

## Focus 1: Meet a Child Where He or She Is

**DESCRIPTION** “Meeting a child where he or she is” means that we select initial therapy goals and activities by working with a child at his or her current developmental level and including as many individual preferences as possible in order to maximize motivation and participation. In other words, start with what a kid already likes and can already do!

**CONSIDERATIONS** This approach is an appropriate starting point for EVERY young child with developmental challenges—not just those with autism or red flags for autism!

### **THIS APPROACH IS ESPECIALLY USEFUL when...**

1. A child is just beginning therapy.
2. Parents want to begin working on speech-language development with a child at home and aren't sure where to start.
3. There's been little progress with other approaches.
4. A child's therapy experience and/or participation in therapy (or therapy-like activities at home) has been negative or ineffective.

*If these things are true, begin with this focus area until a child is consistently participating.*

### **THIS APPROACH IS USUALLY NOT NECESSARY when...**

1. A child is happily participating in existing therapy activities.
2. A child is making steady progress.

*If these things are true, this is a strength! Move on to find a focus area where a child needs more help.*

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK AND ANSWER**

1. What things are easy for this child?
2. How does he like to spend his time?
3. What are his favorite toys, activities, and foods?
4. When is she at her best?
5. When is he at his worst?
6. What does she dislike or avoid?
7. What is frustrating for this child?

**GETTING STARTED** Begin with activities a child already likes to do and focus on having fun together. Emphasize a child's strengths, not what's difficult or “the goal.” Select toys and other things to do that are interesting and hold a child's attention but are easy enough to ensure as much success and pleasant participation as possible.

**ACTIVITIES** Focus on toys, foods, games, and events that facilitate interaction and togetherness. Even if a child loves “screen time,” unless she includes you as she watches or plays the game it won't be a good choice for a beginning therapy activity. In this case, you may be able to use a screen as a motivator or reward. See ideas for this in Focus Area 8: Experimenting with AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication).