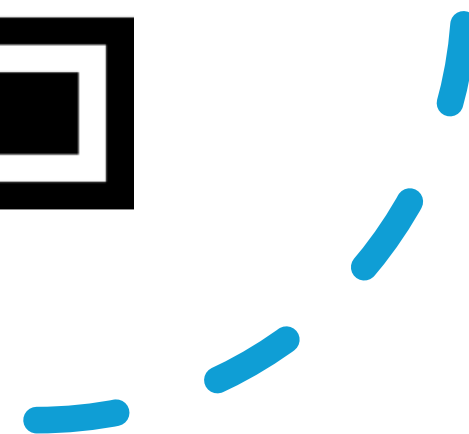


# **Adaptation Station: Simple Strategies for Supporting Infants and Toddlers Across Settings**

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May 21, 2026  
8:30 to 10:00am ET  
Alissa Rausch, Ed.D.  
Allison Jones, M.Ed.

Who's in the  
Room?



# Participant Objectives

- Increase participants' understanding and use of low-tech assistive technology with infants and toddlers, such as adaptations and assistance, to promote access to and participation in early learning.
- Increase participants' awareness of online resources that are available at no-cost to support access to and meaningful participation in early learning for all infants and toddlers.





## There are many ways children express themselves

Children may express themselves in ways we don't immediately recognize. This doesn't mean they aren't engaged or that they aren't communicating—it invites **us to listen, observe, and plan differently and to offer support that honors their way of being.**

# A Philosophy Towards Dignity and Disability



Children with disabilities do not need to be repaired or fixed. Just like all children, they need support to succeed.

All children are entitled to developmentally appropriate materials and exemplary classroom practices that honor each child's strengths and areas of development.

There are no one-size-fits-all practices for children and we must work to understand the strengths and needs of each child and family.

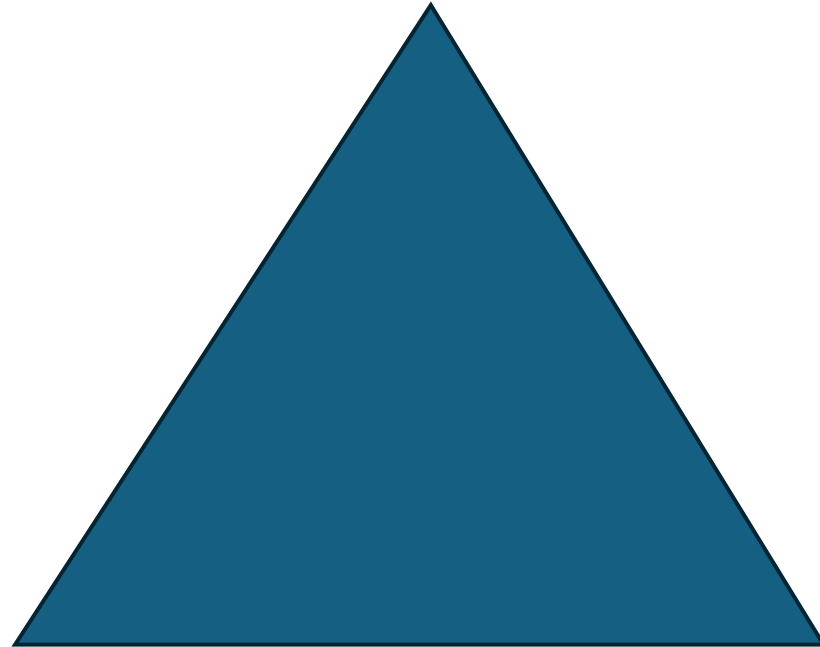
# Key Defining Features of Inclusion

## Participation

In environments that have individualized accommodations

## Access

To learning  
opportunities,  
settings, activities



## Support

An infrastructure for and  
maintains individual and  
program supports for  
children and families

# Accessible Defined

“Accessible” means a child with a disability can

- access the **same** information,
- engage in the **same** interactions, and
- otherwise participate in or benefit from the **same** services, programs, and activities
- as children without disabilities, in a manner that provides **substantially equivalent timeliness, privacy, independence, and ease of use.**

Adapted from Department of Justice and  
Department of Education

# Adaptation

Modification or change made to an environment, activity, materials or interaction to maximize a child's ability to participate in everyday interest-based learning opportunities

Source: Center for Early Literacy Learning

<https://earlyliteracylearning.org/>

# Why It Matters

- Adaptations ensure that children with disabilities:
  - Can express their interests and have them interpreted correctly
  - Can engage in learning activities with their peers
  - Can become skillful and competent in learning activities
  - Can offer children alternative ways to demonstrate their learning
- In other words, adaptations offer the necessary support so that children with disabilities can participate in activities at the greatest level possible alongside peers
- Adaptations (as assistive technology) dignify children.

