



www.clarissawillis.com  
 clarissa@clarissawillis.com  
 3364079098  
 @clarissawillisauthor

**Clarissa Willis**  
 AUTHOR, CONSULTANT, EDUCATOR

**Learn Every Day The Infant/Toddler Way:  
 Providing Natural and Inclusive  
 Environments for Infants, Toddlers & Twos**

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**Children with Special Needs**

1. Natural Environments
2. Caregiver Interaction
3. Communication Clues

**Teaching INFANTS, TODDLERS, AND TWOS WITH Special Needs**  
 Clarissa Willis

What We Know  
 Research suggests that the best outcomes are more likely to be achieved when children with disabilities begin inclusive education early - Students without disabilities in inclusive early childhood settings show compassion, empathy, and understanding of diversity and disability.  
 —Ruth Cook, Ann Marie Richardson-Gilboe, and Laurie N. Dotson, Strategies for Including Children with Special Needs in Early Childhood Settings

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**What exactly is typical development?**

- The term *typical development* implies that a child falls within a range of development similar to that of other children the same age. But even typically developing infants sometimes lag behind their peers.
- Therefore, it is important to understand and remember that this normal range is quite broad. Development depends on many factors, some of which are inherited or genetic in nature, while others are environmental.



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### What is the difference between a child with a developmental delay and an at-risk child?

When the term *developmental delay* is used, it refers to a significant difference between the level at which an infant, toddler, or two-year-old currently functions and the expected range of development that is based on her chronological age. A developmental delay usually occurs in one or more of the following developmental domains:

- Cognitive
- Motor
- Sensory (including vision and hearing)
- Communication
- Social-emotional
- Adaptive (self-help)

• On the other hand, a child may be deemed *at risk* for a delay, which indicates there is evidence that her environment or some other factor places her in a category where she is likely to develop a temporary or permanent special need.

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## TYPES OF DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS

For the purposes of this program, the term *developmental delay* will be used to describe all the types of disability that may be encountered in a setting serving infants, toddlers, and two-year-olds. Yet there are some types of developmental delays that are seen more commonly than others. These include, but are not limited to, infants with the following delays:

- **Cognitive delays** such as those observed in children with Down syndrome or intellectual disabilities
- **Physical delays** such as those observed with infants, toddlers, or two-year-olds who have cerebral palsy or motor issues
- **Communication delays** such as those observed with infants, toddlers, or two-year-olds who do not develop speech skills or do not communicate
- **Sensory impairments** such as with infants, toddlers, or two-year-olds who experience vision or hearing loss; while rare, this also refers to children who are dual-sensory impaired, meaning the child is both hearing and vision impaired
- **Social-emotional delays** such as those seen in children with autism spectrum disorder

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### 1. Natural Environments

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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### 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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## 2. Caregiver Responsiveness: 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 in order 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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- 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

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- 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.
- 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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## Toddler Humor

- Variations on Peek-A-Boo include encouraging the child to "hide" under a scarf or blanket while you "search" for him, or covering your face half-way when you play the game. You can also build on the idea behind peek-a-boo, which is to teach body parts. For example, cover your left hand with a scarf, wiggle your fingers under the scarf, and say, "Where are my fingers?" See if the child will lift the scarf to find them.
- Ring Around the Rosy. Play this game the traditional way if the child is able. If not, look for ways in which he can partially participate. One way may be walking along with him and helping him "fall down" by lowering him with your arms. Try variations, such as "all run around," "jump up and down," or "touch the ground."
- Old MacDonald Had a Farm. Once a child knows animal sounds, what could be funnier than substituting a child's name for an animal, such as, "On his farm he had a Brandon, ei-ei-o," etc.



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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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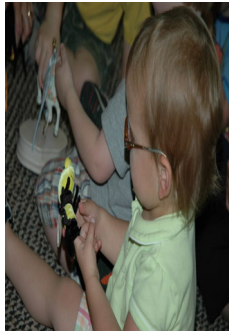
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- During the toddler months, developmental milestones vary widely..
- Signs that a toddler's developmental delay is more than just a "lag" in development will become more apparent during these months.
- Other than several delayed milestone achievements, 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 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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### The toddler schedule

- large group time (usually two or more per day);
- small group time;
- individual instruction;
- free-choice time (usually spent in learning centers);
- creative activities (art, music, drama, etc.);
- transitions between activities; and
- time for active play and climbing, either outdoors or indoors.

