

# AI-00817 Do not tell an adult what to do

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## what is the formal psychology term for telling an adult what to do?

The **formal psychology term** for telling an adult what to do is "**psychological reactance**". When individuals perceive that their choices are restricted or that others are imposing directives upon them, they may react by rebelling or doing the opposite. This phenomenon is referred to as **psychological reactance**, which is our brain's response to a perceived threat to our freedom<sup>2</sup>.

However, it's essential to recognize that being an authentic adult involves several other aspects beyond just reacting to external instructions. Let's explore some of these aspects:

1. **Rationality:** Adults experience emotions but make rational decisions based on self-interest and moral concerns. They have a strong sense of identity, live with integrity, and adhere to their principles and values<sup>1</sup>.
2. **Formulating and Implementing Goals:** Adults set goals, prioritize them, and take actions to achieve them. They align their words with their actions, avoiding emotional overreactions to insignificant events<sup>1</sup>.
3. **Equality in Relationships:** Adults seek equality in relationships, interacting as independent individuals with reciprocal give-and-take. They don't recreate parental roles in their partnerships<sup>1</sup>.
4. **Active versus Passive:** Adults are proactive, self-assertive, and problem-solvers. They don't play the victim or rely excessively on others for direction<sup>1</sup>.

Remember, psychological reactance is just one aspect of adult behavior, and emotional maturity involves a broader perspective<sup>1</sup>.

Source: Conversation with Bing, 3/28/2024

(1) Why We Hate People Telling Us What to Do | Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/conscious-communication/201906/why-we-hate-people-telling-us-what-do>.

(2) Six Aspects of Being an Adult | Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-human-experience/201306/six-aspects-being-adult>.

(3) What does it mean to be "adult" today? | Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/adulthood-whats-the-rush/201010/what-does-it-mean-be-adult-today>.

There isn't a single, universally accepted term in psychology for "telling an adult what to do." However, depending on the context, a few terms might be relevant:

- **Directive communication:** This is a general term for communication that aims to influence someone's behavior. It doesn't specify the age of the person being directed.
- **Instruction:** This refers to providing clear and specific information on how to complete a task. It's often used in situations where one person has expertise and the other is learning.
- **Persuasion:** This involves trying to convince someone to take a specific course of action through reasoning or emotional appeals.
- **Prescriptive approach:** This refers to a method that emphasizes providing specific solutions or recommendations.

It's important to consider the power dynamic at play. If the person giving instructions holds a position of authority (e.g., manager, therapist), it might be called **supervision** or **guidance**.

Ultimately, the best term depends on the specific situation and the intent behind the communication.

## What is psychological reactance?

Psychological reactance is a phenomenon in psychology that describes a person's negative reaction to feeling their freedom of choice is being limited or

threatened. It's a motivational state that pushes people to restore their autonomy. Here's a breakdown of the key points:

- **Triggered by threats to freedom:** When someone feels pressured, forbidden, or otherwise restricted in their choices, they might experience reactance.
- **Motivated by regaining control:** The core of reactance is the desire to re-establish a sense of control over one's own behavior.
- **Results in non-compliance:** People experiencing reactance may rebel against the pressure, even if it means going against their own best interests or the intended goal of the pressure.
- **Think "forbidden fruit":** Reactance can make the restricted option even more desirable, simply because it's forbidden.

Here's an example: A teenager who is constantly nagged by their parents to clean their room might become even more resistant to cleaning due to the pressure. The nagging makes cleaning feel like an obligation rather than a free choice, triggering reactance.

## Tell more

Here's a deeper dive into psychological reactance:

### Factors influencing reactance:

- **Severity of the threat:** The more restricted someone feels, the stronger the reactance. Subtle pressure might not trigger it, but heavy-handed tactics can backfire.
- **Importance of the freedom:** People are more likely to react when the threatened freedom is important to them.
- **Perceived source of pressure:** Pressure from someone seen as controlling or untrustworthy is more likely to trigger reactance.

### Consequences of reactance:

- **Reduced persuasion:** When someone feels pressured to adopt a belief or behavior, they might become less receptive to persuasion altogether.

- **Increased resistance:** Reactance can lead to defiance and a stronger commitment to the opposite viewpoint.
- **Boomerang effect:** Efforts to control someone's behavior can lead to the opposite outcome, making them even more likely to engage in the restricted behavior.

#### **Applications of reactance theory:**

- **Marketing:** Creating a sense of scarcity or exclusivity can trigger reactance and make a product more desirable.
- **Parenting:** Instead of nagging, parents can try offering choices and focusing on the benefits of desired behaviors.
- **Education:** Teachers can create a more engaging learning environment where students feel autonomy and a sense of choice.