Source: Center for Early Literacy Learning

**True- Flags Up**

**False- Flags Down**

**Mythbusters**



# NCADEMI Myths and Facts Surrounding Assistive Technology



The screenshot shows the top portion of the NCADEMI website. On the left is the NCADEMI logo, which includes a stylized person icon next to a computer monitor. To the right of the logo is a search bar with the word "Search" and a magnifying glass icon. Below these elements is a dark blue navigation bar with several menu items: "About", "Learn", "Create", "Provide" (highlighted in orange), "Sustain", "Audiences", and "Contact Us".

[Home](#) » [Provide](#) » [Accessible Formats](#) » [IEP Guidance](#) » More the the Myths and Facts

## More to the Myths and Facts: Addressing Accessible Educational Materials in the 2024 Assistive Technology Guidance

**Publication Date:** October 2024

AEM and AT  
Under  
IDEA Part C

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**What sparks JOY for children?**

# Everyday Learning Environments and Activities with Responsive Adults


## Home Environment

- Mealtime
- Indoor/outdoor play
- Bedtime
- Grocery shopping
- Bath time
- Other?

## Classroom Environment

- Meals and snacks
- Transitions
- Indoor/Outdoor play
- Nap
- Floor time
- Arrival/Departure
- Other?

# Start with What You Know About the Child and Family

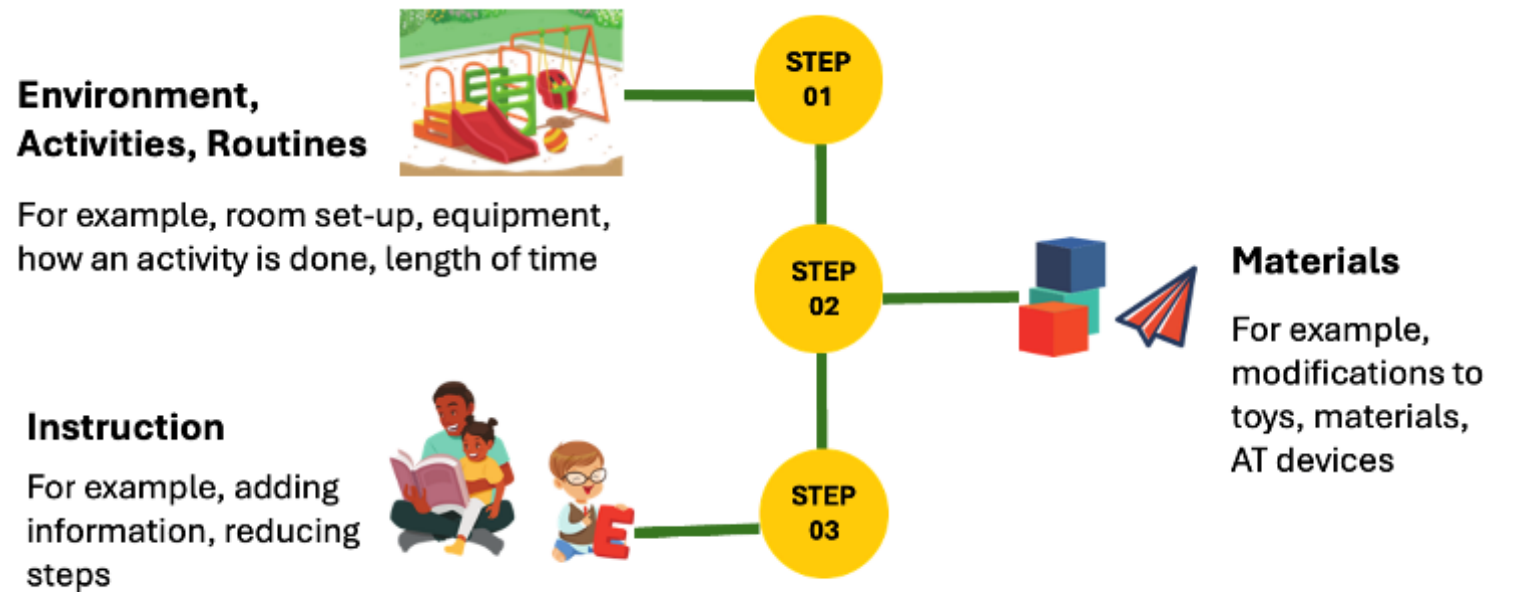
- What are the child's interests and strengths?
  - What is most challenging for the family?
  - How is the child currently participating in the everyday routine/activity?
  - How could the child be more involved in the everyday learning opportunity?
  - What could be provided to support increased engagement and learning?
- 