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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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| Modifications for Learning Centers |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Center                             | Modifications   |
| Literacy                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place books that feature people with disabilities as part of the community.</li> <li>• Offer plenty of large “board books” that have bright pictures.</li> <li>• Provide books that make noise when they are opened or have different textures that a child can touch, such as in <i>Pat the Bunny</i>.</li> <li>• Children with motor delays may need adaptive equipment, such as a “page-turner,” to help him turn pages, or a special switch, to help him turn a tape recorder on and off.</li> </ul> |
| Block                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer blocks of different sizes and other materials that can be stacked, such as clean plastic food containers or boxes.</li> <li>• Consider using blocks with handles or knobs, so a child with motor delays can participate in building activities.</li> </ul>   |
| Manipulatives                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide puzzles with knobs and handles.</li> <li>• Offer activities that help develop fine motor skills, such as the Rock ‘n Stack or the Fisher Price Activity Center™.</li> </ul>  |
| Exploration                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer magnifying glasses of varying strengths. If possible, try to provide one with a built-in light.</li> <li>• Provide large and small items to explore. Add a pair of tongs, to help children with fine motor issues pick up objects.</li> </ul>  |

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| Modifications for Learning Centers |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Center                             | Modifications  |
| Music                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities to dance, sing, and play music instruments.</li> <li>• Adapt tape recorders with switches so that children can turn them on and off more easily.</li> </ul>   |
| Art                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide adaptive paintbrushes and double-hold scissors for children with motor issues.</li> <li>• Assure the art materials are available in bright colors.</li> <li>• Provide a variety of textures and art media (clay, paint, paper, sand, etc.) to encourage exploration of new things.</li> </ul>                     |
| Computer                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure there is an adaptive keyboard, such as Intellikeys™ (see appendix – Adaptive Equipment), available for children with special needs.</li> <li>• Provide computer programs for varying abilities and skills. Programs that offer instant feedback are especially good for children with special needs.</li> </ul> |

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| Quiet       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Make sure there are comfortable places to sit and the lighting is soft.</li> <li>•Provide an audio player with headphones, so the child can listen to music. If necessary, fit the player with an adaptive switch or battery interrupter so the child can turn it on and off.</li> </ul>   |
| Dress-Up    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Place clothes in the dress-up center that have buttons and zippers, to give the child extra practice.</li> <li>•Provide clothes of varying colors, and invite the child to sort them by color, shape, size, etc.</li> <li>•Include hats, caps, and accessories, such as shoes and purses.</li> </ul>   |
| Home Living | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Make sure some of the materials have large handles for the child to grip.</li> <li>•Home living is a great center for role-play. For example, children can role-play enjoying meals with friends or everyday routines, such as getting ready for bed or preparing for school.</li> <li>•Place sequence cards for everyday things, like setting the table or getting ready for school, in the center. The cards will help the child learn the steps of routine activities.</li> </ul> |

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| Modifications for Non-Traditional Learning Centers |   |
|--|---|
| Center   | Modifications   |
| Touch  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide objects and materials of varying shapes, textures, and sizes.</li> <li>• Make "feely" boxes with things of different textures hidden inside. Remember, some children may be hesitant to put their hands into a box. Offer to do the activity with the child.</li> </ul>  |
| Friendship   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This center can reinforce in-class activities, by giving children an opportunity to practice friendship skills.</li> <li>• Role-playing activities or friendship circles (a circle where friends sit and talk) are all useful, and can help children with special needs interact with their peers.</li> <li>• Include activities that children can do together, such as building with blocks or painting a mural.</li> </ul> |
| International                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feature people and places that are foreign to them or different from what they are used to. Provide props to go with each activity. This center may help you in continuing to teach about diversity.</li> <li>• Bring foods from other cultures for the children to sample, to help them learn about new and different tastes. This is also a good center for collaborative activities.</li> </ul>                           |

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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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## Infant Toddler Lifeskills

- **Feeding**
  - Progressing from bottle feeding to simple finger foods
  - Using utensils to eat
  - Simple table rules
  - Social context of meal time
- **Toileting**
  - Recognizing when a diaper change is needed
  - Anticipating the need to go to the bathroom
  - Asking to go to the toilet
  - Taking care of own toilet needs
  - Washing hands after toileting
  - Handling unplanned situations

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- **Daily routines**
  - Brushing teeth
  - Washing and drying face
  - Tolerating a bath
- **Dressing**
  - Getting dressed for school
  - Preparing to go outside (putting on a coat, mittens, etc.)
  - Putting on shoes
  - Taking off clothes



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### Toileting

- After careful observation, decide if the child has the pre-requisite skills needed to begin toilet training
- Collect data about how often the child needs a diaper change and the times when he usually needs a diaper change.
- Learn to identify signs, such as facial gestures, noises, or other cues that he is about to go to the bathroom.
- Provide opportunities for children to observe others going to the bathroom. For example, if the teacher takes two or three children to the bathroom at the same time, invite the child with special needs to go along and give the child a "turn" at sitting on the toilet, even if nothing happens.
- Begin training while the child is sitting on the toilet.
- Help the child communicate (signs, gestures, speech, or pointing to a picture) that he needs to go to the bathroom.
- Teach each skill the child will need in a toileting routine. Keep in mind that some children may be able to partially participate in the process before they are able to complete a step independently.
- Expect accidents to happen and don't make a crisis out of them when they occur.



