

David² is another second grader in the same classroom who consistently demonstrates non-compliance with verbal directions. As a result of this challenging behavior, David frequently has difficulty managing transitions independently and engaging in on-task behaviors. The teacher has given a variety of single-step and multi-step directions, and it is difficult for him to follow the single-step directions, even when they are communicated one-on-one and repeated more than three times. A conversation with the parent confirms that directions are often repeated as many as four or five times at home as well.

When a verbal direction is given, such as lining up or closing a book, David will often continue to sit on the floor or at his table until the direction is repeated by the teacher, other students repeat the direction to him, or he notices that everyone around him or everyone else at his table has followed the direction and physically moved to another area of the room. I thought at one time that he might not be able to hear the directions, but testing done by the audiologist concluded that this was not the case. A reading specialist at the school who assessed David thought he might be over-medicated for ADHD, resulting in his generally sedated mood, speech, and movement. A recent medical student study team meeting provided more specific information to my cooperating teacher and I about David's medical history and background, which supports the general hypothesis that David is unable to typically process language, both written and oral, as documented throughout his development since the age of two. Although I cannot elaborate on his medical condition due to the confidential nature of this information, I can make some suggestions for behavioral interventions.

Since David may not be able to follow verbal directions because of his difficulty in language processing, one intervention may be to write the directions on the white board for the next task or activity. He seems to cope with following some directions, such as lining up for PE or lunch, by noticing that other students have already lined up. For task-specific instructions, however, that cannot be easily copied or imitated, a small white board could be used to write the direction and give it to David to take with him to his seat. Since his ability to decode grade-level words is adequate for the beginning of second grade, he could re-read the directions on the white board as many times as needed and the teacher would not have to repeat them again and again. Plenty of positive reinforcement would be needed so that David would be motivated to continue following the directions on the white board and be able to independently manage transitions.

² Actual name of student has been changed to protect student's privacy.

Sounds like an interesting case, Sarah. Clear analysis and reasons for David's challenging behavior, too. You seem very understanding and patient w/ him. I'm curious to know which proactive strategies will work best for him!

Can David process written directions? What about a visual schedule or visual reminders?