

Follow the Child's Lead

What is it?

Following the child's lead involves:

- *Noticing* what a child is interested in, looking at, playing with, or talking about and using that interest to provide opportunities for communication
- *Engaging* in child-directed interactions and activities
- *Being responsive* to infants and young children by observing, listening, and interacting when children communicate using gestures, vocalizations, or words

PC TALK Strategy Video
Following the Child's Lead



<https://talk.ku.edu/tools/videos/>

Why is it important?

It is easier for children to learn names for things they are already interested in and paying attention to.

Children are more likely to want to communicate and engage in longer “back and forth” conversations about things they are interested in.

When adults are responsive, young children are more likely to initiate communication, and eventually learn how to be more responsive to others.

More interactions with adults who are following the child's lead means more opportunities for communication.

Getting Started

Young children are more likely to attend to and learn from caregivers who **notice** what children are interested in, and are able to **join** in with the child's activities in a **responsive** way. This is what we call “Following the Child's Lead.” Following the child's lead should be used with all of the promoting communication strategies. Those strategies will be most effective when the caregiver is attending to and being responsive to the child's interests and activities.



Ways to Follow the Child's Lead



First, **observe** and **notice** what the child is interested in – what they are looking at, playing with, or talking about.

Use the child's **current interest** as the starting point for communication.

You like watching the cars drive by!

Get down onto the **child's level** so you can make eye contact. Using a friendly, engaging voice, listen to and respond to the child.

Follow a child's lead by using a variety of PC TALK strategies to **talk about** a child's toys or activities.

Let a **child direct** your play together. Ask the child about what they are doing and how you should play. For example, when painting, ask, "What should we paint here?"



When a child is **not engaged** in an activity, present them with a couple choices to gain their interest. Base those choices on activities in which the child has shown interest in the past. Then, follow the child's lead in the chosen activity.



Following the Child's Lead with Children Who Use Gestures & Sounds

Ideas for Following the Child's Lead During Activities



Play

- If a child is playing with a ball, find another ball and play in a similar way, or initiate rolling the ball back and forth. Describe the child's actions, how the ball bounces high, rolls so far, or how the child is catching the ball.
- Allow children to direct your play activities together. If a child is lining up the blocks to make a road, join in the activity and build the road together. Try to avoid directing the child to build the road a certain way, or to build something else. Ask open-ended questions about where the road might be going, or how to build onto the road.
- If a child is coloring or painting dots, allow the child to continue doing this rather than directing the child to paint a picture.



Daily Routines

- Observe and talk about the foods children are eating at snack or lunch time. *"Krystal is eating crackers." "What are you eating now, Dion?"* While handing out cups, ask, *"What color is your cup, Sam?"*
- While changing diapers or dressing, notice where children are looking and talk about the focus of their attention. *"What do you see up there?"* If the child is watching you, comment on what you are doing. *"We are putting on your shirt. Here is your arm!" "Now I am going to wash my hands."*
- During clean-up time, listen to what children say and respond by adding more information. If a child says, *"doggy,"* you might say, *"Yes, we're picking up the dogs and putting them away."*



Books

- When a child is looking at books, join in and offer to read the book with them. If the child wants to look at the pictures and turn the pages, follow the child's lead and name or ask open-ended questions about what you see in the pictures.
- If a child is not currently engaged in an activity, pick out two books the child might enjoy and ask, *"Which book would you like to read?"*
- If a child turns pages while reading a story, follow the child's lead and talk about the page they turned to.

Help children with limited movement point at pictures or turn pages with you. Observe the child to see where the child is looking and respond by describing what they see.

Follow Child's Lead

Notice and talk about child's interests, activities, & materials





Following the Child's Lead with Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Following the Child's Lead During Activities

Play

- While playing, a child places a doll in a bed. Describe the child's activity. *"Baby is sleeping. 'Night, baby."* Place another doll in the bed. Wait for the child to respond.
- A child watches a large truck and people working outside the window. Respond by sitting next to the child and saying, *"Oh, that's a big truck. What are they doing out there?"* This can start a conversation about the activities of the workers and their trucks.
- While playing outside, watch and describe the children's movements and actions. *"You're climbing up the ladder, and sliding down the slide."* *"You are pushing the shopping cart. What are you shopping for?"*
- Notice what the child is coloring and describe the colors, the shapes, and even the scribbles. Ask *"What should I draw?"* and draw what the child asks you to draw.

Daily Routines

- While preparing for naptime, let children help get ready and comment on their sheets or blankets. *"You have sheets with bears."* *"That is a pretty blanket."*
- During meals, talk about the foods everyone is eating. *"What are we having today?"* *"I like apples. Where do apples grow?"* Wait for children to respond, and then continue talking about the foods they are eating.
- During daily routines such as diapering, dressing, or nap, notice if the child is awake and excited, or quiet and sleepy. Follow their lead and adjust your energy level and tone to theirs and to the activity as you talk about your activities or about the day.

Books

- When a child points to pictures in a book, observe and respond by asking open-ended questions. *"What are they doing?"* *"Who is that?"* *"Where are they going?"* or *"Why did they do that?"* This can open up a conversation about what they see in the book.
- During circle time, allow children to choose books to read together. Let different children make their choices each day as everyone is getting ready to sit down.
- Think back on the activities of the day when choosing books. If children played restaurant in the morning, offer the choice of a book about foods or eating.
- As you look at books together, observe where children are looking or the pages they turn to most often. Offer more detailed descriptions for those parts of the book.

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