



PARENT GUIDE • ACCESSIBLE COOPERATION

Refusing Directions Behavior Blueprint™

Before deciding “won’t,” find out what is blocking “can.”

CONNECTION IS NOT GIVING IN. CLARITY IS NOT CONTROL.

What refusing a direction means

Refusing a direction means the requested action does not begin, continue, or finish. The cause may be misunderstanding, processing time, executive functioning, overload, pain, fear, autonomy, a missing skill, or a learned way to change the outcome.

The goal is not instant obedience. It is safe, respectful follow-through with growing understanding, communication, autonomy, and skill.

The boundary says what must happen. The support makes success possible.

Step 1: find the barrier

NOT UNDERSTOOD

The words may be vague, too long, too fast, distant, or dependent on language and concepts the child cannot process.

EXECUTIVE-FUNCTION DEMAND

Starting, sequencing, estimating time, shifting attention, remembering steps, finding materials, or defining done may be the barrier.

OVERLOAD OR BODY NEED

Pain, fatigue, hunger, sensory load, illness, anxiety, or a full nervous system can make an ordinary direction inaccessible.

FEAR, SHAME, OR EXPERIENCE

The task may be linked to failure, correction, conflict, trauma, embarrassment, bullying, or an unsafe person or place.

AUTONOMY & LOSS OF CONTROL

Constant commands, no meaningful choices, interrupted focus, or adults controlling every detail can create resistance.

LEARNED DELAY OR OUTCOME

Refusal may postpone or remove a demand. Teach a better way to request help, time, or a reasonable adjustment.

Direction, setting, timing, and what happened before it:

Step 2: match the response

CANNOT ACCESS THE TASK

Clarify, demonstrate, reduce language, provide materials, chunk steps, and support initiation.

OVERLOAD, SHUTDOWN, OR MELTDOWN

Pause the demand, create safety, reduce input, and restore regulation. Follow-through waits for capacity.

REASONABLE OR SAFETY OBJECTION

Listen for pain, confusion, bullying, unsafe touch, unfair treatment, or a direction that conflicts with safety.

GOAL-DIRECTED DELAY

Keep the direction brief, offer two choices, prompt the replacement request, and follow through without debate.

Remember: A child should learn cooperation and also learn that they can report danger, pain, mistreatment, or an unsafe instruction.

Step 3: map the 0-60 Journey™

	Looks away, pauses, asks what, keeps playing, or needs extra time to shift attention
	Says later, bargains, repeats no, moves slowly, jokes, distracts, or asks many questions
	Argues, hides, freezes, drops materials, walks away, or cannot identify the first step
	Yells, threatens, throws, runs, becomes rigid, or loses access to choices and problem-solving
	Shutdown, meltdown, aggression, bolting, or full inability to complete the direction
	Immediate danger, severe distress, or complete loss of functional capacity

10-20 signals:

30-40 signals:

50-60 signals:

Steps 4-7: Pause-Clarify-Choice-Follow Through Plan™

04 • PAUSE

Get close without crowding, gain attention respectfully, stop repeating, and check body, safety, and capacity.

05 • CLARIFY

Use one short direction, a visual or demonstration, concrete language, and enough quiet processing time.

06 • CHOICE

Offer two acceptable paths or one help option: "Shoes first or coat first?" "Start alone or with me?"

07 • FOLLOW THROUGH

Prompt the smallest first step, acknowledge cooperation, and keep the boundary steady without lectures or shame.

One clear direction and visual:

Two choices, help option, and first step:

Step 8: teach cooperation skills

SHOW UNDERSTANDING

Point to the first step, repeat it in an accessible way, select a picture, or demonstrate what comes next.

ASK FOR HELP

Use “show me,” “do it with me,” “too hard,” or “which part first?” through speech, gesture, card, or AAC.

REQUEST TIME

Teach “one minute,” “finish this piece,” or “timer please,” with a clear limit adults honor consistently.

CHOOSE WITHIN THE BOUNDARY

Choose order, location, tool, helper, or method while the necessary task remains clear.

START ONE SMALL STEP

Build initiation through feet on floor, open the page, carry one item, or put one piece away.

FINISH, CHECK & REPAIR

Identify done, ask for a check, complete a missed step, and reconnect after conflict without shame.

The first cooperation skill we will teach:

How adults will respond when it is used:

Prevention plan

REDUCE COMMAND OVERLOAD

Separate necessary directions from preferences. Avoid narrating, correcting, and commanding every action.

USE VISIBLE ROUTINES

Schedules, checklists, first-then supports, labeled places, and finish points reduce repeated prompts.

BUILD AUTONOMY

Offer real choices, invite child-generated plans, respect appropriate no, and give control over method.

PREPARE EXECUTIVE SUPPORTS

Put materials in reach, chunk tasks, model the first step, estimate time visibly, and check completion.

PROTECT REGULATION

Adjust timing for sleep, pain, hunger, sensory load, transitions, anxiety, communication, and recovery.

COORDINATE THE RESPONSE

Home and school use the same cues, wait time, choices, help requests, and calm follow-through.

Routine, visual, and executive support:

Autonomy choice and replacement request:

School planning: If disability-related communication, executive functioning, sensory needs, anxiety, or regulation affects follow-through, request clear accommodations and teaching supports in the IEP/504 or behavior plan.

Safety note: Investigate sudden changes, pain, illness, trauma, bullying, abuse, or fear. This educational guide does not replace medical, mental-health, or school-team evaluation.

Need an individualized plan? Schedule at calendly.com/optimizemylife/newclientintake or email mary@supportiveminds.us.

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