



## Strategies for Infants, Toddlers, and Twos With Special Needs

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**What is infant resilience?**

- Within-child protective factors that strengthen infant and toddler resilience are closely tied to their social and emotional well-being
- the ability to form relationships,
- get their needs met,
- regulate strong emotions and
- explore their world.

Children learn best in natural environments with their typically developing peers....

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## Think about these statements!

1. An infant with a developmental delay is not "broken."
2. Infants and toddlers grow up in a world where everyone is not the same.
3. For your program to be successful, it must reflect a team approach to planning for an infant with developmental delays.
4. You should welcome and encourage the input and ongoing involvement of all participants, especially the child's family.

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5. Inclusive programs model the belief that all children are entitled to experience developmentally-appropriate materials and exemplary classroom practices that value the child's strengths and work to improve the child's weaknesses.
6. It is important to understand that no single method, process, or product works for every child.
7. Quality programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities will allow you to recognize when something works, and to be able to change and adapt when something does not work.

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## Attachment

- Provide a secure base for the child, as he begins to explore the world around him.
- Be physically and emotionally available to meet the child's needs.
- Respond with sensitivity to the child's feelings.
- Recognize the child as a unique individual whose wishes, feelings, and goals are valid and meaningful.
- Accept the child – building self esteem.

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## Promoting family membership –

- Early relationships may influence overall development.
- There appears to be a strong relationship between secure attachments and positive social outcomes for the future.
- Special needs may reduce the infant's capacity to engage in rewarding interactions.
- Special needs of the infant may result in discomfort and interactive difficulties on the part of the caregivers.
- Mutually satisfying interactions may be the basis from which other positive interventions stem.

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## Positive Interactions

- Plan activities that require taking turns or give-and-take.
- Adjust to the child's cues. If he looks away, assume the game is over.
- Imitate what the child does and encourage him to imitate you.
- Play games, sing songs, and talk to the child.
- Use facial expressions that indicate you are enjoying the activity.
- Recognize that children with special needs may not respond in typical ways.

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## Key Concepts for Infants

- Cause and effect, or learning that an action can cause a reaction, is a very important concept..
- Place a rattle or scarf in the infant's line of vision and shake it.
- Then, give it to the infant and see if he will imitate your movements to make it rattle.
- If he doesn't, place your hand gently over his and repeat the activity.

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## General Suggestions for Infants

- Follow the child's lead. Try to engage the child by using objects that interest him..
- Look for opportunities throughout daily routines that encourage choice-making.
- Natural consequences. It is important the infant learns the natural consequence for an action, such as when activating a pull-toy the toy moves.
- Consistent responses.

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## Continued

- Set the child up to succeed.
- Break tasks into manageable steps.
- Provide opportunities to practice.
- Use daily routines as times to learn.
- Work collaboratively with the child's family

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## Music & Infants

- Just like their typically developing peers, infants with special needs also benefit greatly from being involved with music.
- At the same time, background music can make it hard for some children to hear speech, so limit the use of background music.
- An infant with special needs may not be able to focus on your face due to a visual impairment; however, it is critically important that when you are singing to her, you place your face as close to hers as possible.

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## Music & Infants

- Be sure that the infant is positioned in a way so that she is comfortable while you sing. This is especially important if she has motor issues, such as trunk support or difficulty holding up her head.
- Be attentive to children who do not seem to enjoy hearing a song. Although children with autism are usually not diagnosed as young infants, a child who is very sensitive to sound may need short periods of exposure to certain types of music.
- If a child is unable to shake a tambourine or to hold a stick to beat a drum, she can get just as much benefit by wearing a jingle-bell bracelet. Even if she cannot participate as fully as her peers, she can still participate partially.

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## Skills for Older Infants

- Solving a new problem using trial and error: Try modeling for the child how to solve the problem.
- Follow a simple command:
  - Often, children with special needs do not understand what you are asking them to do.
  - To help them understand better, use multiple cues, such as pointing, modeling, and pictures.
  - As mentioned, you may have to show the child several times, before he is able to complete the task or solve the problem.

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## Combining one or two actions

- Use gestures or picture sequence cards, as a way to show him what you want him to do.
- Breaking a task into smaller steps and modeling each step for him can also be extremely helpful.
- Remember to use **shaping** to reinforce each approximation toward the final goal that the child achieves.

