



California Early Childhood
Special Education Network

Funded by the California Department of Education (CDE),
Special Education Division

Tiny But Mighty: Growing Inclusive Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Classrooms
Part 3: Tier One Supports and Evidence-Based Classroom Practices
October 13, 2026



CALECSE
California Early Childhood
Special Education Network

About CalECSE

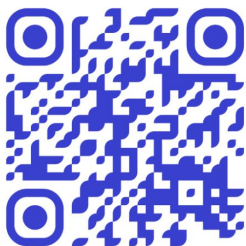


Funded by the CDE

Supporting Educators.
Strengthening Partnerships.
Improving Outcomes.

Explore. Learn. Connect.

Visit <https://www.calecse.org/> for no-cost trainings, communities of practice, practical tools, and resources.



California Early Childhood Special Education Network (CalECSE)

A CDE-funded technical assistance project supporting local educational agencies (LEAs), Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA), county offices of education (COEs), and agency partners through:

- Professional learning
- Technical assistance
- Evidence-based resources
- Cross-agency collaboration

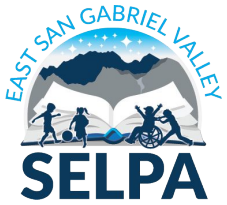
Mission

Strengthen early childhood systems to improve outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families.



CALECSE
California Early Childhood
Special Education Network

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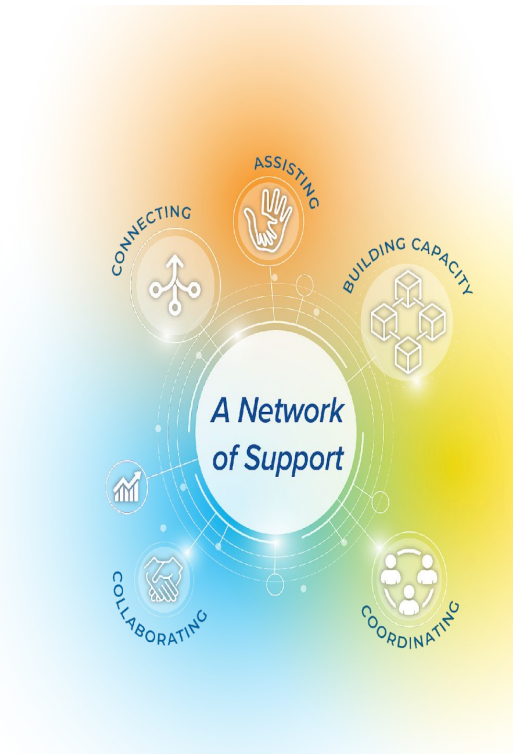
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Today's Agenda

- Tier One Tools
- Relationships and Belonging
- Developmentally Appropriate Behavioral Expectations
- Teaching Behavioral Expectations
- Visual Supports, Schedules, and Routines
- Transitions
- What Can You Try This Week?
- Questions

Which Routine Needs Support?

Choose one part of your school day:

- Arrival
- Centers
- Group time/circle
- Snack
- Play
- Cleanup or another transition

In the chat: What makes that part of the day difficult for children?



How Can We Support Engagement, Access, and Belonging in TK Classrooms?

Engagement: A child has a meaningful way to join the activities.

Access: A child can reach, understand, and use the space and materials.

Belonging: A child is recognized as a valued member of the group.



Tier One Tools

Resources for Educators



The Pyramid Model: A **framework** for promoting young children's social and emotional development through nurturing relationships, supportive environments, and intentional teaching. Many no-cost tools and training modules are available on the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI) website:

<https://www.challengingbehavior.org/pyramid-model/overview/basics/>

The Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules (AFIRM) modules:

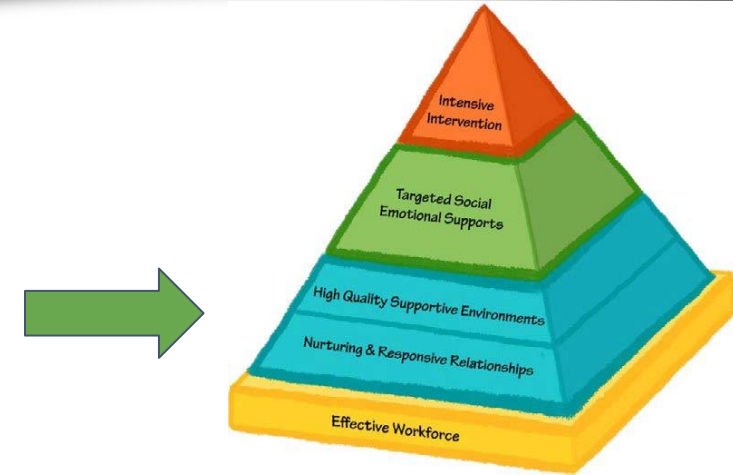
The AFIRM website provides free, step-by-step learning modules that help educators plan, use, and monitor **evidence-based practices (EBPs)**, such as visual supports, prompting, and reinforcement: <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>

The Pyramid Model

The Pyramid Model is not a curriculum, but rather a framework of effective practices to support the social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of all young children, including those at risk for developmental delays or disabilities and those with extensive needs.