# **Adaptations and Examples**

# Adaptation Continuum: Least to Most Restrictive

- Adapt Environment
- Adapt Activity
- Adapt Materials
- Adapt Instruction
- Provide Assistance



# STEMIE's Guide to Adaptations



## 1 – Environment

*Environmental, activity, and/or routine adaptations are changes and/or accommodations in the setting and/or activity that support inclusive access to learning opportunities, embed interventions, and support full participation and independence for all children.*



### Area & Space

**Arrange the environment and/or materials in a systematic way for a specific purpose**



	Tape place mats for mealtime routines or use trays for manipulatives, games, and puzzles <small>Image Credit: CONNECT Module 1, 2009</small>		Modified seating (e.g., cube chair, chair with bumpers) <small>Image Credit: Reading Links</small>
	Space between centers and tables for wheelchairs and walkers to maneuver <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>		Limit background noise and distractions <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>
	Add rails to step stools <small>Image Credit: CONNECT Module 1, 2009</small>		Cover materials not needed for an activity <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>
	Use standing and seating options so that all children are on the same level (e.g., stander at water table, floor-level support seat for group time) <small>Image Credit: CONNECT Module 1, 2009</small>		



## 2 – Materials

*Materials adaptations are changes and/or accommodations to materials that support inclusive access to learning opportunities, embed interventions, and support full participation and independence for all children.*



### Grasping Supports

**Add additional material(s) to an object to make it easier to grasp, lift, or turn**



	Magnets or Velcro wrist bands to pick up materials <small>Image Credit: Design Activity Module 2017</small>		Cups with handles <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>
	Grip tape and/or tubes to thicken handles <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>		Deep bowls/plates for easier scooping <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>
	Page fluffers to space apart pages of a book for easier turning <small>Image Credit: Paths to Literacy, 2018</small>		Stabilizers, like Velcro or rubber shelf liners, for activities, puzzles, and games <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>
	Alternative materials (e.g., soft, squeezable) to support grasping <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>		Low-tech materials (e.g., Velcro on blocks, tabs, padded handles for toys, tools, and utensils) <small>Image Credit: Paths to Literacy, 2018</small>



## 3 – Instruction

*Instructional adaptations are changes and/or accommodations to the instruction or teaching that support inclusive access to learning opportunities, embed interventions, and support full participation and independence for all children.*



### Visual Cues

**Use pictures and/or icons to signal next steps**



	Prompt cards (e.g., pictures of activities and centers) <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>		First/Then prompts <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>
	Use visuals that clearly illustrate the activity <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>		Choice boards <small>Image Credit: Creative Commons</small>
	Use concrete objects to represent schedule (see Visual Schedules)		
	Add a graphic organizer to aid reading comprehension		



# 1. Environmental Adaptation

Modifications made to the environment to ensure that a child can get to and participate in an activity independently



# Examples of an Environmental Adaptation

## *Examples*

- Placing toys and materials within a child's reach by moving them to a lower shelf
- Rearranging furniture so a child can easily walk across the room using a walker or wheelchair.



