

Empowering Families in Early Intervention: Free Online Resources for Using Evidence-Based Practices with Autistic Toddlers

Virtual Inclusion Institute, 2026

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Acknowledgements

▶ AFIRM:

NEW!

- DOE OPE and UNC FPG #P116J250647 (AFIRM-AI; 2026-2029)
- California Autism Professional Training and Information Network contract and UNC FPG (CAPTAIN, 2021–2022),
- DOE IES and UNC FPG #R324B160038 (Post-Doctoral Training; 2016-2022)
- DOE IES and UNC FPG #R324A150047 (TESELA; 2015-2019)
- DOE IES #H325E12002 (IRIS Center and UNC FPG; 2014-2016)

▶ AFIRM for Toddlers:

- Foundation for Child Development's Promising Scholars Program (2023–2025)
- UNC Autism Research Center, Kelley Altman Greer Family Research Fund Pilot Award (2024)
- DOE OSEP and UNC FPG #H326P170001 (ECTA Center; 2017-2022)

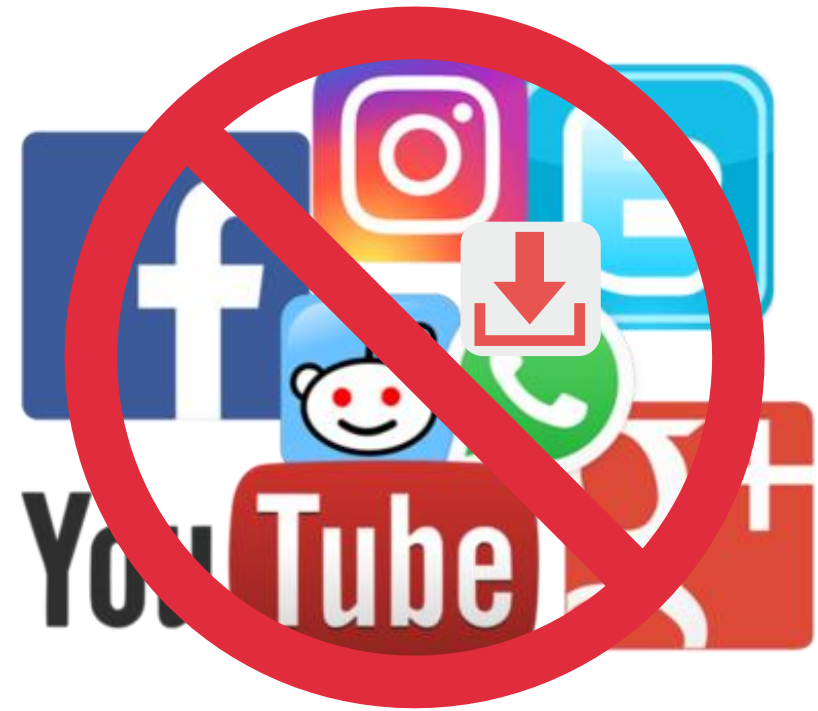
▶ AFIRM for Paraeducators:

- DOE IES and UNC FPG #R324A230140 (2023-2026)
- DOE IES and UNC FPG #R324A170028 (2023–2025)



Video and Photographs

Please do not photograph, download or share any videos or pictures that will be used to demonstrate concepts throughout this training.



Welcome

- ▶ Where are you from?
- ▶ What is your work?
- ▶ What do you hope to learn today?

WILLKOMMEN स्वागत
欢迎 BIENVENIDA
WELCOME
BIENVENUE ようこそ
добро пожаловать
ترحيب BEM-VINDO



Who are We? The AFIRM for Toddlers Team!



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Objectives

- ▶ **Identify practices that are evidence-based and lead to improved outcomes for toddlers with autism and their families.**
- ▶ **Describe steps taken by the module development team to ensure the modules would be useful and relevant to early intervention practitioners and families.**
- ▶ **Learn evidence-based supports for coaching and empowering families in EI**
- ▶ **Develop a plan to increase their own use of evidence-based practices when serving toddlers with autism and their families.**



AFIRM

- ▶ **E-learning modules for 28 EBPs**
 - <http://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>
- ▶ **Target audience**
 - Special and general educators
 - Related service personnel
 - Early interventionists
 - Paraprofessionals
- ▶ **Planning, Selecting, and Monitoring EBPs**



Autism Focused Intervention
Resources & Modules



What are Evidence-Based Practices?