Throughout this training, we will reference the document Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist for Preschool (2–5) Classrooms:

<https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/Pyramid-Practices-Checklist.pdf>



Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist for Preschool (2-5 years) Classrooms

Nurturing and Responsive Relationships

Creating a Caring Classroom Community

- ☐ Teach children how to care for one another by helping each other, inviting another child to play together, celebrating accomplishments, and giving compliments.
- ☐ Create a classroom that is a place children and families want to be (e.g., reflect children's home and cultures, feel comfortable, welcoming, and safe).
- ☐ Give children opportunities to be leaders in the classroom and helpers to their peers.
- ☐ Display children's art and products in the classroom with contributions from every child.
- ☐ Represent families in the classroom with family photos, projects, and other materials created by families.
- ☐ Give children and families opportunities to participate in making decisions about the classroom community.
- ☐ Use knowledge about individual children and families when planning activities.
- ☐ Show appreciation and gratitude to children and families.

Notes and Ideas:

AFIRM Modules and Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)



What Are EBPs?

- The 2020 autism research review identified 28 evidence-based practices for supporting autistic learners
- Examples: visual supports, social narratives, prompting, reinforcement

How Can EBPs Support Students with Autism?

- Support communication, social interaction, and emotional regulation
- Provide structure and predictability to reduce anxiety and challenging behaviors
- Improve learning outcomes and independence

Source: Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. *Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules (AFIRM)*. <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules/afirm/>

EBPs Align with Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)



A chart on how EBPs align with MTSS can be found at the California Autism Professional Training and Information Network (CAPTAIN) website:

<https://www.captain.ca.gov/documents/mtssebbs4autismalignment202502.pdf>

A chart on how EBPs align with UDL can be found at the CAPTAIN website:

<https://www.captain.ca.gov/documents/captain-udl3.pdf>

EBPs:

- Promote clarity and consistency (helpful for all learners).
- Build inclusive practices that support diverse needs.
- Foster engagement, collaboration, and positive behavior across the class.

No-Cost Training on EBPs



Learn more about EBPs through free module-based trainings at the AFIRM website: <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules/afirm/>. School staff can find evidence-based practices and approaches for the classroom.

List of modules include:

- Antecedent-Based Interventions (ABI)
- Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC)
- Ayres Sensory Integration® (ASI®)
- Behavioral Momentum Intervention (BMI)
- Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies (CBIS)
- Differential Reinforcement (DR)
- Direct Instruction (DI)
- Discrete Trial Training (DTT)
- Exercise & Movement (EXM)
- Extinction (EXT)
- Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)
- Functional Communication Training (FCT)
- Modeling (MD)
- Music-Mediated Intervention (MMI)
- Naturalistic Interventions (NI)
- Parent-Implemented Intervention (PII)
- Peer-Based Instruction & Intervention (PBII)
- Prompting (PP)
- Reinforcement (R)
- Response Interruption & Redirection (RIR)
- Self-Management (SM)
- Social Narratives (SN)
- Social Skills Training (SST)
- Task Analysis (TA)
- Technology-Aided Instruction & Intervention (TAII)
- Time Delay (TD)
- Video Modeling (VM)
- Visual Supports (VS)

Relationships and Belonging

Positive Relationships Create the Conditions for Learning



Research links higher-quality classroom interactions with gains in children's academic, language, and social skills.

Positive teacher–child relationships can support:

- Engagement and participation in classroom activities
- Language and academic learning
- Social-emotional development
- Behavior regulation and classroom adjustment
- School readiness

The practical takeaway: Building a positive relationship with a child is not separate from instruction—it helps create the conditions in which instruction can be effective.

Source: Mashburn, A. J., et al. (2008). Measures of classroom quality in prekindergarten and children's development of academic, language, and social skills. *Child Development*, 79(3), 732–749. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01154.x>

Learning Starts with Relationships

Children are more likely to engage when adults know them and respond to them warmly.