[Photo credit: virtuallabschool.org](http://virtuallabschool.org)





Photo Credit: [virtuallabschool.org](http://virtuallabschool.org)





# Reggio Emilia Infant Toddler Outdoor Experience

# The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) Practice Improvement Tools

- Based on the Division for Early Childhood's Recommended Practices
- Developed for Families and Practitioners
- Available in English and Spanish
- Accessible by laptop, smartphone, or tablet
- Available at NO-COST

<https://ectacenter.org/decrp/>

# Environmental Adaptations Checklist

<https://ectacenter.org/decrp/to-pic-environment.asp>



## Environmental Adaptations Checklist

This checklist includes procedures for determining the types of environmental adaptations (physical, social, temporal, etc.) that can be used to promote child participation in learning activities to enhance child competence. The checklist indicators focus on the types of adaptations that can be used to eliminate or reduce barriers to increase child participation in learning activities and routines. The checklist indicators

can be used by a practitioner to conduct an adaptation assessment and to develop an action plan for using specific adaptations to promote child participation in learning activities. The checklist rating scale can be used to do a self-evaluation to determine if the necessary steps were followed to use adaptations as part of a child's individualized intervention plan.

Practitioner: \_\_\_\_\_ Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate which environmental adaptation practice characteristics you were able to use with a child:	Seldom or never (0 - 25%)	Some of the time (25 - 50%)	As often as I can (50 - 75%)	Most of the time (75 - 100%)	Notes
1. Observe the child's attempt to engage in everyday learning activities and routines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Identify the particular environmental barriers that interfere with child participation in the activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Identify the strengths, interests, preferences, etc. that the child demonstrates and that motivate him or her to attempt to engage in interactions with other persons and materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Determine the types of adaptations (physical environment, scheduling, everyday activities, learning materials, instructional practices) that make it possible for increased child participation in learning activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5. Use the least-intrusive adaptation(s) together with child strengths to encourage child interactions with and engagement in learning activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6. Employ the adaptation(s) to determine how well it (they) permits access to and child participation in learning activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7. Incorporate the adaptations into everyday activities and routines to ensure ongoing participation in child learning activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8. Reduce or eliminate the use of an adaptation as the child becomes more independent as part of engagement in everyday activities and routines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## Adapting Children's Learning Opportunities

Children learn best by being active participants within their everyday environment—whether it's watching and listening to a wind chime blow in the wind, or learning the steps to handwashing. The more opportunities children have to actively participate in everyday learning activities, the more opportunities they have to practice existing skills and explore new ones. Make sure that all children can access materials and activities within their daily environments.

[Watch a video of this guide](#)

### Environmental Adaptations

- Watch children during everyday activities to identify each child's level of participation. Start with the interests and strengths of each child. These are motivators that you can use to engage a child in a learning activity. A child who likes trains and follows instructions well, may be more engaged during the transition to other activities if the teacher invites the child to chug like a train going from one activity to another.
- Does a specific child have a difficult time engaging in an activity? Consider the barriers that may be preventing the child from fully participating. Barriers for a child may be things such as not being able to reach toys, having difficulty using an object in an activity, or having difficulty following the instructions for an activity. It is helpful to ask, "How is the child currently participating in the activity?" and "How could he be more engaged during this activity?" "What changes can support or increase the child's participation in learning activities?" "Could I adapt the room, a toy or object, instructions, schedule, etc.?"
- Try to use an adaptation that least interferes with the child and/or the activity. When possible, use the least-intrusive adaptation along with the child's interests to encourage his/her engagement in learning activities.
- When using an adaptation, observe the child to determine how well the adaptation permits access to and participation in learning activities. If the child is more engaged in a particular routine, could the same adaptation be used in other everyday routines to increase this child's participation? If the adaptation did not help the child participate in the activity, what might be done differently? Recognize that it may take a few attempts to find what works.
- Remember to reduce or eliminate the use of an adaptation as the child becomes more independent. For example, you may place non-slip shelf liner on the table to support a child in steadying and stacking blocks. As the weeks go by, you might notice the child is stacking blocks on all types of surfaces, and no longer needs the support of the shelf liner.



