

PLAY Project  
*20 Home Consultant Coaching Tips*  
*When the Parents are not PLAYing as They Could*

1. **Catch parents being successful and compliment them** especially when they ‘wait’, get circles, create engagement, are having fun. Show them on the video!
2. **Use a ‘feedback sandwich’**: one positive comment, one constructive comment and one positive comment.
  - a. A corollary to the feedback sandwich is to find the positive but **do not give false praise** which will reward the parent for doing the wrong thing.
  - b. Make ‘learning the model’ the norm. “A lot of parents have problems with learning this model in the beginning. Don’t worry. You’ll get it. It kind of hard to focus on the process of interaction.”
3. Don’t be afraid to **be gently directive**.
  - a. “OK, Mrs. Smith, let’s go for a few more ‘circles’.”
  - b. “Let’s wait and see what HE wants to do.”
  - c. “Let’s try some theme and variation by figuring out five things we can do here.”
4. **Take the pressure off**. Many parents feel pressured to keep the child engaged. They don’t wait enough. They feel pressure to ‘do it right’. Give them permission to relax and just enjoy being with their child.
5. **Model and rehearse**. Show the parents what to do by doing it (on video too). Then ask them to do what you did (reassuring them that it’s ok to make mistakes and that this work is not as easy as it looks!)
6. **‘Go theoretical’--share what YOU are thinking** in terms of The Skill Sequence strategies, methods, and techniques and the model. Educate!
  - a. “In our model we don’t drill for results. Step 4 in the Skill Sequence means that we have to follow the child.”
  - b. “I’m just waiting here, *being with*, Jacob to see what his idea is. Then I’m going to use the *Rabbit Hole Techniques* to get him engaged.”
  - c. At first we focus on methods so that we can help your boy move up the functional levels.
7. Direct the parents to ‘the child’s attention and the child’s intention’.
8. **Sprinkle Pixie Dust**. More than gentle, more than modeling or going theoretical, sprinkling pixie dust is a directive method that uses strong coaching techniques like not allowing the parent to say anything until the child opens the first circle.
  - a. OK mom, I’m going to sprinkle some pixie dust on you and you can’t talk until Susie talks to you first.
  - b. Dad, I’m going to sprinkle some pixie dust on you. You can’t do anything except tell me what Johnny’s intention is.
9. Distinguish between the **parents’ ideas** and the **child’s ideas**.
  - a. “It’s ok to have your own ideas I just want you to be aware of whose idea it is.
  - b. “Singing a song was YOUR idea. Let’s wait and see if Jacob comes up with his own idea. There, did you see that? He threw himself on the couch. THAT was his idea. Let’s go with that and give him some deep pressure. . .”

10. **Use the videotape *during a home visit*** to show them what they did well (or could have done differently!) and give them feedback.
  - a. Distinguish between (the interactional) ***process*** versus than the ***content*** (of what is happening).
11. **Define the terms** of The PLAY Project clearly.
  - a. Make sure parents know what the FDLs are and how to work with each level.
    - i. Quiz them in a fun way. “Do you know your levels yet?”
  - b. Define ‘circles’, ‘intention’, ‘cues’, ‘following the child’s lead’
  - c. Define: Zone of proximal development i.e. playing to high, too low, or just right
  - d. Use the ***glossary***
  - e. Make sure parents know what ***technique*** you’re referring to.
12. **Ask for feedback** when you feel like things aren’t going well.
  - a. Use the satisfaction survey
  - b. ***Report on your feelings***: “Can we talk about how The PLAY Project is going? I’m feeling a little worried about how we’re doing together.”
13. **Talk about your coaching style**. “Am I being too directive? Not directive enough?”
14. **Blame yourself**. (It’s me, not you.) Never blame the parent. There’s always a reason for their behavior.
  - a. “I’m not sure I’m making myself clear.”
  - b. “I feel like I’m not helping you very much here.”
  - c. “What can I do to make this better for you.”
15. Remember ***parallel process***: Whatever the parent is making you feel (anxious, incompetent, depressed, overwhelmed) is a clue as to how they are feeling. You can use your feeling to understand them better which can shift your attitude from frustration to sympathy and may give you more patience.
16. **Blame the PLAY Project**. “I have to help you understand ‘circles’ better or my supervisors are going to jump all over my case.”
17. **Join their wishes**. “I know that you want Johnny to talk and I do too but if you play to high and don’t fill in these lower levels he won’t make progress as fast as he can.”
18. **Reflect the parent’s feelings**. “It can be frustrating (or saddening or disappointing) to try and play and not get much of a response back.” Then WAIT. . .and see what the parent says. This technique has to be used in a context of trust.
19. **Invoke trust and openness** by being open to feedback.
  - a. “We’ve been working together now for 4-5 months. Please tell me what you need from me. I’m here for you.”
  - b. ***Poll the parents***. About their feelings: “How are you holding up?”
  - c. About their life events, family. “You have so much going on!”
20. **Just Be Honest (with a smile)**. Once you’ve established trust you can be bluntly honest with a little sense of humor: “You were off there mom! A little too high!”