During an ordinary TK day, adults can:

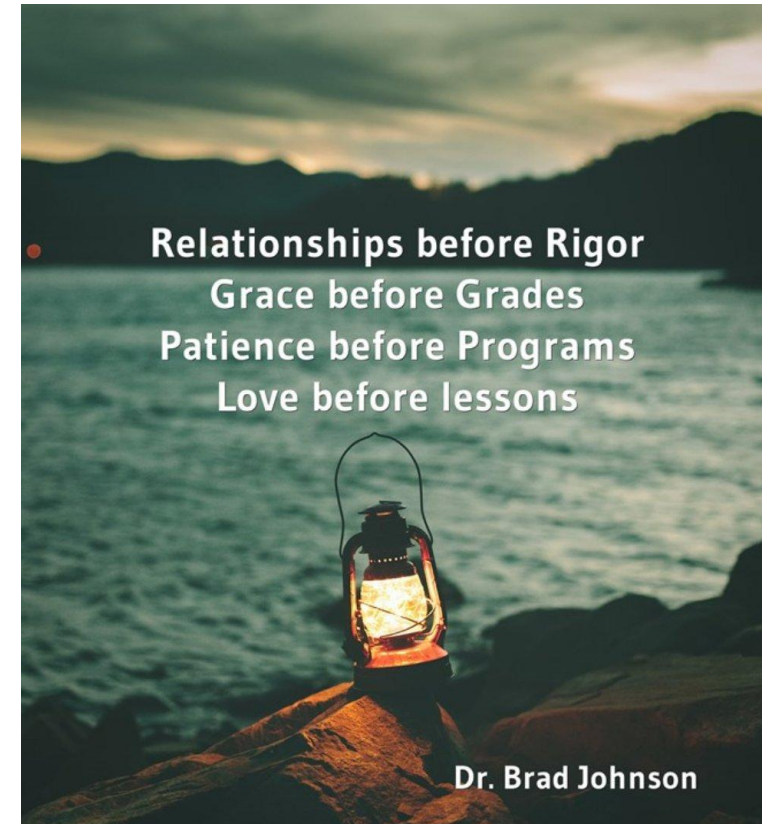
- Greet each child in a way the child welcomes.
- Notice and talk about the child's interests.
- Join a child's play before introducing a new idea. Follow the child's lead.
- Use positive language and model kind tones of voice and caring behaviors.
- Help children build relationships with peers.
- Ask families what helps their child feel comfortable at school.

This video from Placer County Office of Education (PCOE) highlights early childhood educator, Nora Rodvold:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO1vzZK0XXs>

Source: NCPMI, *Preschool Module 1: Nurturing and Responsive Relationships*.

<https://www.challengingbehavior.org/document/preschool-module-1-nurturing-and-responsive-relationships/>



Create a Caring Classroom Community

NCPMI's Pyramid Model Practices Checklist details ways in which nurturing and responsive relationships can be fostered, including:

- Displaying work from every child
- Including family photos and materials that reflect children's homes, languages, and cultures
- Giving children meaningful classroom jobs and opportunities to help peers
- Greeting children warmly on arrival
- Calling children by their preferred names throughout the day



Source: NCPMI, Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist for Preschool (2-5) Classrooms, p. 1. <https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/Pyramid-Practices-Checklist.pdf>

Provide Positive Attention During Everyday Routines



- Notice children's efforts and engagement during play, meals, arrival, and cleanup.
- Describe the action: "You made room for Soli at the table."
- Use a smile, gesture, or words that the child welcomes.
- Make positive interactions part of the routine, rather than waiting for a problem.
- Aim for a ratio of five positive comments to every one corrective statement.

Source: NCPMI, Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist for Preschool (2-5) Classrooms, p. 2.

<https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/Pyramid-Practices-Checklist.pdf>

Provide Descriptive Positive Feedback

General: “Good job.”

Descriptive: “You shared the block with Mika!”

During cleanup: “You put the food in the basket after the song.”

Name the action, effort, or behavior you want children to recognize and use again.



Source: NCPMI, Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist for Preschool (2-5) Classrooms, pp. 7–8

<https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/Pyramid-Practices-Checklist.pdf>

Resource for Improving Positive Feedback



See NCPMI's *Recommendations and Considerations for Positive Descriptive Feedback* for guidance on acknowledging children's specific actions and skills:

<https://www.challengingbehavior.org/docs/positive-feedback.pdf>

Giving Children Choices

Choice is a fundamental element of developmentally appropriate practice and is essential to maintaining engagement of young children.

Choice is a powerful prevention strategy that reduces behavioral challenges.

Build in opportunities for children to make choices often:

- Activities or the order in which to complete activities
- How to be greeted
- Song to sing at circle time
- Colors to choose from
- Where to sit
- What items to clean up
- Calming strategies to be used

Limited choices can be an effective strategy when a child is hesitating to participate: “Do you want to sit in the cube chair or on the carpet for circle time?”

Source: National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. *Preschool Module 2: High-Quality, Supportive Environments*.

<https://www.challengingbehavior.org/document/preschool-module-2-high-quality-supportive-environments>



Developmentally Appropriate Behavioral Expectations

What are Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAPs)?



- What it is: Teaching and learning that match how young children (birth through age eight) grow, learn and develop.
- Why it matters: Children learn best when instruction fits their age, individual strengths, and cultural/linguistic background.
- Core ideas:
 - Learning is **hands-on, active, and play-based**.
 - Expectations are realistic for the child's age and stage.
 - Instruction is responsive to each child's needs, interests, and family context.
 - Supports both academic skills and social–emotional growth.