*Ekaterina Lapina / Shutterstock.com*

### A Quick Peek

Javier, a lively 4-year-old, has just joined Ms. Daria's preschool class. His favorite neighborhood playmate, Nora, has been a class member since the beginning of the school term, and she happily welcomes him. Ms. Daria notices that Javier participates eagerly in group activities when Nora is also part of the group. One day a set of colorful felt-tip markers captures their attention, and they join several other children who are drawing at a table in the school courtyard. Nora quickly becomes absorbed in her artwork, but Javier is frustrated by the uneven work surface and being unable to steady his paper and use the marker at the same time. Soon he puts his head down and simply watches his classmates. Ms. Daria quickly devises a simple solution. She shows Javier how to use a wide three-ring binder with paper clips to hold the paper securely for him to see what he's doing and to move his hands freely. Soon Javier is all smiles as he gets back to work, just like his best friend.

### You'll know the practice is working if...

- Adaptations increase children's participation in learning activities
- Each child is actively participating in everyday activities and routines
- A child's participation increases in an activity or routine

This practice guide is based upon the following DEC Recommended Practices: Environment 1, 3, 4, 5, 6. The DEC Recommended Practices are available at <http://dec-spced.org/recommendedpractices>


Access this practice guide and other products at <http://ectacenter.org/decrp>  
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# Practice Guide for Practitioners



**Considerations  
for  
Environmental  
Adaptations**



It is helpful to ask, “To what extent does this environment encourage exploration and learning for this child?”

## 2. Activity Adaptation

Selecting an activity based on a child's interests and adjusting the activity in ways necessary to ensure that the child can participate in the activity independently.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)

# Examples of Activity Adaptation

Oftentimes, an adaptation to an activity involves adding visual, kinesthetic, and auditory aids to support the child in participating in the activity or routine.

## *Examples*

- Add movements to a song to keep an active child engaged.
- Add props to story time to help a child follow along and understand the story.
- Toddlers that are developing language skills benefit from the use of sign language to engage in songs and everyday routines.

Photo Credit: [virtuallabschool.org](http://virtuallabschool.org)



Photo credit: [pathstoliteracy.org](http://pathstoliteracy.org)



Photo credit: [TN-TAN](#)



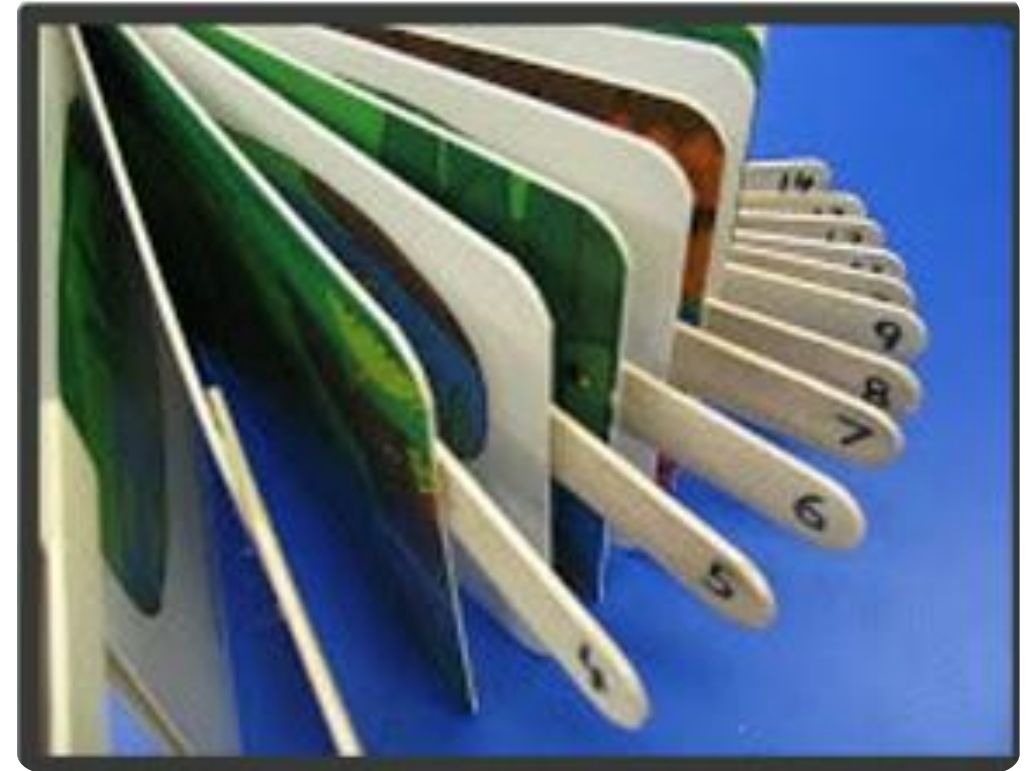


## Considerations for Activity Adaptation

The adult may ask,  
“What addition could be  
made to this activity to  
support the child’s  
participation and  
learning?”

