to the bathroom." |
| "Wipe your mouth." | "Bring me the red marker." | "Get your coat." |
| "Push in your chair." | "Sit in the chair." | "Stand in line." |
| "Dump your cup." | "Walk to the art table." | "Dry your hands." |

## When the Child Follows Right Away

Specific praise + access to the natural next activity:

"I love how you did that right away, thank you!"

## When the child does NOT start within 3 seconds:

Say: "When I give you an instruction, do it right away. Let's try again."

Repeat the instruction.

If they follow: Give specific praise!

If not: Move to the next child. Try again later.

## Progression - two-step instructions:

Once single-step is solid, move to two steps:

- "Scrape your plate AND stack it."
- "Get your coat AND put it on."
- "Walk to the library AND sit down."

SKILL 3

# FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING (FCT)

## The Goal

The child uses words to communicate needs instead of challenging behavior.

## Before You Start:

Refer back to the ABC data and hypothesis you developed using the "stopping behavior before it starts" guide. Your best guess identifies what is driving the challenging behavior - use that to select the right phrase to teach. If you have not yet written a best guess for this child, go back to that guide first.

## Step 1

**Match the phrase to the reason why (GET or GET AWAY FROM) in your best guess.**

| If your best guess identifies the reason as . . . | Teach the child to say... |
|---|---|
| Escape / need for help | "Help me, please." |
| Attention | "Excuse me." (with up to 3 gentle taps if needed) |
| Wants an item or activity | "Can I have ___?" or "May I use ___?" |

## Step 2

**Teach the phrase directly**

Introduce the phrase during a calm moment - not in the middle of the challenging behavior. Explain it, model it, and have the child practice it with you before the situation arises.

## Step 3

### Use your ABC data to plan practice

The child uses words to communicate needs instead of challenging behavior.

## Step 4

### Respond every time they use the phrase

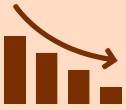
When the child uses the phrase, honor it immediately. Consistency is everything. If the phrase sometimes works and sometimes does not, the child will continue trying challenging behavior.

## Step 5

### Record, reflect, and check your hypothesis

After each practice opportunity, ask:

Did the child use the phrase - with help or independently?



Is the challenging behavior decreasing?

If not, does the best guess still hold, or is it time to go back and look at the ABC data again?

What will you change or set up differently next time?