



Episode 26: Following a Child's Lead

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder



LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

"Follow the child's lead" might be the most repeated phrase in paediatric therapy, and one of the most misunderstood. This episode takes it apart: where it came from, why Tracy would rather we followed the child's need, and how true attunement is nothing like literally copying a child around the room. Tracy reframes the principle as intersubjective attunement, holding the child's mind, body, curiosity and developmental need in your own, rather than a literal follow. Cory brings the counter-example that stuck with him, an old video of parents copying a child grinding on an exercise ball, which is copying, not following, because nothing more adaptive emerges. Michelle walks through assessing a tentative under-two, signalling safety through the child's co-regulators before moving in, and the watch, hypothesise, test, watch rhythm underneath it. We get into Dan Siegel's "mwe" space, Ayres and the just right challenge, and a lovely stretch on repetitive behaviours and affordances, with plenty of clinical honesty about getting it wrong before getting it right.



Resources & Mentions

- Dan Siegel, on intersubjective connection and the "mwe" space.
- Jean Ayres, on the just right challenge and the adaptive response.
- The SPIRIT model, Tracy Stackhouse, as a field of thinking for clinical reasoning.



Reflection Prompts

Take a few quiet minutes to consider each prompt and write freely. Add or remove a prompt block to suit the episode.

1

Think of a child you'd describe yourself as following. Are you following their lead, or following their need, and what would change if you tuned into the need underneath the behaviour?

- 2 Recall a time following a child's lead tipped into simply copying or chasing them. What was missing, and what might have helped something more adaptive emerge?

- 3 Michelle signalled safety through a child's co-regulators before engaging directly. Whose presence could you borrow, a parent, sibling or familiar adult, to help a hesitant child feel you are safe?

- 4 Consider a child with a repetitive behaviour you do not yet understand. What perceptual quality or affordance might they be exploring, and how could you follow that rather than redirect it?

- 5 Where do you notice yourself reaching for representational play, "let's play trains," when a child is working at a pre-representational, perceptual level? How might you meet them where they actually are?
