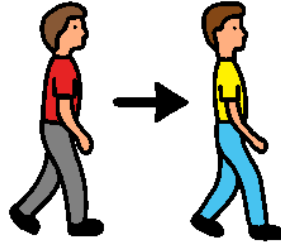


Allow your child to take the lead



As parents we naturally want to encourage our children to experience new things and discover new information about the world around them. This natural instinct to care for, teach and entertain our child can result in us taking over the control of our child's environment and what they do in it.

The opportunity for children, especially those experiencing difficulties around social responses and communication, to be able to react in whatever way they feel appropriate, and to have an adult closely echo or copy, can be very beneficial.

It takes a conscious effort to stand back and watch, and then duplicate your child's movements, actions and sounds, whatever they may be.

In order to allow your child to take the lead there are three very important words to remember – *observe, wait, listen* – and then copy.

Such shared activities:

- Give your child the chance to express him/herself in whatever way they can, and build up an awareness that he/she is being 'heard'
- Gives you a powerful insight into understanding your child and what to expect from him/her
- Gives your child an opportunity, in a situation he/she feels secure in because they are leading, to become aware of a basic skill needed for the development of communication, i.e. copying, waiting and responding

Try to:

- Follow your child's lead to whatever they are doing. Start with what your child is showing you (e.g. banging objects, flapping, flipping books), and come alongside them and imitate their actions. Try doing it at the same time as them and then in response to their actions, e.g. he/she bangs a brick on the floor – he/she stops – you bang a brick on the floor for about the same amount of time – you stop. Wait for a response. If your child moves on to something new: follow, wait, observe, listen and repeat

- When face to face, or looking in a mirror together, copy the expressions your child makes
- Copy all the sounds back to your child that he/she makes
- Sometimes face-to-face can be too intense, and so side-by-side may be less intrusive initially
- Musical instruments and sound making activities often make good copying situations – banging on saucepans together, playing the piano or keyboard, home made shakers, etc
- Simple chasing games: follow the leader, e.g. your child runs across the room – you follow - wait – your child runs back – so do you, etc
- Have a special time each day where your child can choose an activity/book/toy for you to look at or play with together