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- Imitate an action after watching it modeled: To help children with special needs imitate actions, such as clapping their hands to music or standing up when their name is called, it is important to break the action into simple steps and demonstrate each one for the child.
- Object permanence: Because they often do not generalize well, it is important to set up activities that help children with special needs learn about object permanence.

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## Toddler Behavior (Tantrum)

- Teach the child to use a gesture or sign to indicate when he is upset or wants something.
- Provide a place where the child can go to be quiet when the activity around him becomes overwhelming. This "quiet area" should have soft lighting and comfortable seating.
- Learn to identify specific warning signs that a child is getting frustrated or upset and redirect his attention before an outburst occurs.

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## Separation Anxiety

- Help the child feel safe and reassured that the adult will return, but do not dwell on the subject. If the child repeatedly asks when mommy or daddy will be back, try to redirect him to a fun activity or game.
- Help the child develop social skills to cope with being left by the parent. If he feels more confident, he may be less anxious.
- Encourage routines that help the child feel secure, such as having a "Morning Welcome Time." Remember to address the child by name when he arrives at school.
- If the toddler gets upset and screams or cries, make sure he has time to transition to his new surroundings and circumstances, and time to calm down before directing him to an activity.

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## Building Pre-literacy Skills

- Select books that are of interest to the child and read with them often.
- Provide picture books and board books for the child to explore.
- Build phonological awareness by helping children see and use the sounds in words.
- Play games and sing songs that develop oral language and listening skills.

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- Rhyme Time. Toddlers love rhyming sounds, especially funny rhyming names. Use a child's name to make up nonsensical chants, and encourage the child to follow along and make up his own rhymes.
- Mirror, Mirror on the Wall! Sit with the child in front of a mirror. Make a funny face, wait, and see if the child will attempt to imitate you or maybe even make a funny face of his own!

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## Summary- Toddler Behavior

- A toddler's newly-developed motor skills (like walking, running, and climbing) provide opportunities for exploration and cognitive development, as she learns new ways to solve problems.
- A child's new awareness of the consequences of being more independent can result in bouts of separation anxiety, as well as internal conflicts between a desire to explore and a desire to be near those he is most comfortable with.

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- During the toddler months, developmental milestones vary widely..
- Signs that a toddler's developmental delay is more than just a "lag" in development will become more apparent during these months.
- Other than several delayed milestone achievements, signs that should alert a teacher
  - include the toddler's frequent irritability,
  - the fact that she seldom smiles,
  - makes few or no sounds, and
  - shows no interest in exploration or interaction with others.

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- As hand-eye coordination improves (usually around age two), most toddlers enjoy activities like puzzles, blocks, scribbling, and drawing.
- By age three, language skills develop rapidly and vocabulary increases dramatically. Reciting nursery rhymes, singing songs, and reading books are especially fun and appropriate activities for a child this age.

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## **Infant and Toddler Environments Setting the Stage for Success**

- Arrange the physical space to ensure that the environment is accessible by all children.
- Follow a daily schedule that promotes optimal activity and development, while keeping in mind the unique needs of a young child with special needs.
- Set up activity areas and learning centers that encourage learning, along with play and exploration.
- Promote independence.
- Provide appropriate and adaptable materials that enable learning of important problem-solving skills.
- Provide environments that promote positive interactions and the development of social skills.

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## **Environments**

1. Foster personal identity and a sense of belonging.
2. Enable children to develop confidence and master new skills.
3. Provide opportunities for growth in stimulating surroundings.
4. Encourage a sense of security and trust by being safe, warm, inviting, and predictable.
5. Designed so that children have opportunities for both social interaction and privacy.

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## Arranging the Physical Space for Accessibility by all Children

- Materials designed to be challenging and provide feedback.
- Adults who know how to read non-verbal communication signs.
- A physical setting that is not too crowded or overwhelming.

