



Help Your Child Develop Imitation Skills

What is imitation?

Imitation is the ability to copy the behavior of another person

How do imitation skills develop?

1. One of the earliest forms of imitation is called “mutual imitation.” This means that your child imitate you only when you imitated the child first. Parents often play “babbling games” with their child. The child says “ba-ba” and the adult imitates “ba-ba.” The child enjoys this response and tries again: “ba-ba.” The child has just engaged in **mutual imitation**. Motor actions such as smiling, clapping, and making raspberries, can be the imitation game. As your child develops, you can start the game by babbling or making some action that you have heard or seen your child do often. At this stage, your child is not ready to imitate a sound or action that the child does not already know.
2. Next, your child begins to imitate sounds and actions that are similar, but not identical to the child’s own. For example, a child might babble “pa-pa.” The adult playing with the child might open and close the mouth without making any sound. At first, the child might imitate this by babbling “pa-pa” again. However, this may soon change to the child opening and closing the mouth in a similar fashion. Then the child will be able to imitate this “new” action. This is the beginning of having a “thought” that is *symbolic*.
3. Now vocal play emerges and you’ll find your child experimenting with sounds and actions to make them more like the adult models. The child imitates the adult more and more exactly. Soon the child will be able to imitate sounds and actions that the child has never tried before.
4. In final stage, the child learns to imitate a direct model. The child remembers situations and starts to rehearse them on his/her own. At this stage, children will imitate “housework” with toy brooms and “feed a baby” and perform many actions seen around the house.

Teaching Tips for Parents

1. Imitate your child frequently. Imitate both motor and verbal movements such as babbling, mouth movements, hand gestures like clapping or lifting hands over head. Repeat any kind of movements, especially ones the child does over and over. Do this frequently throughout the day.
2. Continue to imitate your child, but not change it up slightly. If your child babbles “pa-pa,” you babble “ba-ba”. Be very enthusiastic if your child imitates your “new” action.
3. Continue to imitate your child, but change your action a little more. If your child says “pa-pa,” you say “pie-pie-pie.” If your child claps hands together, you put hands on the floor. Praise your child and be enthusiastic when the child imitates you.
4. Let your child play with things around the house; booms, pots and pans, and “dress-up” clothes. These will give your child opportunities to experiment with actions you perform during the day; “caring for baby”, “cooking” actions , “sweeping” “pushing cart” , etc.
5. Contact your speech language pathologist for more tips and guidance.