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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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## Communication Basics

- **Form**
  - A way to communicate
- **Function**
  - A reason to communication
- **Content**
  - Experiences to communicate about

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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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## Social Competence

- Interact in the context of everyday routines, such as while you are changing a diaper or feeding the child.
- Remember, in order to become social, an infant needs opportunities to practice in authentic social settings. Place your hands around the infant's hands and help her clap. You may say something like, "Clap, clap, clap, happy as can be; clap, clap, clap, look at me!" Stop, pick up a small hand mirror, and hold it up for the child to see herself. Before long, the infant will learn to recognize the *Clap and See Game*, and anticipate playing it with you by smiling, rocking her body, or attempting to clap on her own.
- Talk to the child and describe what you are doing. Many times, adults like to talk to infants in a high-pitched "baby-talk" voice.
- Remember to wait to see if the child responds to you when you talk or gesture to him. His response is an indication that he can "read" your actions (especially the non-verbal cues).
- For example, when you feed the infant and he pushes away from you, wait to see if he will also let you know he is finished by continuing to turn his body away from the bottle or spoon. Respond by saying, "Oh you are all finished!" Sign the word finished placing your palms together then moving them outward.

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### Suggestions

- Work closely with the child's family, so that you know what her interests are, as well as what types of music or books she enjoys.
- Teach reciprocity through simple games, such as rolling a ball back and forth or playing with a toy car. Roll the car toward the child and encourage him to roll it back to you.
- Model what you want the infant to do, and be patient, remembering that children with special needs often take a little longer to process information than their peers.
- Imitate actions and sounds. Repeat what the child says and does.
- Keep your body language upbeat and enthusiastic. If you are bored by an activity, a child will be too!
- Continually raise expectations. You should not assume that, because a child has special needs, he cannot interact with others.



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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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### Toddler Friendship Skills

- Involve a child's learning to interact with others in a social setting in ways that achieve his goal of an interaction to get what he wants or to establish reciprocity.
- It is crucial for children with special needs to have intensive and intentional instruction about how to handle each social situation.
- They also need multiple opportunities to practice new social skills, as developed, which may be accomplished through the use of one or more of these techniques:
- peer modeling, picture cards to depict positive social interaction, or direct intervention by an adult.



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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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### Small Group Activities

- Group activities can be overwhelming for some children, especially those with behavior issues and those with autism.
- Make sure the child knows what will happen next, and plan short periods of group instruction.
- Provide opportunities to sing, move around, and interact with others, as sitting for a long time is very challenging for most toddlers and is often impossible for a toddler with special needs.



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## Summary

- Keep group sizes small, to help promote positive interactions.
- Provide materials, which are appropriate to the age and stage of the child's development.
- Intentionally plan activities that incorporate collaboration and working together.
- Peers can be great social models for children with special needs. They can model social skills, initiate communication interactions, and serve as peer buddies, to help a child with special needs complete an activity or work on a developing skill.

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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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## 10 Communication Rules for working with Parents

1. Listen! Listen! Listen! Listen! Listen!
2. Speak politely and positively.
3. Establish partnerships based on mutual trust and respect.
4. Use inviting non-verbal communications and avoid using words like "should" and "ought."
5. Explain information in ways that are understandable.
6. Encourage parent's involvement by asking open-ended questions.
7. Support parents in developing the skills necessary to become strong advocates for themselves and their family.
8. Appreciate cultural diversity.
9. Respect individual differences, desires, needs, and values.
10. Adopt an attitude of equal partnership.

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**L** look and  
listen to the  
world around  
them

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**E** Explore their  
environments  
with enthusiasm  
and wonder

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**A** Actively engage  
in daily routines  
and novel  
experiences

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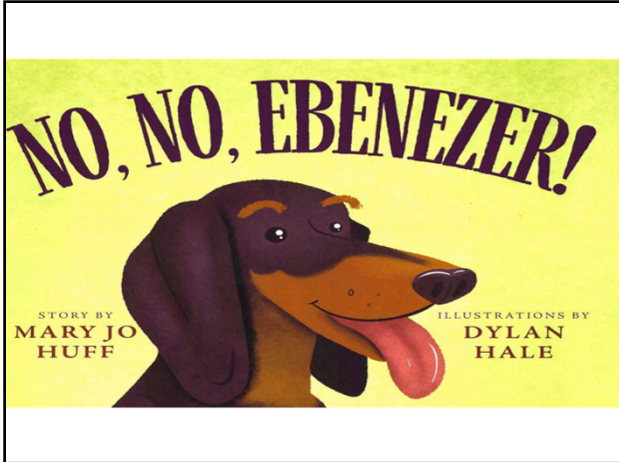
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