Looking Back on Child Development and DAP

Refer back to CalECSE's **Tiny But Mighty: Growing Inclusive Transitional Kindergarten Classrooms Part 1: Developmentally Appropriate Practices and Play-Based Learning** for a review of the wide range of development of four-year-olds and developmentally appropriate teaching practices.

The slides from that training are available on the CalECSE website:

[https://www.calecse.org/uploads/materials/files/1787163978_Tiny%20But%20Mighty_%20Growing%20Inclusive%20Transitional%20Kindergarten%20Classrooms%20Part%201_%20Developmentally%20Appropriate%20Practices%20and%20Play-Based%20Learning%20Compliant%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.calecse.org/uploads/materials/files/1787163978_Tiny%20But%20Mighty_%20Growing%20Inclusive%20Transitional%20Kindergarten%20Classrooms%20Part%201_%20Developmentally%20Appropriate%20Practices%20and%20Play-Based%20Learning%20Compliant%20(2).pdf)

The video is available here: <https://vimeo.com/1224077528?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Is This Developmentally Appropriate for a Four-Year-Old?



One Way of Receiving Learning Is Not Appropriate for Everyone

- My **eyes** help me listen when...
 - they are looking at the speaker
 - they are looking down at the ground
 - they are looking at visual/written supports
 - they are closed



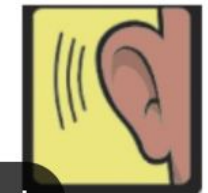
- My **hands** help me listen when they...
 - fidget
 - flap
 - stay in my lap
 - doodle
 - are in my pockets



- When I am listening, my **mouth** is...
 - humming quietly
 - echoing
 - quiet
 - chewing
 - asking questions



- My **ears** listen when...
 - it is quiet
 - music plays
 - there is white noise
 - I wear ear defenders



“Whole Body Listening” is not developmentally appropriate. See the authors’ updates to *Whole Body Listening*:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1flqw-SQcreP_yZiBYhDFsuANyS1QKib0/view



Creating a Developmentally Appropriate TK Day

- **Child-directed learning centers:** at least 50 percent should be spent on child-directed **playful** learning activities (e.g., nature/science, blocks, sand, dress-up, art)
- **Educator-directed playful learning activities:** the rest of the day should be spent in teacher-directed playful activities (e.g., small group instruction, music/movement, read-alouds, community building)

Source: California Department of Education, *Universal PreKindergarten Curriculum Evaluation and Implementation*

Toolkit, https://cauniversalprek.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/CA_UPK_GPG_CurriculumProject_FullToolkit_ACCESSIBLE_Functional_4.pdf

Consider Your TK Classroom: Is Learning Hands-On, Active, and Play-Based?

Ensure that instruction and expectations are developmentally appropriate. A video from PCOE explains a play-based model of education:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfwwTF_IUoE



Movement Throughout the Day Supports Engagement

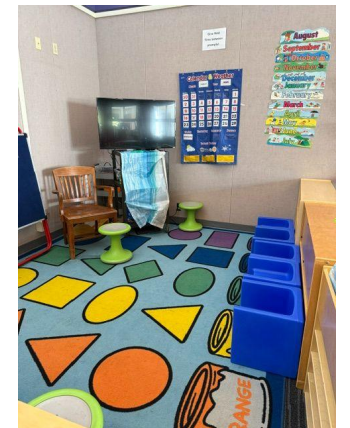
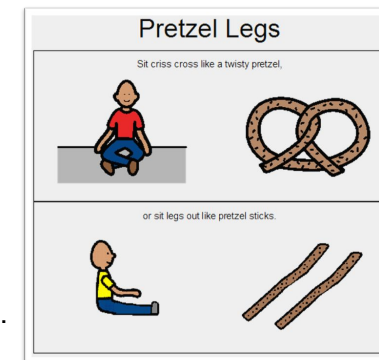
- Build motor movement into learning throughout the day: act out a story, incorporate music, count steps, go for nature walks, play movement games.
- Offer safe options to sit, stand, or change position during seated activities (large group time).
- Provide space for dancing, building, carrying, jumping, and rolling during free play.
- Pause for movement breaks when children lose interest or become restless.
- Adapt materials and actions so every child can join.

PBS LearningMedia has a downloadable document, *We Have the Moves!*, which offers ideas on movement activities for classrooms:

https://static.pbslearningmedia.org/media/media_files/f5f46648-c476-4b1e-8b98-0a5aecc7e9f9.pdf

Source: California Department of Education, *Universal PreKindergarten Curriculum Evaluation and Implementation Toolkit*, pp. 46, 80, 123.

https://cauniversalprek.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/CA_UPK_GPG_CurriculumProject_FullToolkit_ACCESSIBLE_Functional_4.pdf



Teaching Behavioral Expectations

Developing Behavioral Expectations for Your Class

- Identify two to five positively stated expectations (e.g., “We are safe”, “We are kind”) and post in the classroom.
- Include a visual or symbol on the poster.
- Refer to expectations multiple times throughout the day and link statements about appropriate behavior (“rules”) to the expectations.
- Facilitate conversations with children about the behavioral expectations and why they are important.
- Provide instruction on posted expectations and rules during large group or small group activities.
- Give positive descriptive feedback to all children when they demonstrate the expectations or follow the rules.
- Individualize instruction on posted rules and expectations for children who need more support.

