

## A Parent-Professional Perspective

By Emily Webb

I was working for the state Early Intervention (EI) Program when the PIWI (Parents Interacting with Infants) model was chosen for our state systemic improvement plan and was part of the original curriculum development plan. PIWI was not familiar to me and I remember thinking... Competence... great, confidence...super important, mutual enjoyment... yeah ok. I thought a lot about competence and confidence but I never really gave much thought to mutual enjoyment and its importance.



Now, fast forward a few years and I had a child who needed Early Intervention services. She was referred at 9 months old for failure to thrive, a motor delay, and some neurological concerns. As my child grew and developed she was what my husband and I would describe as difficult. Not behavior difficult, just harder than my other two children. She was needy, whiny, and so unsure of her body. The world always seemed to move one step fast than Colette could. I can remember feeling stressed about being home with her and having to meet her needs (demands) all day. Don't get me wrong she was well cared for and loved on hard but we were not enjoying each other. I can remember sighing in relief when she would go down for a nap, or sleep in on the morning I was home. I did not notice it right away as it was slow but something began to change. All of a sudden she was making progress; we were both feeling more confident and competent separately and as a pair. Her rate of progress started to speed up. And looking back on it, it dawned on me; we had found and were experiencing mutual enjoyment.

I share this as a parent to remind people how important mutual enjoyment really is. For my family it truly changed our family dynamic. It also helped my child reach developmental milestones and feel more confident in a world that still continues to move a tad faster than she does.

A colleague asked me after hearing my story, "What do you think changed to improve your mutual enjoyment?" I could not answer that question right away. I had to think about it. I came to the conclusion that I changed the dyadic (the interactions between two people) strategies or the ways I interacted with Colette. As a busy mom with four small children my default was to follow their lead. Dyadic strategy is match and follow. I naturally see what my children are interested in or drawn to and then join in or expand activities from there. However, this was not working for Colette. She struggles with processing information and then acting on it. Colette needs me to do more setting the

stage and supporting. When I was able to interact with her differently, our whole family benefited!

Before, after a long day I would put the kids in the bath and her older brother and sister would play and splash and make up games that I would get involved in. However, Colette would sit there and whine or cry. She would often spend half of her bath hanging over the side to suck on my shirt aka Velcro baby! At this point, she also had a baby brother who required my physical care and I was frustrated. Frustrated that a routine I have no choice about seemed so hard. I dreaded bath nights. It was no fun for either of us and we were both overwhelmed. Then slowly without even being aware of it, I would do things to support her. I would put a baby doll in the bath tub and show her how she could wash the baby and have her sister help her wash the baby's hair. I bought bubble bath and showed her how to make a beard and pretend to be Santa. She needed me to set activities up and support her through them, something my other children never needed. She was now practicing skills she needed to work on, experiencing things differently, engaging with her siblings, and ultimately making progress toward her IFSP outcomes.

Because of Colette, I learned first-hand that using the PIWI philosophy along with functional assessment allows EI providers to support parents to build competence, confidence, and mutual enjoyment in them, their child, and between them and their child!