



Consider Imitation

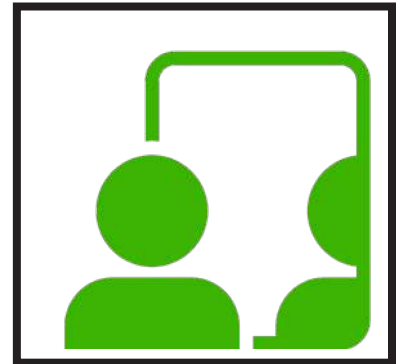
Can this person copy movements?

Big movements?

Finger movements?

Mouth movements?

Can this person copy sounds?



For a more robust way to communicate, a person's imitation skills can help us make some decisions about how to go— Speech? Signs? Pictures? AAC?

Not all imitation is equal—Some people have trouble copying movements; other copy large body movements; some can do tiny, intricate hand movements while others can copy sounds/ sequences or cartoons/videos but not actual people. Quality of imitation matters.

Encourage Imitation—If a person doesn't imitate, we can encourage it. First, we can copy what they are doing—over and over again. Then, add a new movement to imitate. We can incorporate activities /objects that motivate the person to connect and urge them to imitate using touch cues to provide a motor plan. Repetition is key.

If the person has some imitation ability, use it as a foundation for more sustained interactions. Shape skills through copying and figure out what kinds of cues inspire imitation.

Teaching imitation by saying “do this” does not allow for authentic communication. We need to teach in the context of social engagement. Without mutual enjoyment, we impede connection.

Mirroring is a form of imitation—when one person subconsciously imitates another. We can imitate a person's gesture, speech pattern, or attitude. Adolescents do this and “try on” different actions, vocal patterns and habits. The ability to mimic actions can be helpful and allows one to establish empathy—the imitator understands another person's emotions.

A predictor of future speech is the ability to imitate. We begin learning our first language by imitating our caregivers. A baby see/hears speech for a year—it takes some time to start talking. Long before the first word, an infant begins to repeat sounds—the sounds become more complex as their motor skills grow. This imitation is a critical factor for more complex communication. Reciprocal imitation between caregiver and infant is an early form of conversation.