Source: National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. *Preschool Module 2: High-Quality, Supportive Environments*.

<https://www.challengingbehavior.org/document/preschool-module-2-high-quality-supportive-environments>



Sample Expectations

Expectations are the general way we want adults and students to act across settings. Here are some examples, but a class should choose two to five:

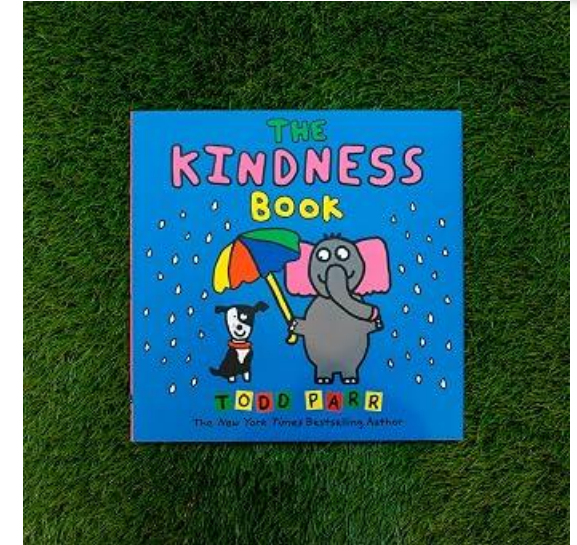
- Respect each other
- Stay safe
- We are team players
- We are peaceful
- Show kindness
- We are responsible
- We are friendly



Expectations Must Be Explicitly Taught

- Adult modeling
- Modeling with puppets
- Opportunities to practice
- Link the rules to expectations: “We are safe when we walk slowly through the hall.”
- Songs
- Flannel board activities
- Role play
- Visuals
- Social stories
- Children’s literature
- Games
- Incidental teaching
- Positive feedback

Source: National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. *Preschool Module 2: High-Quality, Supportive Environments*.
<https://www.challengingbehavior.org/document/preschool-module-2-high-quality-supportive-environments/>



Visual Supports, Schedules, and Routines

Many Ways Visuals Can Be Used in TK

Supporting Play: This website has free, printable visual supports ideal for a TK classroom: <https://prekese.dadeschools.net/#!/fullWidth/20568>

Visual Schedules

Breaking Down Tasks Into Smaller Parts

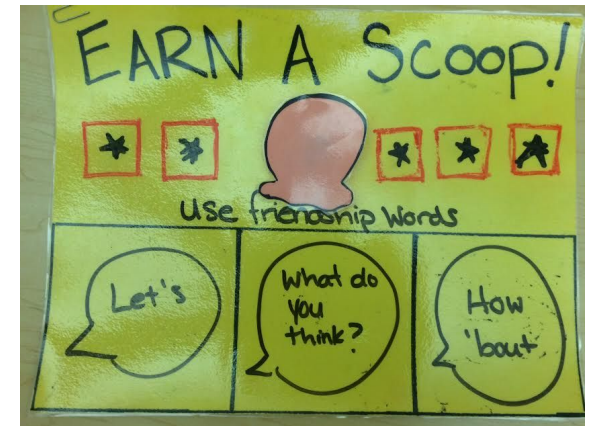
Social Narratives/Stories

Core Language Boards

Supporting Functional Communication (break cards to request breaks)

Timers for Transitions

Reinforcement Systems



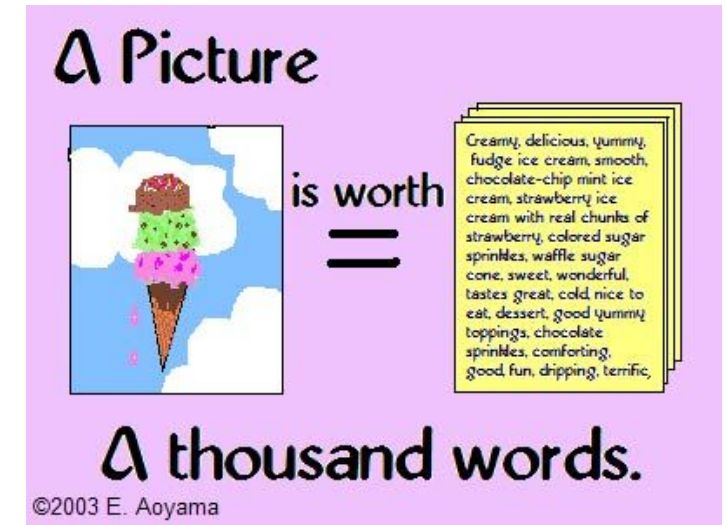
Visual Supports

Access a free training for teachers and paraeducators on using visual supports on the AFIRM website:

