

A Handbook for Parents and Other Caregivers

# INTELLIGENT DISOBEDIENCE FOR CHILDREN



**blink**  
**think**  
**choice**  
**voice**

The ***new*** technique for keeping children ***safe***

Recommended for use with 4 to 11 year olds

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## Introduction



When you place your children in the care of other adults – day care providers, teachers, coaches, religious clerics, camp counselors – you trust they will be safe but you know you can't be totally sure. When a supposedly trusted authority figure tells a child to do something wrong it is a confusing and potentially dangerous experience for them. You prepare your children to not get into cars with strangers or walk off with a stranger at the mall. How do you prepare them for the rare but serious situation when an authority figure tells them to do something they shouldn't?

Many of us don't. Let's see how we might.

We already have a great example of how to do this from another safety activity. Most of us were taught at a very young age what to do if our clothes catch on fire:

Stop, Drop and Roll.

This simple memorable saying has saved disfigurements and even deaths.

Relatively few people have ever needed to use this. Yet they still remember it even decades later. Why?

A rhythmic rhyming phrase is memorable. When it is combined with simple practice our brains form a pattern for behavior that can activate when the right circumstances trigger it.

So let's create a memorable saying we can teach and practice with our children about orders from authorities. The one I came up with is:

**Blink, Think, Choice, Voice!**

The full expression is **Blink, Think, Make A Choice, Use Your Voice**. What is it telling children to remember?

It is teaching them how to say “no” when saying “yes” would be harmful. This is known as **Intelligent Disobedience**. It is a critical skill both for safety and good citizenship. It is taught to guide dogs and service dogs. Surely we can teach it to children.

Parents who have read articles or seen the video on how to teach children the safety skills of **Intelligent Disobedience** may want the additional guidance this workbook offers to introduce the skills to their children.

Once the skills have been taught, It is important that all adults in the household understand what is meant by **Intelligent Disobedience** and why it is important for your children's safety. Then they can recognize and support instances of intelligent disobedience when a child tries out their new skill.

**BLINK:** Register the shock. Pause. Blink a few times in disbelief. Take a few seconds to recover. Resist the social pressure to obey the authority figure.

**THINK:** What is at stake? Does the order make sense? Does it go against what you have been taught is right? Could obeying cause harm to you or another?

**CHOICE:** You always have a choice: obey, disobey, check with someone else, or make a different suggestion. Which choice seems right?

**VOICE:** Express your decision early and clearly. Don't send a mixed message. If you decide “no”, say it so your meaning can't be misunderstood. “No!” means “No!”



## **Teaching Your Children with this Guide**

**“The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.”**

**— Denis Waitley, motivational speaker**

**You might be asking yourself, how do I teach my child when and how to say no when an authority figure or a peer tells them to do something that will be harmful to themselves or others?**

**It’s a skill that can be taught and adapted to many situations. You can teach it to your children with a basic learning process laid out in this guide.**

**The process includes (1) Instruction, (2) Demonstration, (3) Rehearsal, and (4) Feedback.**

**In the next few pages, we will take you through each part of this process. We will give you some typical situations to start with for teaching your child the Blink, Think, Choice, and Voice technique.**

**The goal of this training is to keep it simple and make it fun, so your child learns how to make the right choice and act on it. We have found that children as young as 4 years and as old as 11 have responded well if these steps are followed.**

# **I. Instruction**

## **DESCRIPTION**

Instruction involves talking with your child about the skill to be learned. Depending on your child's learning preference, you can also include written examples or pictures to illustrate what you are talking about.

## **WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Introducing a new skill directly and explaining why it is important can reduce confusion for both you and your child. Understanding how this skill will come up in their day to day life - and how they can use it - will keep your child interested in this activity.

## **APPLICATION**

Please note that for children ages 4 – 6 years old, certain social skills may need to be introduced before or while teaching the Blink, Think, Choice, Voice technique. For instance, learning to how to make eye contact, using a confident volume of speech, and making sure your child's speech can be understood.

Older children that already have these social skills possess the tools they need to learn the Blink, Think, Choice, Voice technique.

To give you an idea of how to start a conversation with your child, we offer the following example as a guideline. We want you to feel confident in your approach, so please, tailor this dialogue to your comfort level and to how your child understands best. You can also use pictures (including those in this workbook) to illustrate what you are teaching.

## EXAMPLE



**NOTE:** Wherever there are blank lines, have the child answer the question and help them as needed. This engages the child right from the beginning.