▶ Focused interventions that:

- Produce specific behavioral and developmental outcomes for a child
- Have been demonstrated as effective in applied research literature
- Can be successfully implemented in educational settings



Odom, Colett-Klingenberg, Rogers, & Hatton, 2010



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Early Intervention Need

▶ **Limited information for supporting early interventionists (Their role is different!):**

- Families
- Early Care and Education Providers
- Foundational EBPs

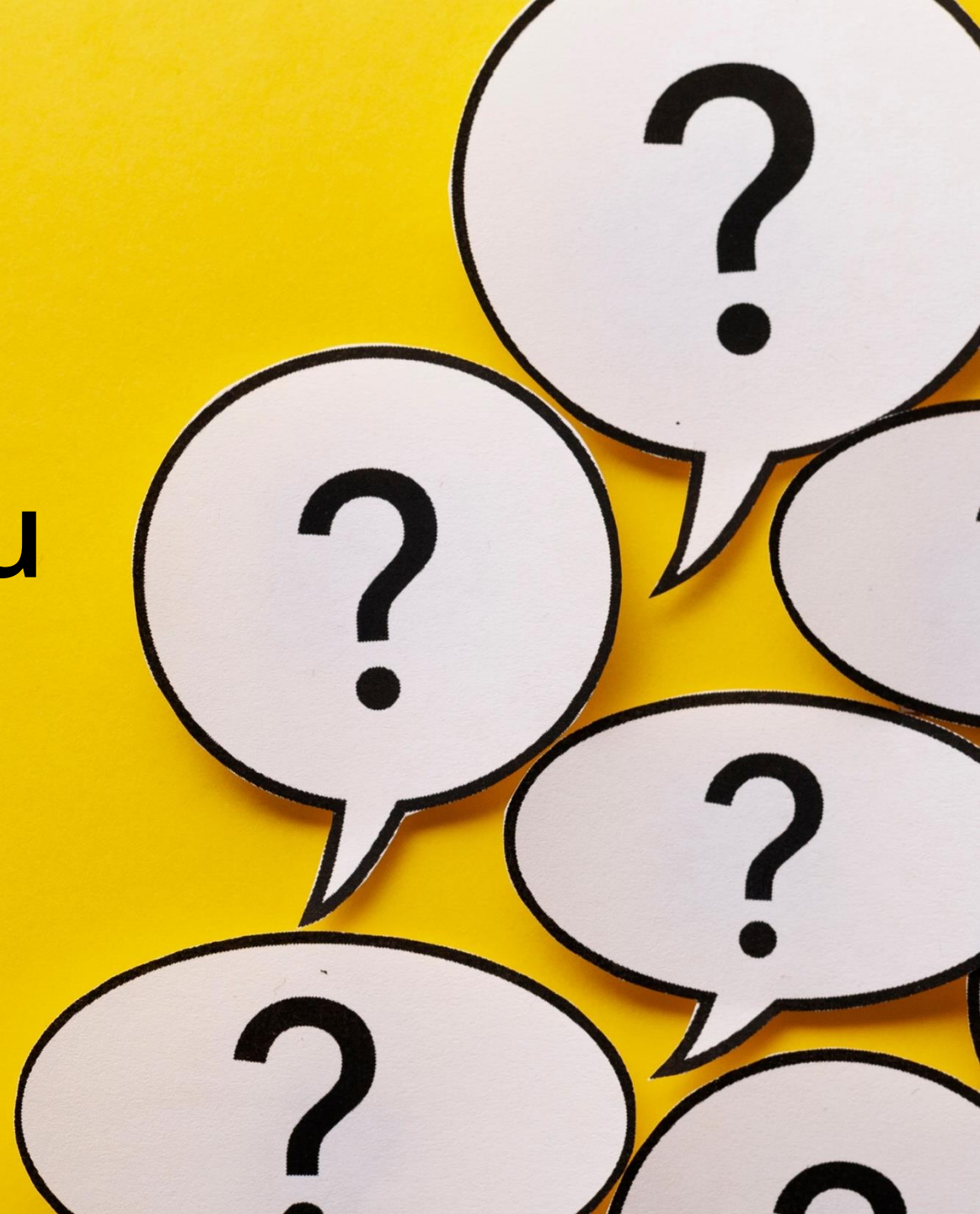


EBPs for Early Intervention

- 1. Antecedent-Based Interventions (ABI)**
2. Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC)
3. Differential Reinforcement (DR)
4. Discrete Trial Training (DTT)
5. Extinction (EXT)
- 6. Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)**
7. Modeling (MD)
8. Music-Mediated Interventions (MMI)
- 9. Naturalistic Interventions (NI)**
- 10. Parent-Implemented Interventions (PII)**
- 11. Prompting (PP)**
- 12. Reinforcement (R)**
13. Social Skills Training (SST)
14. Technology-aided Instruction & Intervention (TAII)
15. Time Delay (TD)
16. Video Modeling (VM)
- 17. Visual Supports (VS)**



