

Lesson 2: Imitating Your Child

RIT involves you imitating all of your child's gestures, vocalizations, and actions with toys. Imitating your child promotes shared attention and social responsiveness. It also lays the groundwork for teaching reciprocal imitation because your child learns that imitation is a back and forth interaction. In addition, imitating your child's speech or preverbal vocalizations promotes the use of spontaneous language and vocalizations. The following strategies will make imitating your child most effective.

Be visible: Make sure that you are always in your child's line of sight. Sit so that you are face to face with your child. This will make it easier to make eye contact. If your child has a hard time sitting, you will need to move around to stay face to face with your child.

Imitate play with toys: Imitate what your child is doing with the toys he or she chooses to play with. Children become much more aware that you are imitating their behavior if you have two sets of the same toy. This way you can imitate your child's play at the same time he or she is playing.

Imitate gestures/body movements: Imitate your child's gestures and body movements. This will also help your child realize that you are imitating him or her. It will also teach that his or her behavior is meaningful and can influence how you act. Imitating gestures/body movements is especially helpful when your child is not engaged with a toy. For example, if your child is wandering around the room, follow the same path purposefully, while trying to remain face to face. Children typically find this behavior quite funny and really enjoy interacting this way.

Imitate vocalizations: For children who are preverbal or just starting to talk, it is important to imitate all your child's vocalizations and words. With a verbal child, it is recommended that you only imitate language that is appropriate to the context of the play. Again, when using this technique it is important to be visible and animated.

Be animated: Exaggerate your imitations of your child's gestures, facial expressions, and vocal quality to draw attention to the fact that you are imitating your child. While imitating your child, you can vary your imitations slightly to keep them interesting. For example, if your child drops a toy on the ground without paying attention to it, you can bounce your toy on the ground in an exaggerated way. Also, you can pause with an expectant look in the middle of imitating your child to encourage your child to initiate for you to continue the game. Use words like "Uh Oh", "Oh No", "Ready, set, go", sound effects and gasping to let your child know you have something to share.

Imitate appropriate behavior: Imitating your child will typically increase the behavior that is being imitated. Therefore, when imitating your child, it is important to decide

which behaviors to imitate. For children who exhibit little to no appropriate play, try to imitate every appropriate action or vocalization. This could include throwing a ball, looking in the mirror, and babbling. If your child is producing behaviors you do not want to see increase you can “imitate” that behavior while shaping it into something more appropriate. For example, if your child is mouthing an object, you can pretend to eat a similar object, or if your child is flapping his or her hands to show excitement you could “imitate” the excitement but express it by clapping your hands. For children that have a majority of appropriate play, try to imitate only the appropriate behaviors. *Remember, you should not imitate behaviors that are dangerous or aggressive such as hitting or breaking toys.*