# 3. Material Adaptation

Making modifications to a material needed in the activity in order for a child to easily manipulate or use the material, enhancing his/her participation in the activity



# Examples of Material Adaptation



## *Example*

- Using large-grip crayons to scribble
- Providing child-sized utensils to feed oneself
- Placing non-slip shelf liner under a bowl or plate to help a toddler practice feeding himself

# Let's check out a material adaptation.

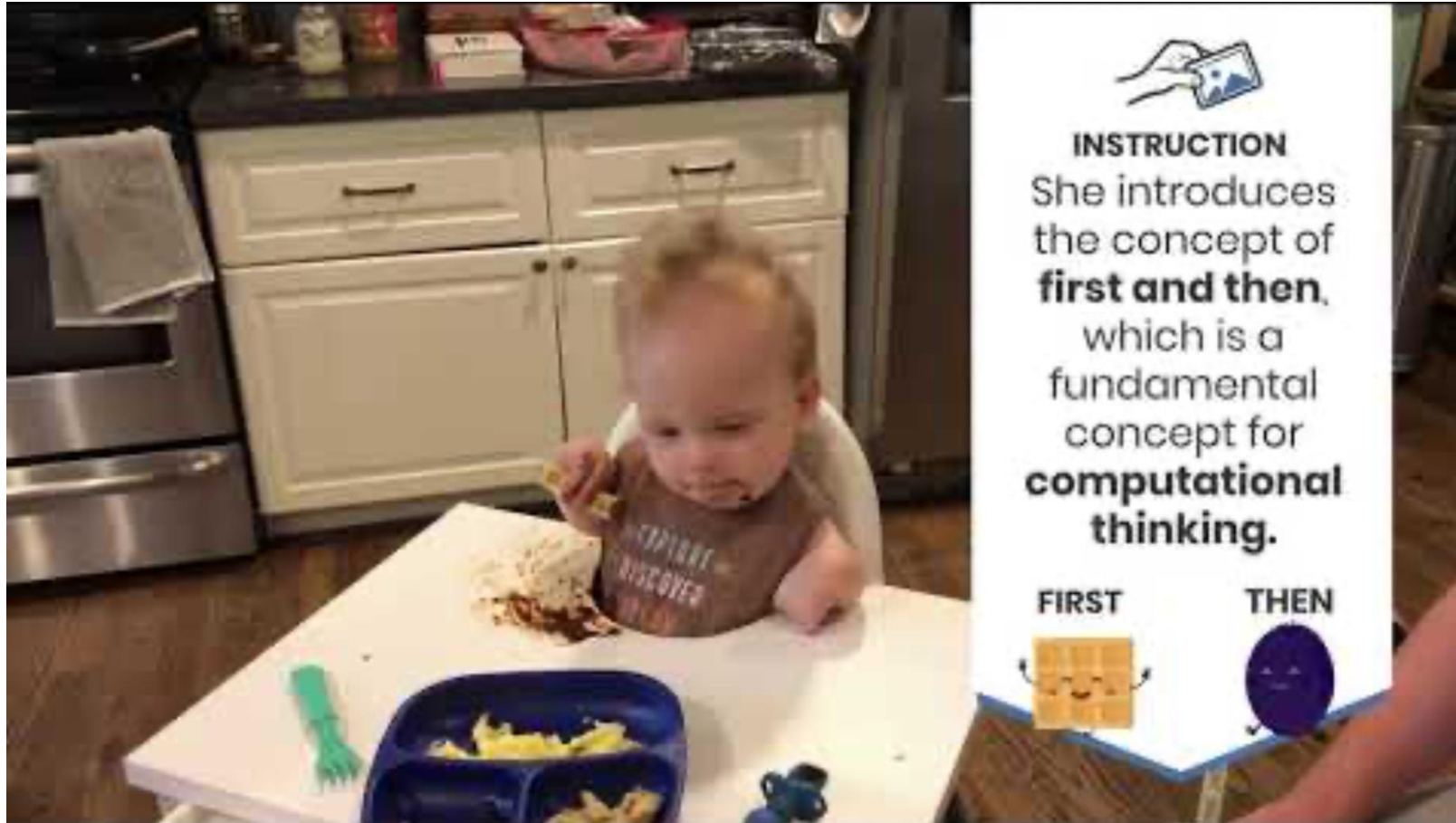


Photo Credit: [virtuallabschool.org](http://virtuallabschool.org)