**Remember:** Reactance is a complex phenomenon, and people don't always react the same way to pressure. However, understanding reactance can help us communicate and persuade more effectively by respecting people's autonomy and avoiding heavy-handed tactics

#### **List 20 examples of related to psychological reactance**

Here are 20 examples of psychological reactance:

1. **Teenager and chores:** A teenager who is constantly nagged by their parents to clean their room might become even more resistant to cleaning due to the pressure. The nagging makes cleaning feel like an obligation rather than a free choice, triggering reactance.
2. **Dieting restrictions:** People on a diet may find themselves craving forbidden foods more than if they weren't restricted. The idea of something being "off-limits" can make it more desirable.
3. **Censorship:** Attempts to censor content online or in the media can backfire, leading to increased interest in the censored material. The forbidden nature of the content fuels curiosity and rebellion.
4. **Pop-up ads:** Pop-up ads that interrupt your browsing experience can be annoying and intrusive. They might trigger reactance, making you less likely to click on the advertised product.

5. **Mandatory fun:** Activities labeled as "mandatory fun" can feel forced and inauthentic, leading people to resist participating. People prefer to choose their own leisure activities.
6. **Dress codes:** Enforcing a strict dress code at school or work can backfire if it feels too restrictive. People value self-expression through clothing, and limitations can trigger reactance.
7. **Relationship ultimatums:** Issuing ultimatums in a relationship ("It's me or your friends!") can create a power struggle and trigger reactance. People don't like feeling controlled in their relationships.
8. **Micromanaging:** A micromanaging boss who constantly monitors and controls their employees' work can create resentment and resistance. Employees value autonomy and feeling trusted to do their jobs.
9. **\* unsolicited advice:\*\*** Even if well-meaning, unsolicited advice can feel intrusive and trigger reactance. People prefer to feel like they can solve their own problems.
10. **Peer pressure to conform:** Teenagers who feel pressured to conform to their peers' expectations might rebel against those expectations to assert their independence.
11. **Smoking bans:** While smoking bans aim to improve public health, they can trigger reactance among some smokers who feel their freedom to make choices is being restricted.
12. **Vaping restrictions:** Similar to smoking bans, restrictions on vaping products can lead some users to feel they're being unfairly targeted, potentially increasing their vaping behavior out of defiance.
13. **Mandatory safety gear:** In some cases, mandatory use of safety gear (e.g., helmets for cyclists) can be met with resistance if it feels like an infringement on personal choice, even if safety is the goal.
14. **Social media regulations:** Attempts to regulate social media platforms can be seen as censorship by some users, triggering a defensive reaction and a stronger attachment to these platforms.
15. **Healthy eating campaigns:** Overly restrictive or preachy campaigns promoting healthy eating might backfire, making people less likely to adopt

healthy habits due to the pressure and feeling of control.

16. **Spoiled children:** Children who are constantly given in to or who have few limitations might experience reactance when they finally encounter a situation where their choices are restricted.
17. **Exit polls:** Voters who are bombarded by exit polls asking about their vote might be more likely to withhold their answer or provide a false response due to a sense of intrusion or a desire to maintain privacy.
18. **Sales tactics:** High-pressure sales tactics that create a sense of urgency or scarcity can trigger reactance, leading customers to walk away from a potential purchase rather than feel pressured.
19. **Clickbait headlines:** Clickbait headlines that rely on sensationalism and manipulation can backfire. Readers who feel tricked into clicking might be less likely to trust the content or engage further with the website.
20. **Gym memberships:** People who sign up for gym memberships with good intentions but feel pressured by the commitment or the environment might be less likely to attend due to reactance.

**What are the reasons why humans dislike being told what to do? List a comprehensive and broad ideas.**

Here's a breakdown of the reasons why humans dislike being told what to do, encompassing various psychological and social factors:

**Desire for Autonomy and Control:**

- **The Need for Self-Determination:** We have a fundamental human desire to feel in control of our own lives and make our own choices. Being told what to do can feel like an attack on our autonomy and freedom.
- **Psychological Reactance:** As discussed earlier, reactance is a specific psychological phenomenon where threats to freedom trigger a desire to resist. It's a motivational push to regain control.
- **Competence and Self-Efficacy:** We often want to feel competent and capable. Being told what to do can imply a lack of trust in our abilities, which can be demotivating.

**Social and Interpersonal Dynamics:**

- **Power Imbalance and Control Issues:** Being told what to do by someone in a perceived position of power can feel domineering or disrespectful. It can create resentment and a desire to push back.
- **Trust and Rapport:** If the person giving instructions is someone we don't trust or have a strained relationship with, we're less likely to be receptive to their directions.
- **Communication Style:** The way instructions are delivered matters. A bossy or condescending tone can trigger resistance, whereas clear explanations and collaborative approaches can foster cooperation.