**You might start by saying:**

**“Usually, I want you to listen to the people who are in charge. But sometimes they can tell you to do something wrong. I want to teach you what to do when you think they are telling you to do something wrong, because I may not be with you when this happens. I’m talking about people like your teacher, coach, or babysitter.**

**“I want to make sure you understand two words.**

**“First, what does it mean to obey? \_\_\_\_\_**

**“What does it mean to disobey? \_\_\_\_\_**

**“Let’s say an adult or even a kid you know tells you to do something bad. Something that will hurt someone else or that will be hurtful to you.**

**“Now when I say hurtful, I mean things like being told to do something unsafe, or to touch private parts, or to hurt someone or be mean or unkind.**

**“Let’s make a list of things that are okay and not okay when someone tells you to do something”**

**Okay to obey**

**Not okay to obey**

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**NOTE:** By inviting your child to make this list with you, it will give you a feel for what they know and don't know. Remember this list does not have to be complete when you begin. You can keep this list and add to it as time goes on. You can also make it specific to situations your child may be in during their daily interactions with other adults and children.

Next, ask your child these questions so you can gently begin helping the child overcome the stress they may feel in these situations.

"If a coach or teacher gave you an order to hurt someone or to do something you know is wrong, how would you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

"Is it okay to disobey that order?" \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:** If your child still feels that they must obey, ask them why. They may tell you something like "I'll get yelled at if I don't obey" or "It's against the rules to disobey." Be sure to respond to your child's concerns with empathy and reassurance as needed.

"Now, we're going to practice a way that will make it easier for you to disobey if you get a bad order. Let's learn a technique called Blink, Think, Choice, and Voice."

## 2. Demonstration

Demonstration allows you to show the child how to do the skill.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT

It is important to demonstrate the skill because observation is a powerful learning tool. You can think of this as a show and tell.



## APPLICATION

We offer the following example as a guideline. We invite you to tailor this using your own examples with the kinds of people your child spends time with. *Make sure to use a gesture while demonstrating each step* - you can use the gestures pictured or make up your own.

## EXAMPLE

**“Your Coach tells you to hit another player.”**

**“The first step is to Blink. If you get a bad order you may be startled. Breathe in and close your eyes. Breathe out through your mouth and open your eyes. Let’s practice this together three times.”**

**Explain why: Blinking and breathing will give you time to think.**



**“The second step is to Think. Put your hand on your head and ask yourself, is hitting another player the right thing to do?”**

**“What other questions can you ask yourself?” (Is it fair? safe? right? kind? mean? etc)**

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**“The third step is to make a Choice. Decide if you are going to obey, disobey, check with someone else, or suggest a different idea.”**

**CHOICES**

If it's right ----- Yes

If it's wrong ----- No

If you're not sure ----- Question

Who else can you ask?

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**“The fourth step is to use your Voice. Lift your head, look the coach in the eye and say it like you mean it.”**

***If the answer is no:***

**“What are ways to say no?”**

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***Parent can give prompts if child has difficulty:***

**“I won't”      “That's wrong”      “Stop saying that”**

***If child is uncomfortable saying no, show how they can use their body instead***

**Shake your head “no”**

**Fold your arms and stare, etc.**

**BREAKS**

**Observe if your child needs a break before going on to Rehearsal**

### 3. Rehearsals

#### DESCRIPTION

Rehearsal allows your child to practice the skill and can be the most fun part of the learning process.

#### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Role-play is an effective way to practice because it gives your child the experience of putting this new skill to use in a safe environment. It also lets your child practice responding *immediately* which is key when learning a new technique.

#### APPLICATION

Think of some age appropriate situations you will use in the role plays with your child.

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Choose the situation you feel will be easiest for your child to deal with first and explain it to them. Then act out the situation as if you are the child being told to do something wrong. Say the action step you are on and use body language to demonstrate the step.

BLINK \_\_\_\_\_

THINK \_\_\_\_\_

CHOICE \_\_\_\_\_

VOICE \_\_\_\_\_

Now have the child do it. You give the harmful order and have the child say each step aloud and act it out. If you are teaching a few children, have each one act out the steps.

Now, using the same situation, this time demonstrate doing it without saying the words BLINK, THINK, CHOICE, VOICE aloud. Then have the child just DO the action steps as they would in a real situation. Still have them do the body motions so you can tell they are doing each step.

Allow the role-play to unfold naturally and allow for mistakes – you will be able to give feedback after the role-play is complete. It may be necessary to use prompts to help your child to remember the order of action steps and/or what type of choices they can make. You can make and use other written or pictorial reminders to help.