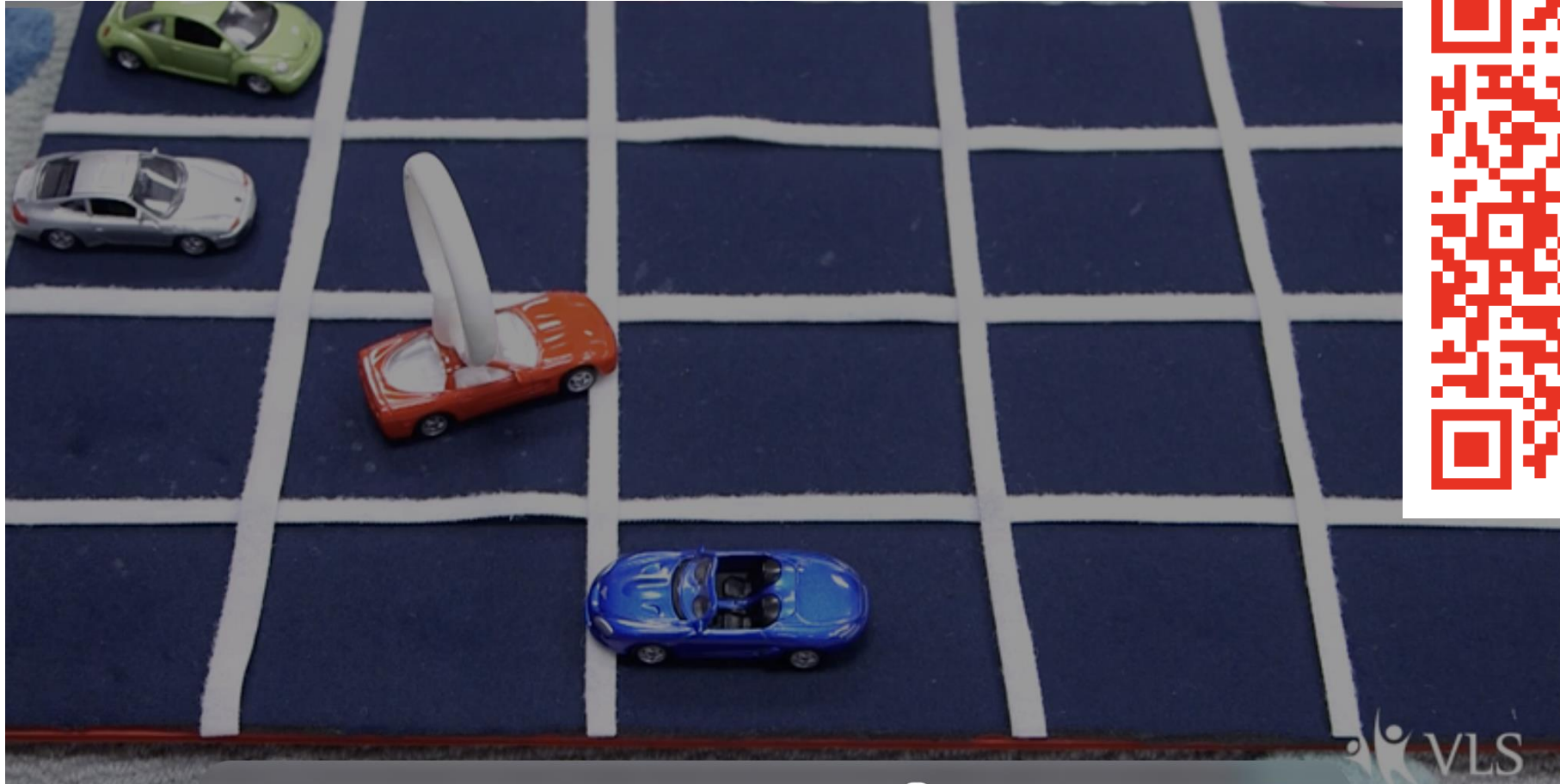





Photo Credit:  
[virtuallabschool.org](http://virtuallabschool.org)





## Considerations for Material Adaptation



The adult may ask, “Is there anything that could be done to this item to support or enhance the child’s exploration or participation in the activity?”