**Which EBPs do you
use the most?**



Community Engagement in Development

▶ **2 focus groups family members**

▶ **2 focus groups EI providers**

▶ **Key take aways:**

- Clarification of roles and responsibilities needed for families, early care and education providers, and early interventionists
- Need for videos to share examples of EBPs with families and childcare educators in natural settings
- Shareable (downloadable) resources and handouts
- Process for using coaching model to provide feedback to families
- Opportunities for listening to content (e.g., podcast style interviews, etc.)



AFIRM for Toddlers



Parent-Implemented Intervention for the Home Setting



Naturalistic Intervention in Child Care Settings



Reinforcement



Visual Supports



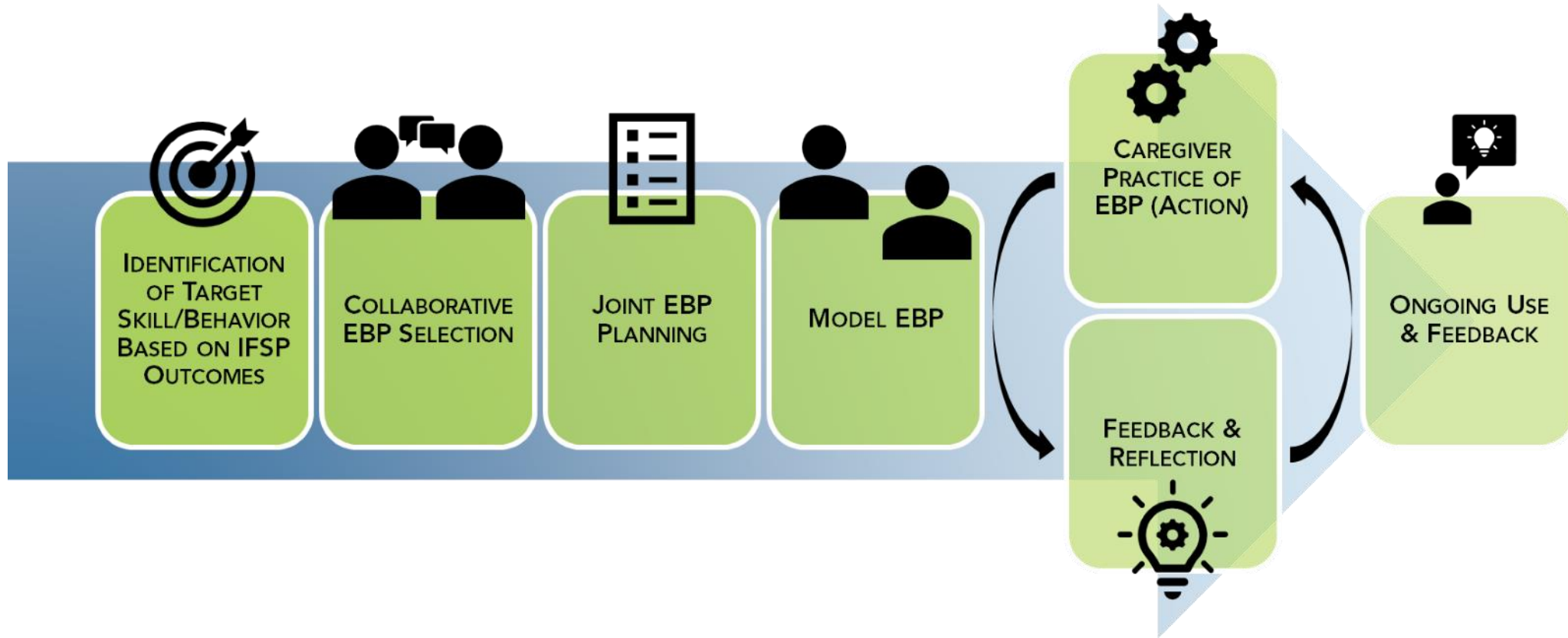
Prompting



Behavior Supports

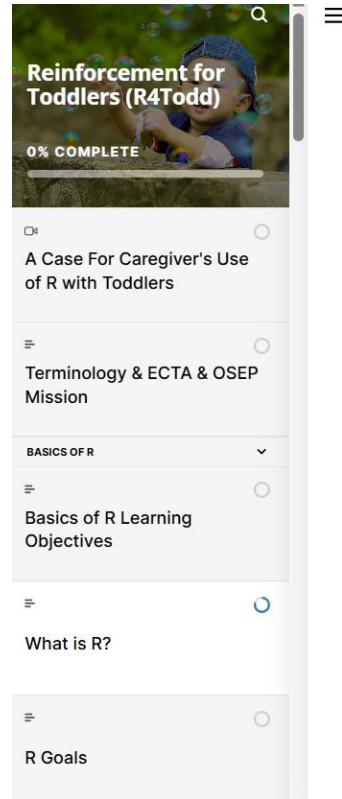


AFIRM for Toddlers (AFT) Coaching Model



AFT Learning Structure

- ▶ **Basic information on EBP**
- ▶ **Joint planning for EBP**
- ▶ **Coaching use of EBP**
- ▶ **Monitoring the EBP**



Key Points

- Watch how this EI provider provides cheers for this toddler for cleaning up the pictures.



Innovative Technology



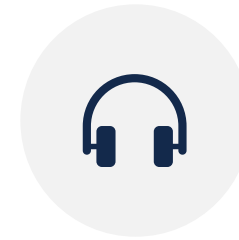
**VIDEO
EXAMPLES
(VIDEO
LIBRARY)**



**ENGAGING
CASE
EXAMPLES**



**DEMONSTRAT
IONS OF
PRACTICES IN
HOME**



AUDIO CLIPS



**INTERACTIVE
ASSESSMENTS
PROVIDING
USER
FEEDBACK**



EI Provider Resources

- ▶ EI Implementation Checklist
- ▶ Planning Guides
- ▶ Step-by-Step Guide for Providers
- ▶ Coaching Guide

Reinforcement for Toddlers
For more information, please visit: <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>

IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST: FOR EI PROVIDER


Observation:	1	2	3	4	5
Date:					
Observer's initials:					
STEP 1: JOINT PLANNING FOR REINFORCEMENT					
