

Language & Learning

Building Conversations

Follow Your Child's Lead

If you want to respond to your baby's communication, but you aren't sure what kind of response to make. The best response follows your child's lead.

Babies and adults are sometimes interested in different things. A mother wants to give her baby a juice cup and talk about drinking, but the baby may at first be fascinated by the condensation running down the outside of the cup. "Wet. Your cup is wet," or "The drop is going down, down, down," is closer to the baby's thought than "Drink your juice," or "This is a cup."

Babies are curious. They are constantly exploring their world. When we try to get their attention to talk about our own ideas, we are taking them away from their interests. They may even be confused if they are thinking about one idea, and getting communication about a different one!

Babies like to communicate about their interests. We don't want to do all of the communicating - that would be like "hogging the ball." Instead, when we see what a baby is attending to, and communicate about that, we teach the baby to start a conversation with us, and learn more about that very interesting drop of water.

One way to be sure that you and your baby are on the same wavelength is to establish joint attention. If your baby points to something, you point, too, before you try to add to the communication. If your baby looks at something and laughs, you look and laugh. If your baby vocalizes at a teddy bear, you do it, too. Then you can add a language turn. You let your actions say, "Your idea was interesting to both of us."