



Follow Their Lead

What: Following a child's lead is an easy and effective way for parents of children with hearing loss to encourage language. Parents can join in whatever the child is doing and let him decide what to do next. Then the child is likely to explore more, make discoveries and have experiences that are meaningful to him. Parents can offer language, speech and actions to build on the child's interests and encourage communication. In this way the child's language development is fostered and he may begin to include new words and ideas in his play.

Why: As you follow your child's lead, you can encourage listening, speech, language and thinking. Both you and your child benefit because:

- Leading allows your child to develop his curiosity. Following allows you to learn how your child is thinking.
- Leading allows your child to expand his exploration. Following allows you to add words or concepts to your child's play.
- Leading allows your child to decide what to do within an activity. Following allows you to encourage turn taking.
- Leading allows your child to choose to use your ideas or not! Following allows you to listen to your child.
- Leading allows your child to include the speech you modeled for him. Following allows you to show he is understood.
- Leading allows your child to increase his communication. Following allows you to discover your child's interests and share in his fun!

How: If your baby is crawling toward a favorite ball, follow his lead and get down on his level saying "Oh, you want your soft ball. Let's roll the ball back and forth!" Your response may encourage him to use his voice or engage in the short game with you. When he decides to play differently, follow his lead to enjoy other activities but include new words and actions.

If you keep books within your toddler's reach he can pick a story to explore with you. You can follow his lead by listening to him tell the story, talking about the pictures he points to or commenting on his favorite pages. "There is the loud motorcycle. Zoom, it is going fast." When he changes the topic you can follow his lead for what he is interested in discussing.



If your preschooler plays in sand, you can follow his lead describing what he is doing by saying, "Dig, dig, dig. That is a big hole you are making with the little shovel." You might admire his mounds, count his buckets or let him tell you what to build and how to do it. When you wait to follow his lead, he can use language to expand and explain his imagination and thinking.

If your child seems to be interested in a household routine, follow his lead and involve him in helping. You might say "Please help me make lunch. What should we put in the lunch box?" You might discuss when to prepare certain foods, how they taste and what his favorite foods are. When you follow his lead, he can choose how much to help and problem solve how to do it.

When: Look for opportunities daily to follow a child's lead. While there are some tasks that must be done quickly or in a certain manner, there are many activities that can be done together in a flexible and fun way. By following a child's lead, parents can encourage listening, language and speech in shared activities that encourage interaction, initiative and independence.