<https://afirm-modules.fpg.unc.edu/Visual-Supports/content/#/>

Open Access has a printable classroom core board here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/11i0JkGICKtiRYIRPooxNx49boXKdiaMF/view>



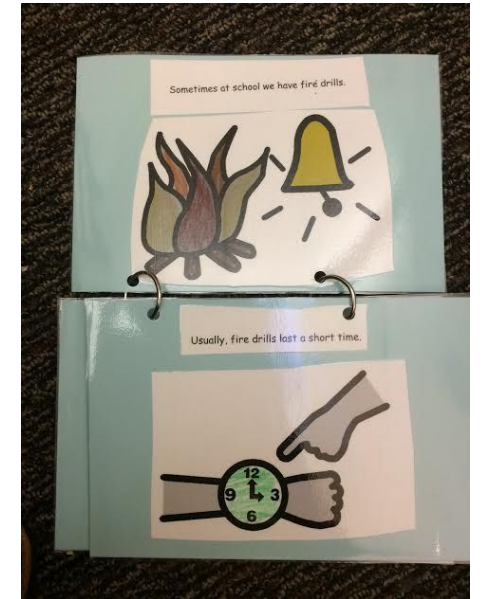
Why Are Visuals Effective with Young Students?

Auditory Messages:

- Transient (in one ear and out the other)
- Difficult to process
- Difficult to attend (filtering ambient noise is hard)
- Difficult to remember
- Language-based

Visual Messages:

- Non-transient, fixed
- Allow children time to process message
- Provide a visual reminder of action



Make the Daily Schedule Predictable and Visible



- Use photos or symbols for the activities in the day.
- Refer to the schedule throughout the day:
 - Every time the whole class is together.
 - If children are unsure what to do.
- Place the schedule in a central location where children can see and use it.
- Refer to it as activities begin and end.
- Show changes on the schedule and review them with children.

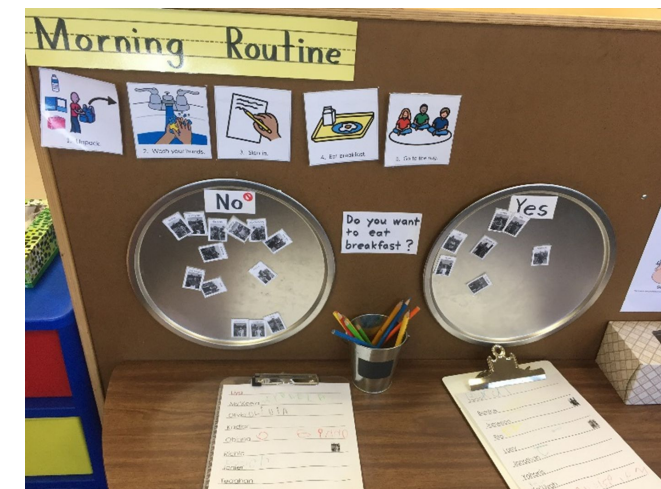
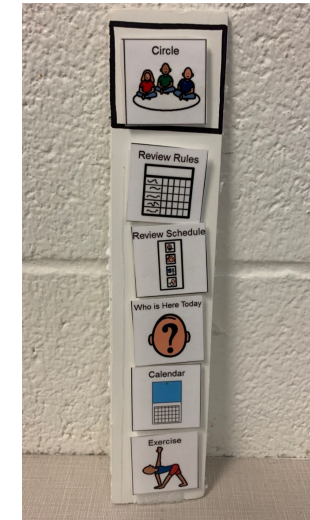
Video showing a teacher using a visual schedule:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7I25mxV69yY>

Source: NCPMI, Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist for Preschool (2-5) Classrooms, p. 6.

<https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/Pyramid-Practices-Checklist.pdf>, Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules. "Visual Supports." Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://afirm-modules.fpg.unc.edu/Visual-Supports/content/#/>

Predictable Routines

- Keep daily routines consistent and predictable.
- Show and practice the steps of arrival, handwashing, snack, and cleanup.
- Give activities a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Support routines with visuals.
- Use familiar materials and cues consistently.
- Build opportunities to communicate and participate into each routine.



Sources: NCPMI, Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist for Preschool (2-5) Classrooms, p. 6.

