

Child-Led vs. Adult-Led Therapy



What is the difference?

If you've ever watched your child's therapy session and thought, "This just looks like play," or "Why aren't they sitting and working?" —you're not alone. Different therapy approaches can look very different on the surface. But each choice is intentional and based on how children learn best.

For some children, structured teaching isn't the first step—it's something we build toward.

When is a child-led approach a good starting point?

If your child needs support to:

- Engage with others (joint attention)
- Take turns
- Respond when someone talks or plays
- Imitate actions or sounds
- Use gestures (like pointing or waving)
- Make purposeful sounds or attempts to communicate
- Stay engaged for longer periods

If these skills are still developing, starting with structured tasks can feel overwhelming or frustrating instead of helpful. This doesn't mean your child can't learn—it means we're building the foundation that makes learning possible.

"Play is the language of childhood."

--Dr. Karen Carlson



CHILD-LED

- Therapist follow child's lead and interests
- Play-based interaction
- Flexible, moment-to-moment engagement
- Focus on connection and shared experience



ADULT-LED

- Therapist sets the agenda
- Structured activities (often at a table or with specific tasks)
- Clear expectations and goals
- Focus on practicing specific skills