



Following Your Child's Lead

Once your child has learned that he/she can lead a conversation, it is important for you to follow your child's lead. There are a number of relatively easy ways to accomplish this to let your child know you are interested in the interaction.

Respond Immediately

As soon as your child starts to interact with you, it is important to respond immediately with enthusiasm in order to start building confidence and also to encourage your child to respond back. Your child is more likely to start an interaction about what he/she is interested in, so it is important to follow your child's line of interest. This will help the child learn about a concept, especially if the response they hear is related to the message they have produced. Also, children have difficulty switching their attention so will be more likely to continue the interaction if your response is on topic.


Join In and Play

This involves joining in with your child and playing with what he/she is interested in. Getting down on the floor with your child to play will help you maintain eye contact and build an interaction. It is very important to play the way your child is playing; don't change the game or shift the focus.

Follow Your Child's Lead with Your Actions and Words

This includes:

- Imitating actions, facial expressions or sounds your child makes
- Interpreting from your child's point of view

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- Making a comment that matches what your child is saying or doing
 - Asking your child a question


Follow Through

When interacting with your child, ensure you always follow through on your communication. For example, when your child makes a request, respond to the request appropriately, so he/she learns the power of communication and interaction.

For more information:

The reference materials used in the production of this pamphlet include:

Pepper, J. & Weitzman, E. (2004) "It Takes Two to Talk: A Practical Guide for Parents of Children with Language Delays". The Hanen Centre, Toronto. For more information, email info@hanen.org or visit www.hanen.org.



LETTING YOUR CHILD LEAD AND FOLLOWING WHERE THEY GO

- How to Let Your Child Lead
- Creating Opportunities for Your Child to Lead
- Following Your Child's Lead

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Let Your Child Lead

When you are communicating with your child, you are both taking part in an interaction. A child must be taught that he/she can lead a communication interaction. This involves you, as the parent, letting your child lead in a variety of ways. When your child leads, and you respond with interest and excitement, he/she will want to communicate even more.

How to Let Your Child Lead

Getting face to face with your child is a very important first step in letting him/her take the lead. When you are at eye level with your child, it is easier to connect and share. When you and your child can both see and hear each other better, it is much easier for you to encourage your child to take the lead, and for your child to know that you are interested in the interaction.

Once you have gotten to your child's level, there are a number of things you can do to encourage them to take the lead. First, **observe** – take the time to watch your child's body language and actions to help you figure out what he/she is thinking about. When you notice what your child is looking at, and you look in the same direction, you and your child can share the moment and communicate.

Second, **wait** – this gives you time to observe what your child is interested in. While you wait, stop talking, lean into your child and look at him/her expectantly; this shows you are ready for the child to take the lead and respond to you. It is important to remember that anything your child does to make his/her needs known is a message to you. You can use this message to start an interaction.

Finally, **listen** – pay close attention to all the words or sounds your child produces to let him/her know that the interaction is important to you. Don't interrupt; even if you don't understand what your child is trying to tell you, look for clues in the environment. If you cannot guess the meaning, you can imitate the sounds or actions your child has made and wait and see if he/she does or says anything else to make it more clear for you.

It is also important to take the focus off getting your child to talk. Part of the joy and desire of communicating is knowing you have something to say and that someone will listen and respond to you. Try to avoid asking your child to say words for you, follow his/her lead instead; communicate about the things that they show interest in.

Following these steps will help your child to know that you are interested in an interaction and expect them to take the lead to communicate with you.

OBSERVE: Watch your child to guess what he/she is thinking about

WAIT: Show your child that you are ready for him/her to take the lead

LISTEN: Let your child know that the interaction is important to you

Create Opportunities for Your Child to Lead

Sometimes your child needs extra help from you to learn how to take the lead. Some of these suggestions may not work right away, however if your child does not take the lead, you can show him/her what they could have done to take the lead and then carry on with the activity.

First, you can create an opportunity to ask for something he/she needs or wants.

HELP YOUR CHILD MAKE A REQUEST:

Place a favorite object out of reach, choose an activity that your child cannot do without your help, offer a choice, or pause a familiar activity and THEN WAIT for your child to respond.

Another way to help your child take the lead is to create an opportunity for him/her to make a remark or ask you a question.

HELP YOUR CHILD MAKE A COMMENT OR ASK A QUESTION:

Change a familiar activity, hide objects in surprising places, or look at your child when things go wrong THEN WAIT for your child's reaction and respond to create an interaction following their lead.