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## Modifications for Infants with Special Needs

### Modifications for Learning Spaces

LEARNING SPACE	MODIFICATIONS
I Move	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be sure to work with the child's physical therapist so that you will know which positions work best for him.</li> <li>• Initially, practice activities such as holding up his head, sitting, or maintaining head control by placing the child in your lap. This will give him a sense of security.</li> <li>• Remember, you may need to stretch his legs or help him flex his arms in order for his muscles to be ready for activities.</li> </ul>
I See	<p>Start with two items that are colorful. Introducing too many items at one time can be overwhelming. If the child has visual challenges, make sure the item is placed in his field of vision and is large enough for him to explore with his eyes and his hands.</p>
I Touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide large and small items to explore.</li> <li>• It may be necessary to hand an item to an infant or to take his hand and help him touch the item.</li> <li>• If an infant has tactile sensitivity issues, do not force him to touch an object. The goal is to encourage exploration, not to make the child fearful of new things.</li> <li>• Provide puzzles with knobs and handles.</li> <li>• Offer activities that help develop fine-motor skills, such as stacking-ring toys.</li> </ul>
At Home	<p>To build vocabulary, be sure and name each item for the child. For mobile infants with developmental delays, it will be necessary for you to demonstrate how to use some of the props.</p>

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## Modifications for Infants with Special Needs

- It is important that caregivers of young children with developmental delays provide services and supports in natural and inclusive environments during daily routines and activities to promote the child's access to and participation in learning experiences.
- Develop a philosophy of inclusion when adapting spaces for infants with special needs.
- This philosophy should encompass much more than just making the physical environment accessible. It should reflect a belief that all children can learn and that infants with special needs learn best when they have the same opportunities as their typically developing peers.

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## Arranging the Daily Schedule

- When arranging a daily schedule for infants with special needs, it is important to allow as much flexibility as possible. In general, these aspects should be considered:
- Most infants are more alert in the morning.
- There should be multiple times during the day allotted for active play, rest, eating, and quiet play.
- Feeding an infant with special needs may take longer than usual.
- While some infants with special needs require more rest and sleep than their peers, many require less.
- Consideration must be given for the child's therapies, such as speech, language, physical therapy, or occupational therapy.

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Welcome Song (sung to the tune  
of *Three Visually Challenged Mice*)



Hello \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name)

Hello \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name)

I'm glad you're here.

I'm glad you're here.

Let's put your things away and find out  
what to do today. I'm glad you're here!  
I'm glad you're here!

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## Communication Apron

- May be bought
- Easy to make
- Velcro
- Pictures
- Try a shoe rack?



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## Large Group Time (KISS!)

- Plan activities that require participation by the whole class.
- Keep large group time as short as possible.
- Make the activity as meaningful as possible for the child with special needs.
- Incorporate movement and music during the large group instruction.
- Make sure seating is comfortable.
- Consider making large group time optional.

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## Small Group Time

- Review what was previously learned, keeping in mind that after a long break like a holiday or long weekend, the child may need extra review.
- Remember that children with special needs have trouble generalizing information; provide as many concrete examples as possible.
- During small group time, provide multiple opportunities for participation.
- Ask questions frequently and look for ways to keep the child engaged. If he is non-verbal, look for ways to help him be part of the group.
- Offer the child opportunities to practice.
- Toddlers with special needs require extra time to process new information, so plan accordingly.
- Provide positive feedback, and don't forget to praise a child for his attempts, even if those attempts are not successful.

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## Activities for Infants and Toddlers

- Contingency response needs:
- Consider the unique learning needs of each child:
- Plan activities based on your knowledge of the child's ability

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## Techniques to Help Infants and Toddlers Learn a New Skill

- Successive approximation or shaping is a technique that supports a child, as she attempts a task.
- Modeling is often necessary, to help a toddler understand how to complete a task.
- Cueing is a technique used by the teacher that gives the child clues about what she is expected to do.

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## Using Observation Skills

- Direct observation is one of the best methods to use, which will help you know how to plan activities for infants and toddlers with special needs. These guidelines will help you know what to observe and how to document the observations:
- Select a method for recording your observation that is easy to use and convenient.
- Practice observing what the child says, does, and how he acts. Record exactly what you hear and see, not what you feel.
- You should write down your observations as close to the time they occur as possible.
- Describe the context of the child's behavior and actions.
- While you observe the child, you may see something you want to examine further.
- Try to observe the child in a variety of settings and at different times during the day, as this will give you multiple opportunities to document not only what happens but also when it happens.

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## Eating /Feeding



- Teach spoon use and cup use first, as these are the easiest skills to acquire.
- Recognize that self-feeding is not a discrete task in itself; rather it is made up of a series of events in which each task builds on the one before it.
- Use physical prompts to help a child learn a sequence.
- Initially, use foods that are reinforcing to the child. In other words, teach him to eat his preferred foods before going on to the lesser preferred ones.
- Remember to teach the child how to pace his eating, as this is both important socially and nutritionally.

