

Following a child's lead

Following a child's lead helps to develop a child's communication and interaction skills

Follow a child's lead by letting the child choose what to play with, moving so you are face to face, observing, waiting and listening and then if appropriate, copying what they are doing

Why do we encourage adults to follow a child's lead during play?

Following a child's lead:

- ✓ Allows us to enter the child's world
- ✓ Shows the child you are interested
- ✓ Increases the child's awareness of an adult
- ✓ Helps children to develop shared enjoyment and attention with an adult
- ✓ Makes interactions relaxed and more enjoyable
- ✓ Makes it more likely for a child to stay at an activity and explore it for longer
- ✓ Will ensure the child hears words and language that is relevant to the play activity

How do we follow a child's lead during play?

Steps to letting the child lead play

Congratulations!
The child is leading

Copy the child*

Wait for the child to initiate

Observe the child's actions and play

Move if you need to, in order to maintain this position

Be face to face – at the same level, opposite and close together

Let the child do what THEY want with the toys

Let the child choose the toys

Let the child choose the toys

- ✓ Provide opportunities for 5 minutes **'Special Time'** with the child – turn off all distractions and just focus on playing with your child for those 5 minutes
- ✓ Try not to have too many choices e.g. no more than 2 or 3 toys
- ✓ Think about the type of toys your child is interested in, for example toys that light up or make a noise, toys that could be used in water, toys that move. Try to offer a range of toys so you can find out more about what your child is interested in most.
- ✓ Let the child choose the toy or activity



Let the child do what THEY want with the toys

- ✓ **Stop!**
- ✓ Don't have a plan, just follow what your child wants to do with the toys, for example you might want to push a car but your child might want to explore it by looking at the wheels or spinning them

Be face to face – at the same level, opposite and close together

Move if you need to, in order to maintain this position

- ✓ Make sure you are at the same level as your child and you are facing each other
- ✓ Move around with your child



Observe the child's actions and play

- ✓ **Look**
- ✓ Watch carefully to see what your child is actually doing



Wait for the child to initiate

Copy the child

- ✓ **Listen**
- ✓ Don't jump in and start talking too quickly, wait and listen
- ✓ Remember your child may not use words, they may use a look, facial expression, reaching for your hand or a sound
- ✓ Don't worry about silences – give your child time
- ✓ While the child is playing, copy what they are doing, either their actions or the sounds they are using
- ✓ *Only copy the actions that you want to see, for example don't copy inappropriate behaviours or actions that could be dangerous
- ✓ If they are using words, copy their words and use single words to name what they are looking at or playing with
- ✓ When you have copied the child's actions for a little, stop and wait for them to start the interaction. It may not be through words at the moment but it may be through eye contact or a physical action e.g. reaching out their hand to you. We want to reinforce this immediately as this is the child's way of telling you they want to continue with the interaction

