Follow the Leader

The skills involved with playing a simple game of “follow the leader” are quickly shifted during play to a variety of children’s tag games. Playing follow the leader games will give your child the opportunity to move in different directions and pathways using a variety of traveling skills (crawling, walking, running, climbing, hopping, leaping, sliding, galloping, and skipping), while building on cooperative play skills used when leading or following a playmate or parent.

The Skills

Playing follow the leader is a prerequisite activity to later playing tag games. Tag games using the skills of chasing and fleeing are, as children mature, used in a more elaborate form in sports such as basketball, hockey, soccer and football. Chasing and fleeing are important skills for children to develop. Chasing (or following) is traveling quickly to follow or overtake or tag a fleeing person. Fleeing (or leading) involves traveling away from a pursuing person.

Cues

A cue word or phrase is like a movement secret that helps your child learn or perform a skill better. Cues help children focus on one specific part of a complex skill. Practice emphasizing one cue for several weeks and when your child has learned that cue then move on to another. Cues for chasing and fleeing are simple but important. If chasing (following), the child should focus on watching the hips of the fleer or leader. If fleeing, the focus should be on quick changes of direction to avoid the chaser. In the beginning, moving and taking turns with your child to be the leader and follower should be done at a slower speed and then increase speed after the cues are introduced.

Equipment

No equipment needed, just a large indoor or outdoor space.

Activity

This activity will give children the opportunity to practice the skills of leading and following. The focus, if leading, is to move in a variety of different ways and change direction often. The focus, if following, is to watch the hips of the leader so you will know where she is going.
What Should Parents Do?

- Introduce the activity to your child by demonstrating the roles of the leader and follower. The leader’s role is to move in different directions and pathways throughout the space while galloping, marching, and crawling, etc., and in general try to challenge the follower to travel in variety of different ways.
- The follower’s role is to attempt to replicate the movements of the leader. The follower should not get too far behind the leader, and the leader should be asked to slow down if he is getting too far away from the follower.
- No more than 60 to 90 seconds is sufficient time for a child to be a leader before changing places. Leaders should be changed several times during the activity.
- Parents should begin as the leader moving about the space using a variety of different traveling movements as they model the activity for their child. “Follow me and do what I do.” Give your child the opportunity to then discuss and decide who will be the follower and who will be the leader. Explain that they will get to take turns being both the leader and follower.
- For safety reasons, suggest that you and your child not get closer than two giant steps from each other.
- Explain that your child can move in different directions (forward, backward, and sideways) and pathways (straight, zigzag, curved), as well as use a variety of traveling patterns.
- After your child has become experienced with playing this simple game, challenge him/her to be creative and lead and follow around obstacles.

Assessment Ideas

The movement skills of chasing and fleeing are referenced in the National Association for Sport and Physical Education National Standards (2004). The standard addresses the child’s ability to use chasing and fleeing to participate in physical activity.

Cut out the assessment forms below and place in the child’s room or on the kitchen refrigerator. Record your child’s progress and discuss the cues that are important to learning how to lead, follow, chase, and flee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Yet</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Consistently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use quick changes of direction (Fleeing)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watch the hips of the leader to tell his or her next move (chasing)</td>
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