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## General Guidelines

- For toddlers who may be resistant to new foods, look for opportunities to learn about new foods, such as playing a smell game.
- Encourage tasting games where each child takes a small bite of a new or unfamiliar food.
- Make mealtime a nurturing, playful, and positive time together.
- Offer choices whenever possible. Choice making is a critical skill and reinforces independence.
- Practice offering the child two different foods on two spoons, let him smell the food, and then honor his choice.
- Remember, he may not choose the preferred food by vocalization – instead, he might lean his body toward the food.

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- Use mealtime as an opportunity to communicate. Be positive and talk about what the child is eating. Do not coerce the child to eat, and avoid commenting on how much or how little he eats.
- Realize that some infants and toddlers are **neophobic** (psychologically afraid of new activities) about food and may require extra opportunities before they feel secure enough to try a new food.
- Offer opportunities for infants and toddlers to practice eating independently and do not be concerned about the “mess.” Remember that the main idea is to eat the food; there will be time, later, to deal with how he eats it.

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## Communication

- Form
- Function
- Content

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## Engaging Infants

- Involvement in daily routines, which should include greetings and saying “Bye-bye” when you leave the room.
- Ask questions, wait, and then answer the question for the infant. For example, ask, “Ohhh, you need a diaper change don’t you?” Wait a few seconds, reach down, pick up the infant, and then say, “Yes you do. You’ll feel better when you are all clean and dry!”
- Adjust your tone of speech, by using “baby-talk” and singing silly songs.
- Trying to interpret unintelligible utterances. For example, the infant says, “ma-moo-ma-moo” and the caregiver may ask, “You want your bottle don’t you?”

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## Key Elements for Communication

- an understanding or reciprocity of turn-taking sequences with adults and caregivers;
- anticipation about how adults will respond to a given behavior, so that, when an infant repeats it, she will get a desired response;
- mutual engagement with toys; and
- a more concrete understanding that the response for an adult is a direct result of an action by the infant.

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## Play

- Focus on the interests of the child.
- Make interactions with others as natural as possible.
- Recognize that children with special needs may have difficulty adjusting to new play situations and new play materials.
- Explain activities that involve more than one step, providing picture cues to help the child know what to do next.
- Allow the child to leave a play activity if it becomes too overwhelming.
- Honor the child's need to play alone;.
- Avoid upsetting the child; let her know in advance that it will soon be time to quit playing, so she has time to accept that there will be a change.

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## Teaching Play Strategies



- Introduce one new toy or activity at a time.
- Too much change can be overwhelming.
- When teaching the child to do something for the first time, break it down into a few simple steps; Show her each step. Then, ask her to repeat it after you.
- Begin with very short periods of structured play. Then, extend the time as the child learns to tolerate the activity.
- Talk about the activity. Be animated, and use a happy approach by saying such things as, "Wow, I just love rolling the ball to you!" or "You built that tower so high, isn't this fun?"
- When teaching a new skill, use the child's name and tell her what will happen. Next, model the steps in the activity, and encourage the child to try the activity on her own.
- Make sure every play activity is fun and rewarding for the child. Remember, the main reason children play is because it is fun!

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## Toddler Social Skills

- friendship skills,
- turn taking,
- learning simple rules, and
- participating in a play group or small group activity.

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- Turn-Taking Skills: Let's face it – none of us likes to wait for a turn. However, learning to wait is an important life skill for every child. Facilitate this learning process in toddlers with special needs by redirecting their attention to another activity while they wait, teaching them to ask for a turn, or minimizing the waiting time. This is not to say that a child with special needs should always be first in line.

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- Learning Simple Rules: Whether your classroom rules are depicted by pictures on the wall or set forth by gentle verbal reminders, it is important to note that children with special needs will need extra instruction in learning rules.

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## Tactile Defensiveness

- When placing the child on a blanket or mat, to practice kicking, experiment with various surfaces, to see what type is most comfortable for the child.
- It will take a child who has tactile defensiveness a while to get used to being held. To relax the child, hold her gently in your arms swaying back and forth.
- Children with tactile issues may have other sensory integration issues as well. Remember to maintain indirect lighting and monitor the environment for textures, odors, and sounds that may distract her.

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## What you teach me!

What you teach me  
From Birth to 3  
Is very very important to  
me  
I can learn and I can do  
But just how much  
depends on you!

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