

Follow Your Toddler

As SLPs working with very young children, we're focused on planning and gaining outcomes. We know the best-laid plans may go asunder depending on what our toddlers want to do! The chart below will give you ideas about how to adapt your therapy sessions with toddlers to maximize desired outcomes.

Adult goals	How to do it
Balance: Act like the child and communicate as much as the child does. Each partner contributes equally to the exchange.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occasionally physically prompt the child to show how to initiate or take a turn. Initiate contacts but then wait expectantly for the child to take her turn. Give the child time to take her turn. Share the choice of activities with the child. Give the child some control in the interaction.
Match: Act like the child and communicate in ways similar to what the child can do. This provides a feasible model for the child. You can show the child what the next step in the communication would be by adding a sound, word, or phrase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a joint activity occurs, keep it going by responding in a meaningful way. Respond to movements with similar movements and occasionally add a sound. Match the child's sounds and occasionally add a word. Respond to a word with one or two words. Be childlike in your interactions.
Responsiveness: Respond sensitively and in different ways to the child's emerging communication. Respond to nonverbal and verbal communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to the child's interest and pace. Pay more attention to appropriate behaviors and less to immature or disruptive behaviors Respond to the child's behaviors and actions as if they were communications.
Nondirectiveness: Follow the child's lead and allow her to share in the direction of interaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow the child's lead. Comment more than asking questions or giving commands. Limit questions to real questions (e.g., asking "Where is the car?" when the car cannot be found rather than asking an artificial question like "What sound does the car make?"). Wait and expect the child to respond. Match the child's language level and ideas. Try to keep the child interacting for more than one turn.
Emotional attachment: Spontaneously reward by interacting with the child for the fun of it rather than for getting something done. This reduces stress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively enjoy the child. Be animated. Show childlike play style. Avoid negative judgments of the child. Concentrate on keeping the interaction going rather than correcting errors in communication.

MacDonald, J.D., & Carroll, J.Y. (1995). A partnership model for communicating with infants at risk. In J.A. Blackman (Ed.), *Treatment options in early intervention*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers.

Adapted from The Early Intervention Kit by Nancy B. Swigert
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