## EXAMPLES

**You need to choose the kinds of situations your child is most likely to encounter. For example, if they are going away to summer camp you may want to make the authority figure a counselor. Choose examples that may be easier for your child and work up to more sensitive or difficult ones. Here are several you may want to choose from.**

**Crossing guard: Guard waves the children to cross the street but does not see the car speeding through the stop signal.**

**Coach: (Choose the type of coach or instructor your child spends time with, for example, soccer, basketball, football, gymnastics, marching band, chess.) This situation could involve things like telling you to be dishonest, to foul someone purposely, to not shake hands at the end of the game, to injure an opposing team's player, to keep playing when there is lightning and thunder.**



**Friends or peers:** A child who is bullying another child tells you to join the bullying by doing things like teasing them, taking their lunch, throwing things at them.

**Babysitter:** Tells you to do something your parents would think is bad like having a taste of their beer, taking a puff on a cigarette, taking pictures with your clothes off.

**Friend's parent:** Tells you to stay alone in a car while they go into the mall, or to leave the store without paying.

**Teacher:** Tells you to do something that makes another student feel bad like making fun of them for wrong answers, helping to lock them in a closet as punishment, etc.

**Authority figures with more intimate trust (clergy, tutors or others who give private lessons, doctors or nurses, relatives):** Tells you to do something that they say you cannot tell your parents about. (Be as specific as you feel needed for your child's safety such as "they tell you to touch their private parts.")

## **ALSO PRACTICE INTELLIGENT *OBEDIENCE***

After a child has done two or three role-plays on Intelligent Disobedience, that day or more likely another day soon afterwards, explain that sometimes an adult may ask them to do something unusual for a good reason. In that case they need to recognize they should obey.

For example, there is an active intruder in the school. The new safety procedures are known as ALICE “Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Escape.” If the classroom is on the ground floor the teacher may judge that the safest thing to do is for the students to jump out the window. Usually this would be an unsafe order, but in this case it is more safe than staying in the school so the right action is to obey.

What are other examples when you might need to use Intelligent OBEDIENCE?

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## 4. Feedback

### DESCRIPTION

Feedback provides the opportunity to give your child praise for correct responses and allows you to give constructive comments for improvement. This is also a good time to see if your child has any questions that may help them understand the technique better. Listen for comments from your child that will enable you to assist with their learning.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Feedback is vital because it provides information to your child on how they are doing and how they could do even better. A key to effective feedback is to give it immediately after a rehearsal.

**CAUTION:** It is critical that children do not become confused about when to obey and when to disobey or how to disobey effectively. Only give feedback on one thing until it is clear the child understands it.

For example, if the child is having trouble with the “Think” action, only give feedback on that one action step. Have the child practice it again. If after three times they are still struggling with that step, gently end the session for that day.

Do not jump to another action. Come back the next day when the child is fresh and go over the action that was difficult for them yesterday until they feel confident with it. Only then give feedback on other actions. Or just redo the whole role play and then give feedback.

### **APPLICATION**

If you are practicing with more than one child this provides an opportunity for the children to learn from watching each other and offering their feedback as well. This gives the children a chance to reflect on what they know. You could also ask what they would do differently and what they would do the same.

#### **Optional:**

One way to give feedback is by videoing the rehearsals. This provides a tangible measure of your child's responses. As you and your child watch the video playback, you can pause the action and point out strong responses as well as pointing out errors using constructive comments specific to the behavior that needs to be improved. You can also ask your child to watch for what they did that was effective, and try to spot what they still need to work on. This provides an opportunity for prompting your child to think of a different strategy to employ.

Whether or not you video the rehearsals, you and your child can fill out the feedback form on the next page.



## FEEDBACK FORM

(You can make additional copies of this page for future use)

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Role-play Situation \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

What You Did Well

What You Could Do Better

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Role-play Situation \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

What You Did Well

What You Could Do Better

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Role-play Situation \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

What You Did Well

What You Could Do Better

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



**Remember that you want to reinforce the behavior that you want to see increase. Praise the specific actions that the child does well during the rehearsal.**

**Once your child has accomplished parts of this technique without prompting, you only need to concentrate on reinforcing other parts they are still having trouble with.**

## **EXAMPLE**

**Your child performed the Blink correctly and added a deep breath while pausing to Think about the Choices available to him in the situation. Let's say that the practice situation involved a classmate telling them to hold another child down on the ground. When your child used their Voice, they avoided eye contact and mumbled, "no, that's not right".**

**Reinforcing feedback: (1) I like how you took a deep breath after you blinked, and (2) your decision not to join in on bullying the other kid was a good response.**

Developmental feedback: (1) I noticed you did not look at the bully in the eye, and (2) I also noticed that you spoke very softly like you were not sure of your decision. Let's practice making eye contact and speaking louder in an 'I mean it' tone of voice.

