



# Pairing

Children's Developmental and Behavioural Supports



Think back to your childhood. Who would you listen to and who was your favourite teacher or relative? Why? They connected with you! It is important to connect and pair positively with your child to build a stronger and healthier bond and relationship. Did you listen to that individual more because you valued their thoughts and you wanted to build that relationship?

## What is pairing?



Pairing is the process by which you make yourself the child's reinforcer in order to build a positive relationship with the child. We know we have successfully paired when the child is looking at us, approaching us, smiling at us, and having fun! (How to ABA, 2024).

### Two Aspects to pairing:

1. Presenting yourself and your words in association with the delivery of reinforcers.
2. Reinforcing interaction and engagement behaviour at whatever level is appropriate for the child.

## Why is pairing important?

In a home environment, it is important for a child and parent to create a healthy and secure bond that fosters learning and development. A parent who successfully pairs with a child will create a sense of security and comfort which in turn encourages an environment that fosters the development of skills as well as the opportunity to reinforce positive behaviours and decrease negative behaviours. Remember who you loved learning from when you were a child? (Kids Ability, 2023).



# Steps to Pairing

## Step 1: Observe

- All items or activities your child engages in when given free access.
- What your child requests frequently when not given free access (Lill, 2021).
- We must know your child's preferred likes to pair ourselves with those items and/or activities.
- Those are reinforcers.
- Make sure that what you have is more desirable than what they can get on their own (Kids Ability, 2023).



## Step 2: Identify reinforcers



- That are easily controllable by you.
- That can be delivered multiple times, in small amounts.
- That don't have to be removed.
- That are somehow better with you, than without you (you are a critical part of these items or activities being good or fun)

## Step 3: Unconditionally approach your child with something fun

- Approach with reinforcer in outstretched hand.
- Make it obvious that you are approaching with something fun.
- If your child does not show interest select another reinforcer –have a variety accessible (edible, toys, sensory, gross motor play, etc.)



## Step 4: Let your child's behaviour guide you



- Don't bombard your child with reinforcers when pairing.
- Follow your child's lead – what is your child going to? (Kids Ability, 2023).
- Once your child starts to engage with you, wait for signs of interaction and interest (no matter how small, you should see some signs), before reinforcing.
- If your child continues to engage with you, then the item or activity you are using is probably reinforcing, so keep using it.

## Pairing is not getting whatever you want

Reinforcement is given free, but there's a difference from free access. The parent always maintains control over the type and amount of reinforcement that the child obtains from the object or activity, based on appropriate behaviour displayed by the child (How to ABA, 2024; Kids Ability, 2023).



### Why Pair?

- Pairing is key to teaching all other skills!
- You will see increased cooperation and responsiveness.
- Pairing never ends.
- Achieve fewer behavioural problems.
- Pairing is how parents build trust and connect themselves to reinforcement (eventually becoming the reinforcer).
- When you are successful with pairing, the child is pushing and pulling to be engaged with you (How to ABA, 2024).

### Remember

If your child has trouble following these activities, try these tips:



- When you and your voice are constantly associated (paired) with the delivery of fun and motivating (reinforcing) items and events to your child, you are paired.
- Pairing is something that you never finish doing. It is constant and ongoing throughout the day!
- When you are smiling and having fun your child will want to engage with you even more (Kids Ability, 2023).

## References

Cooper, J., Heron, T., & Heward, W. (2020). *Applied Behavior Analysis* (3rd ed.). Pearson.

How to ABA. (2024). *The Magic of Pairing in ABA: Building Bonds That Empower Learning*. How to ABA. <https://howtoaba.com/aba-pairing/>

Kids Ability. (2023). *Pairing*. KidsAbility. <https://www.kidsability.ca/resources/pairing-handout/>

Lill, J. D., Shriver, M. D., & Allen, K. D. (2021). Stimulus preference assessment decision-making system (SPADS): A decision-making model for practitioners. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 14(4), 1144–1156

## Additional resources

How to ABA <https://howtoaba.com/aba-pairing/>

## Disclaimer

Resources shared by Children’s Developmental and Behavioural Supports (CDBS)– Durham Region is offered for informational and educational purposes only. This information should not be constituted as individualized advice, and does not imply that Durham Region recommends, condones, or supports the implementation of this information. CDBS does not assume any responsibility or risk for your use of the material in this resource. Always speak to a qualified health service provider if you have concerns about your child’s development, treatment and/or medical condition