<https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/Pyramid-Practices-Checklist.pdf>; AFIRM. "Visual Supports." Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://afirm-modules.fpg.unc.edu/Visual-Supports/content/#/>

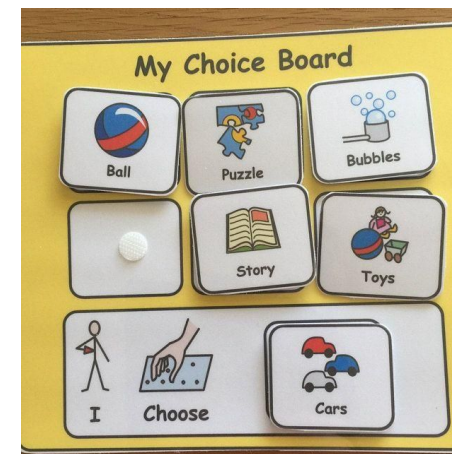
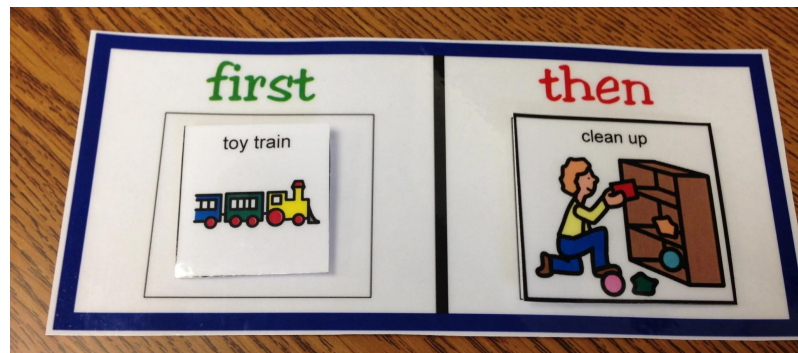
Choose the Right Visual for the Job

Daily schedule: What happens across the day?

First–then card: What are the next two steps?

Picture sequence: How do I complete this task?

Choice or communication board: How can I choose or express a need?



Print and Go Tools



Toolkit assembly instructions:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/175ToVrF6yeZe4KUwONhNnJNtpG0IRiiTt5pM7_K1Qww/edit?usp=drive_link

Visual schedule toolkit:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pXXGXkLd0htOHWgbh0hrgXN4bLvxHfbm/view?usp=drive_link

Classroom visual toolkit:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HbzpKL25vduxPq76LoTOjrp5DkOupu_/view?usp=drive_link

Lanyard visual support toolkit:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/19uwTQiVOwqtOasCm6YBXhmJE_zTxQfLz/view?usp=drive_link

Positive behavior supports toolkit:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PFXL3p4GcfSNGq4ho9TeykBsCwrWk4h9/view?usp=drive_link

Print and Go Tools (continued)



Break cards and calming strategies toolkit:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T9jC9CNI9Ym7NmtGTbQpsl3TY0W9-Tza/view?usp=sharing>

Social-emotional check-in toolkit:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KwmEsJPeflLbTgBX7-Otmu4Ul0TxCjDI/view?usp=drive_link

Greeting choices toolkit:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DStekG9V2deIBaq2Z4ePCo9YrJrOahYP/view>

Make your own social narrative toolkit:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1nfvdRiOaTP2dapzl9fXSnm0JpL__muZiyR6Aya_-9sc/copy

Transitions

Think Back to the Beginning of Our Discussion

How many of you identified a transition as the difficult part of the day?

Respond with a thumbs up.

In the chat, share why you think transitions are difficult for children

Transitions: Teach Before They Happen

Before: Minimize transitions throughout the day. Use visual supports. Give a familiar warning or cue and show what comes next.

During: Use a song, game, or helper role to keep children engaged.

After: Describe what children did and support anyone who needs another way to join.

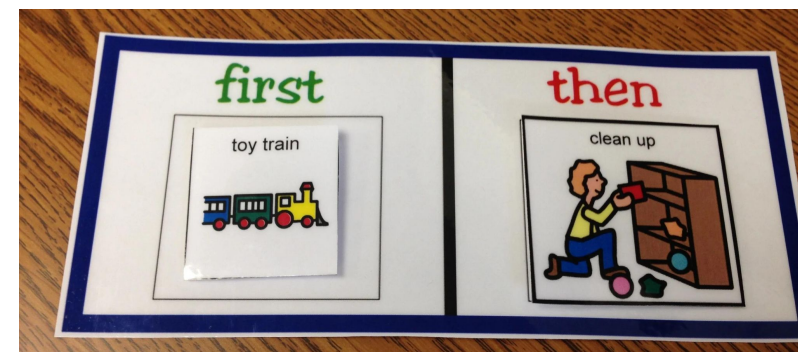
Ideas for classroom transitions are available on the Head Start website in this video: <https://headstart.gov/video/classroom-transitions>

The Head Start website also features a document for teachers on supporting children through transitions:

<https://headstart.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/managing-the-classroom/classroom-transitions-teacher-tips.pdf>

The NCPMI website features a handout Helping Children Transition Between Activities:

<https://www.challengingbehavior.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/helping-children-transition.pdf>