## 4. Instructional Adaptation

The adult modifies or adjusts their instruction and requirements based on the individual child so the child can participate in the activity as completely and independently as possible.

A few ways the adult may do this are by reducing the steps of the activity or by extending the length of time in which the child is expected to perform an activity.

# Examples of Instructional Adaptation with Objects

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## *Examples*

- Waiting and allowing the child enough time to respond before providing more adaptations
- Adding pictures along with print to represent the verbal instruction
- Allowing a child to stand during an activity rather than sit



Image Credit: Sarah Pedonti

# Instructional Adaptation- Object Schedule

---



Image Credit: <https://theautismhelper.com/how-to-start-a-learner-with-an-object-schedule/>

# National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations Resource Library

## Circle time rules cards

We sit on our circle time spot.



We use our looking eyes.




We use our listening ears.




We follow directions.





## Considerations for Instructional Adaptation



The adult may ask, “Do I need to adapt my instructions so that the child understands the ways they can participate? Have I given this child an adequate amount of time to complete this task? Have I required too many steps to participate in the activity?”

# **Providing Assistance**

# When to Provide Assistance?

An adult or a peer provides physical assistance.


In *Cara's Kit*, Milbourne and Campbell state, "Provide assistance only when other adaptations have not worked, and only as a last resort."

Why do you think this is important?



# Provide Assistance- Physical Prompts

## *Examples*

- 
- Providing hand-under-hand or hand-over-hand support
  - Modeling for the child how to do something such as clapping their hands and then inviting them to do it.
  - Peer intervention where a peer models for the child or provides some kind of physical assistance. Siblings are great engagement partners.

Can you think of times where it was necessary to provide assistance? Can you identify times when it may not have been the most appropriate adaptation?

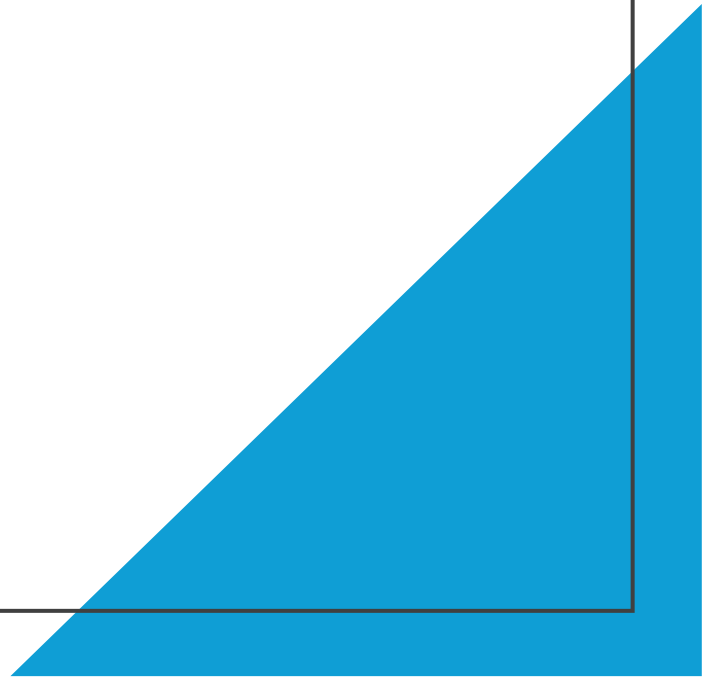
# Image Credit: Texas DeafBlind Project



## Considerations for Using an Adaptation

- Have you observed the child to know what his/her interests and abilities are?
- To what extent is the child currently participating in an activity?
- In what ways could the child be more involved?
- How will the adaptation enhance the child's ability to participate in the activity?
- How will the adaptation be implemented?
- Does an additional adaptation need to be provided?
- Could this adaptation be generalized to other activities or routines?
- How will you know when the adaptation may no longer be needed?

# Questions for Clarification and Support



# References and Resources

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