### **Personal Values and Beliefs:**

- **Differing Opinions and Perspectives:** We all have our own values and ways of doing things. Being told to do something that clashes with our personal beliefs can create internal conflict and resistance.
- **Questioning the Rationale:** If the reasons behind instructions aren't clear, or we disagree with the logic, we're less likely to be compliant. People appreciate understanding the "why" behind what they're supposed to do.
- **Feeling Micromanaged:** Excessive control and constant instructions can feel stifling and lead to resentment. People want some level of freedom and trust to perform their tasks.

**Remember, these reasons all intertwine.** For example, feeling micromanaged can trigger both a desire for autonomy and a sense that our competence is being questioned.

**If I want a human to do what I want, what is the best method to avoid psychological reactance. List 20 guidelines or examples.**

Here are 20 guidelines to avoid psychological reactance and encourage cooperation:

### **Focus on Autonomy and Choice:**

1. **Offer Options:** Present multiple choices instead of a single directive. This empowers the person to feel like they have some control over the situation. (Ex: "Would you prefer to start with task A or task B?")

2. **Frame it as a Suggestion:** Instead of giving orders, phrase your request as a suggestion or recommendation. This acknowledges their autonomy. (Ex: "I think it might be helpful to..." instead of "You need to...")
3. **Explain the Rationale:** Provide a clear explanation for why something needs to be done. Understanding the purpose can increase buy-in. (Ex: "This step is important because...")

### **Emphasize Collaboration and Partnership:**

1. **Use "We" Language:** Phrasing things in terms of "we" creates a sense of shared responsibility and reduces the feeling of being dictated to. (Ex: "We can work together on this project...")
2. **Ask for Input:** Solicit their ideas and suggestions. Feeling valued and heard fosters cooperation. (Ex: "What do you think about this approach?")
3. **Acknowledge Expertise:** Recognize their knowledge or skills in the relevant area. This builds trust and reduces the perception of micromanagement. (Ex: "I value your expertise in this area. Do you have any suggestions?")

### **Focus on Positive Reinforcement:**

1. **Highlight Benefits:** Emphasize the positive outcomes of completing the task. Focus on how it benefits them or the bigger picture. (Ex: "Completing this will help you achieve your goals.")
2. **Express Appreciation:** Thank them for their time, effort, and contributions. Recognition motivates people and strengthens cooperation. (Ex: "I appreciate your willingness to help with this.")
3. **Celebrate Successes:** Acknowledge and celebrate achievements along the way. Positive reinforcement keeps people engaged. (Ex: "Great job on completing that step!")

### **Be Clear, Respectful, and Transparent:**

1. **Deliver Clear Instructions:** Provide well-defined instructions that are easy to understand. Ambiguity can breed frustration and resistance. (Ex: "Here's a detailed outline of the steps involved...")
2. **Be Respectful:** Treat the person with respect, regardless of their position. Condescending or bossy behavior triggers reactance. (Ex: "Would you



mind...?" instead of "You will...")

3. **Be Transparent:** If there are challenges or limitations, be upfront about them. Honesty builds trust and allows for collaborative problem-solving. (Ex: "There might be a slight delay, but I'll keep you updated.")

### **Consider Individual Preferences and Communication Styles:**

1. **Adapt your Approach:** Some people thrive with clear instructions, while others appreciate more autonomy. Tailor your communication style to the individual.
2. **Focus on Positive Communication:** People are more receptive to requests delivered in a positive and encouraging tone.
3. **Active Listening:** Actively listen to their concerns and ideas. Feeling heard fosters a sense of value and collaboration.

### **Be Patient and Understanding:**

1. **Allow Time for Processing:** Don't expect immediate compliance. Give them time to consider your request and ask questions.
2. **Be Open to Negotiation:** Be willing to negotiate and find a solution that works for both parties. Rigidity can lead to resistance.
3. **Focus on Long-Term Relationships:** Building trust and positive working relationships fosters cooperation in the long run.

### **Additional Tips:**

1. **Lead by Example:** Demonstrate the desired behavior yourself. People are more likely to follow suit if they see the value in it.
2. **Use Humor (Carefully):** A touch of humor can lighten the mood and make requests more palatable. However, avoid humor that could be seen as insensitive or disrespectful.

Remember, these are guidelines, and the most effective approach will depend on the specific situation and the people involved. However, by focusing on respect, autonomy, and clear communication, you can increase the likelihood of cooperation and minimize psychological reactance.