### HOW MUCH PRACTICE IS NEEDED?

At the beginning it is good to practice a couple of times within the first week so you get through a full role play and feedback at least once or twice. Keep it as fun and engaging as possible. Respect your child's attention span. 15 to 30 minutes is probably a good length of time. If you are teaching several children they are likely to stay engaged longer.

Once you have successfully completed the first role play, additional ones should go faster. We suggest doing two or three role plays in the next session or two. By that time your child should be comfortable with the skill. You can decide if you want to do another couple of role plays a few weeks later to cement the new skill.

Dates and times to practice over the next two weeks.

Date

Time

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**CAUTION:** If you are teaching this to older children, you should discuss the exceptional need to obey law enforcement officers. The rare but tragic instances of pre-teenage or teenage children being shot in police encounters require caution even if your child believes the order is bad. It is safer for them to obey and report the events after they are physically safe.

## REINFORCEMENT

Make sure the adults in your household and any regular caregivers know what you are teaching your children and why. Ask them to stay alert for any attempts by your child to use Intelligent Disobedience skills. Ask the adults to manage their own reactions and be supportive, within the context of the situation.

For example, they might ask:

Are you practicing Intelligent Disobedience?

What did I ask you to do that seemed unsafe or wrong?

What about that seemed wrong or unsafe?

If the child gives answers that support their use of Intelligent Disobedience give them positive reinforcement.

If the child gives answers that show they misunderstood the order, help them see what was actually meant without making them feel bad for misunderstanding.

## REPORTING

Once your child has learned the Blink Think technique, it is important to talk to them about *reporting* afterwards when an adult tells them to do something wrong . Explain this is especially important if the adult has harmed the child or threatened the child to keep the bad behavior a secret.

## COMMUNITY REINFORCEMENT

At this point, if you have seen the benefit of the Blink-Think-Choice-Voice practice you may want to advocate for it being introduced in other places where your child spends time such as after school clubs. The more adult social support there is for Intelligent Disobedience the more confidence you can have that it will be used when needed.

Where does my child spend time and who is the best contact there?

Place

Best Contact

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **EASY REHEARSAL CHECKLIST**

**After you have gone through the workbook once with your child, you may find it easier to work from this checklist when you do additional rehearsals with them. Remember to keep it fun.**

**1. Pick an example to practice (like Uncle Joe just asked you to...)**

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**2. Make it clear who is the authority figure and what they are telling the child to do.**

**3. Have the child go through the steps using hand gestures while doing them: BLINK THINK CHOICE VOICE**

**4. Prompt as needed, but on each rehearsal give them more time to figure out the steps themselves.**

**5. Be generous in your praise : Good job! You're doing well!**

**6. Give specific positive feedback, for example: You did a good job blinking until you could think clearly.**

**7. Here's something you could do even better. Be very specific: "When you say "no" you can look up and say it louder."**

**8. Practice one thing at a time. Have them try it again. If they try three times and still have trouble, gently end the session for that day.**

**9. If you videoed the rehearsal, watch it together and ask what they see, or point out what you see.**

**10. Decide whether to end rehearsing for that day or to do another situation and give feedback on it.**

## Acknowledgements

After publishing the book *Intelligent Disobedience*, the idea came to me for a simple way to teach its principles to young children. Of course the idea needed testing and I thank the parents, teachers and children who participated in doing this. These include:

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Spike Robinson wrote and performed the Blink Think song that can be found on the *Intelligent Disobedience* Facebook page and website, which parents can use to further engage their children in learning the skills in this workbook. Mike Powell of Mirandum Pictures, who helped me create the Blink Think Choice Voice video also did invaluable work in helping format and polish this workbook.

Lastly, I am indebted to Pat Wyman of [www.HowToLearn.com](http://www.HowToLearn.com) for providing the platform to reach millions of parents.



## Resources

**BLINK THINK CHOICE VOICE Website:**

[www.blinkthinkchoicevoice.com](http://www.blinkthinkchoicevoice.com)

**BEHAVIOR SKILLS TRAINING (BST) RESOURCES:**

<http://www.iloveaba.com/2017/06/rock-star-parent-training-bst.html>

### VIDEO LINKS

**BLINK, THINK, CHOICE, VOICE:**

<https://youtu.be/RdKPIK71SP8>

**Spike Robinson's BLINK, THINK song:**

[https://youtu.be/JEnAIdCsY\\_w](https://youtu.be/JEnAIdCsY_w)



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