

Follow Your Child's Lead

Why is it important?

Letting your child choose the toy or activity allows your child to engage in more appropriate social and play behaviors. Children are less disruptive when they choose the activity than when an adult does. By allowing your child to choose their activity, you can be sure your child is engaged and motivated. The more engaged and motivated your child is, the more they will learn.

Let your child choose the activity

- Have toys available that your child likes to play with.
- After the toy is chosen, wait and see how your child plays with it.
- Pay attention to your child's interest with the toy.
- Do not make your child continue to play with the toy if they have lost interest.
- If your child likes gross motor activities, follow their lead in games such as chase, tickles, and swinging.
- If your child prefers sensory play, follow their lead in these activities such as rice/bean buckets or water play.
- If your child engages in unacceptable behavior (property destruction or injury to themselves or others) make it clear that the behavior is not ok by removing toys or objects involved in the problem.

Stay Face to Face with Your Child

- Place yourself in your child's line of sight.
- This allows them to easily make eye contact and see what you're doing. It also makes it easier for you to see what their interests are.

Join in Your Child's Play

- Become a needed part of your child's play. (If building with blocks, give your child the blocks. Or take turns stacking the blocks.)
- If your child protests, this is a request. Comply with it appropriately, but do not leave the interaction. Try to join the play in a different way.
- Avoid directing the play, or attempting to teach them how to play "correctly"
- Become your child's narrator. Don't ask questions or give commands, this will take the lead away from your child. Instead comment about what your child is doing. Ex: "You're pushing the car."
- Follow the "one up" rule. If your child is making sounds, narrate using single words. If your child is using single words, narrate using two-word phrases.
- Actively Listen. Wait for your child to engage and communicate with you. Watch for signs that your child may be engaging or communicating with you (looking at you, gesturing, vocalizing, moving away).
- Waiting gives your child a chance to initiate engagement
- Be helpful. As you are watching your child play, anticipate when your child may get stuck or need help. You may set these opportunities up, but be ready to immediately help your child. This will make you a positive part of the play as well as help your child attend to you and your language.
- Imitate your child's sounds and actions. This will attract your child's attention to you and builds awareness of you as a social partner.