Other Tools to Support Transitions

Use music during transitions:

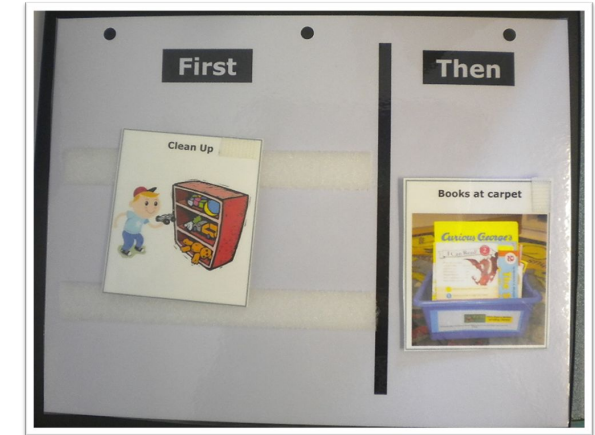
Examples of using music during transitions with Miss Nina:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=829dXYDa7nY>

An example of using music during cleanup with Miss Nina:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2HrC9aidKY&list=RDS2HrC9aidKY&start_radio=1

Provide activities while children are waiting: books to look at, fidgets to hold, a transition object, a song to sing, or a short movement activity.



Using the Prompt Hierarchy During Transitions

Example: Child is not cleaning up with classmates.

Independent: When the cleanup song starts, wait to allow the child to begin.

↓
Visual: Child is not cleaning up. Point to the cleanup picture on the schedule.

↓
Gestural: Point to a block, then to the bin.

↓
Verbal: Offer a choice: 'Clean up the cars or the blocks?' Then provide wait time.

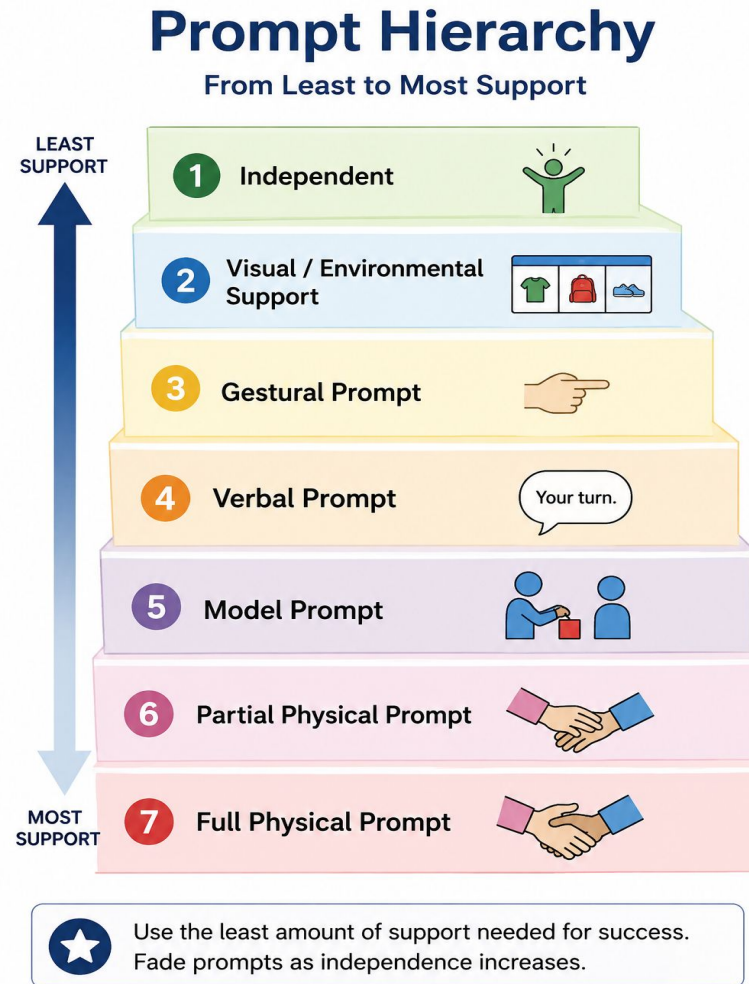
↓
Model: Put one block in the bin and pause for the child's turn.

↓
Partial physical: Help the child grasp or carry a block, if physical assistance is part of their support plan. Use physical assistance only when needed, accepted by the child, and consistent with the child's individualized support plan.

↓
Full physical: Provide the assistance needed to complete the step, if appropriate for the child.

Source: Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules (AFIRM).
Prompting. Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<https://afirm-modules.fpg.unc.edu/Prompting/content/#/le>



What Can You Try This Week?

Your Turn: Plan One Change

Routine: When is engagement difficult?

Practice: Is there one change to your practice you can try this week?

or

Support: Can you implement a visual, transition routine, or adaptation in your classroom?

Evidence: What will you watch for to know if it is supporting engagement and students' participation?



Questions



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