



Following a Child's Lead

Skill Being Taught: Following a Child's Lead—Observe how your child communicates and use that as a starting point for building language skills.

Facts

1. Every child has likes, dislikes, wants, and needs.
2. Before a child communicates with words, they communicate their preferences and desires in many ways (eg., gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and sounds).
3. The messages that children with multiple challenges communicate may sometimes be hard to detect, but with practice you can become skilled at understanding your child's unique way of communicating.
4. When you use a child's current communication as a starting point, you are doing what is known as *following the child's lead*. This is a great way to promote learning!

What outcomes do we want?

The goal is for parents and caregivers to become skillful observers of the ways that a child communicates and then respond verbally to the messages she is sending.

What outcomes do we NOT want?

Research shows that parents facilitate greater language development when they are responsive to their child rather than directive.

What do we need to do?

You can learn to follow your child's lead by trying the recommendations in these steps:

Step #1: Watch your child for little movements that may mean she likes or does not like something. Talk to her about what you think the movements mean. For example, if she moves her lips or smiles after you have given her a bite to eat, she may indicate that she likes the food. Say, "You want more!"

Step #2: : If your child has functional vision, watch your child's eyes. Talk about what you think she is feeling or trying to tell you. For example if she appears to be looking at a rocking horse, say, "Oh, you want to bounce!" and put her on the rocking horse.

Step #3: If you and your child are playing with a toy and she begins to play with a different toy, follow her new interest rather than attempting to keep her focused on a specific toy.

Step #4: Watch your child's facial expressions and imitate them. For example, if she makes a face while eating carrots, imitate her expression while shaking your head and say, "You don't like carrots."

Step #5: Watch your child's gestures and talk about them (e.g., if she points at a light, imitate the gesture and say, "I see the light").

Step #6: Listen to the sounds your child makes and imitate them as best as you can. Then wait for her make the sound again and imitate it once more. If she does not make the sound again, repeat the sound yourself. You can do this with lots of different sounds. You can also play games with the sounds, for example by making the sounds in a sing song voice.

Step #7: If your child says a word, repeat the word back to her and even add a word or two. For example, if she says "ba" and you think she means ball, say, "Ball. Let's roll ball!"