PARENT GUIDE

Preschool Life Skills: Building Blocks for Success

What's inside

1. **Respond to Name**
2. **Following Simple Instructions**
3. **Using Words to Ask for Help, Wants and Needs**

Why These Skills Matter

Think about when your child hears their name most often. For many kids, their name gets called when something is wrong - "Stop that!" or "Come here right now!" That means their name can actually feel like a warning sign. These guides flip that. We practice these skills during calm, everyday moments so your child learns that responding to their name leads to good things - help, attention, and getting what they need. When children know HOW to respond to an adult, ask for help, and use their words, they are set up to succeed in school and feel more confident every day. Kindergarten teachers say these are the skills they most want children to walk in with. The best part? These skills get easier the more you practice them together.

SKILL 1: RESPOND TO NAME

What it looks like when your child has this skill:

When you call their name, they stop what they are doing, look at you, and say "Yes" - within 2 seconds.

How to Teach It ----------

STEP 1

Show them what you want.

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

Show them! If you can, ask another adult or older sibling to help you act it out. Or you can ask your child to call your name. Someone calls your name, the other stops, looks, and says "Yes." Then switch. Practice a few times.

STEP 2

Practice during everyday moments.

Look for natural chances throughout your day:

- At the table before passing food or drink
- During playtime while they are busy with a toy
- In the morning while they are getting dressed
- Before you give any direction

STEP 3

When they get it right:

Give warm, specific praise right away: "Yes! Way to go, stopping and looking at me!" Then give them what they need - the snack, the toy, your attention.

STEP 4

When they do 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 do it: praise! If not: let it go and try again soon.

Helpful Tip

Practice when things are calm at first. Later, try when the TV is on or siblings are nearby. That is when it counts most.

SKILL 2: FOLLOW A SIMPLE INSTRUCTION

What it looks like when your child has this skill:

You give a one-step direction. Within 3 seconds, they start doing it - and they finish it.

How to Teach It

STEP 1

Get their attention first.

Use Skill 1! Call their name, wait for "Yes," THEN give the instruction. This sets them up for success.

STEP 2

Give one short, clear direction.

Keep it simple. One thing at a time. For example:

- "Please pick up your cup."
- "Put your shoes by the door."
- "Come to the table."
- "Hand me the book."

STEP 3

Wait 3 seconds for them to start.

STEP 4

When they follow right away:

"I love how you listened and did that right away! Thank you!"

STEP 5

When they don't follow right away:

Say: "When I give you an instruction, do it right away. Let's try again." Repeat the direction once. Wait 3 seconds. If they do it: praise! If not: gently guide them through it, then try again later.

Ready to level up?

Once one-step directions feel easy, try two steps:

- "Pick up your cup AND put it in the sink."
- "Get your shoes AND bring them to me."

Helpful Tip

Pick easy tasks to start - ones they usually do not mind. Save the harder ones (turning off the TV, stopping playtime) for once the skill is solid.

SKILL 3: FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING - USING WORDS TO GET WHAT YOU NEED

What it looks like when your child has this skill:
Instead of whining, grabbing, crying, or acting out, your child uses words to ask for what they need.

Before you start:
Go back to your ABC data and the best guess you wrote in the "stopping challenging behavior before it starts" guide. Your best guess tells you WHY the challenging behavior is happening - and that is exactly what you need to pick the right phrase to teach.

STEP 1

Use your hypothesis to pick the right phrase.

If your hypothesis says they act out to...	Teach them to say...
Get out of something hard or get help	"Help me, please."
Get your attention	"Excuse me." (with up to 3 gentle arm taps)
Get something they want	"Can I have ___?" or "May I use ___?"

STEP 2

Teach the phrase directly.

Teach it during a calm moment - before you are in the middle of the challenging behavior:

- Say the phrase yourself and explain when to use it.
- Have your child repeat it back to you.
- Practice it together.

STEP 3

Set up chances to practice.

Your ABC notes already told you when and where the challenging behavior is most likely. Use those same situations on purpose so your child can practice the phrase right when they actually need it.

STEP 4

Respond every time they use the phrase.

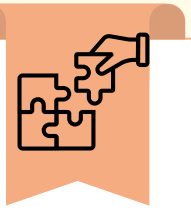
When they use their words, give them what they asked for right away. This teaches them that words work faster and better than acting out.

STEP 5

Notice what is working and adjust.

At the end of the day, ask yourself:

- Did the phrase work for them today?
- If not, does my best guess still make sense, or do I need to look at my ABC notes again?
- What will I try differently tomorrow?



Helpful Tip

Start with the one phrase that matches your best guess. Once that feels solid, you can teach the others.