



IMITATE TO CONNECT!

Sparking Interactions with Young Autistic Children

Throughout childhood, children learn a lot about communication by watching and imitating the people around them. But did you know a lot can happen if you imitate *them*? In fact, imitating your child can be one of the most powerful ways to get an interaction going with your child. Here are some tips for using the Imitate strategy from the Hanen More Than Words® Program that can help you spark an interaction between you and your child.

Three Steps to Imitate Your Child

1. **Ob**serve what your child is doing

Notice what your child is doing and what your child is interested in by observing them closely. Is your child moving their body? Doing an action with a toy or object? Making any sounds?



2. **COPY** what your child is doing



Do exactly what your child is doing. If your child is running back and forth and making the “ahh” sound, run beside them and make the “ahh” sound too. If your child is playing with a toy or object, get your own toy or object and copy your child’s actions. You need to have your own toys or objects when you are imitating your child. The toys or objects you imitate them with don’t have to be the same but should be similar. Some children like to keep their toys as a “set” (i.e. all the cars as a “set” or a “whole”). If you notice your child isn’t pleased when you pick up another toy that looks the same, you can imitate with a similar looking toy that is not part of the “set”. For example, if your child is pushing a car down a ramp, you can pick up a block and push the block down the ramp.





3. Watch and see how your child responds

As you copy your child, observe how they respond to you copying them. They might smile, quickly glance over to check out what you're doing, or keep the game going by doing their action again. All of these are great signs because it means you've started an interaction! Keep imitating your child so that the interaction continues, with you and your child noticing each other's actions.

You may get the interaction started quickly or it may take time. If you are unable to get the interaction going, you can try to imitate your child in other activities to see if an interaction gets started when you imitate in a different activity. Sometimes children are used to adults changing their play, so it can take a bit of time for them to see that you are copying them and not trying to "take over" their play idea. Be patient. It can take time to get the interaction started.



Having fun Is What's Most Important

The most important thing to remember is to have fun together and to keep the back-and-forth interaction going. By joining in with your child in the way they like to play, you can support their social communication skills while having fun together!

To learn more about the power of imitation and how to keep the interaction going, visit www.hanen.org/Imitate2Connect