1.1	Select target skill/behavior for toddler with autism with caregiver (e.g., family member, early care and education provider)				
1.2	Collect baseline on target skill/behavior with caregiver				
1.3	Discuss reinforcement basics and using steps with caregiver				
1.4	Select reinforcers				
1.5	Select activity that reinforcement will be used with				
1.6	Determine supports that may be needed for toddler to use target skill/behavior				
1.7	Have materials ready and available				
STEP 2: COACHING USE OF REINFORCEMENT					
2.1	Model using reinforcement for the caregiver (Live and/or video):				
2.1a	Introduce the Caregiver Reinforcement Implementation Checklist to the caregiver				
2.1b	Set up the activity for the toddler to accomplish the target skill/behavior				
2.1c	Transition the toddler into the activity				
2.1d	If needed, support the toddler to use the target skill/behavior (e.g., prompting, modeling, etc.)				
2.1e	Provide the reinforcer immediately after the toddler exhibits the skill /behavior				
2.2	Answer caregiver's questions, if needed				
2.3	Support caregiver's use of Caregiver Reinforcement Implementation Checklist to practice using reinforcement				
2.4	Facilitate caregiver reflection and provide feedback following the practice use of reinforcement				
2.5	Discuss with the caregiver how the reinforcer will be thinned (reduced) once the toddler is regularly accomplishing the target skill/behavior				
2.6	Discuss with the caregiver use of reinforcement in daily routine and activities				
STEP 3: MONITORING USE OF REINFORCEMENT					
3.1	Plan for and support caregiver's data collection on the toddler progress toward the target skill/behavior				
3.2	Monitor caregiver fidelity using the Caregiver Reinforcement Implementation Checklist				
3.3	Review data collected on the toddler's target skill/behavior				
3.4	Support use of reinforcement for other skills/behaviors				
3.5	Collaborate with caregiver about next steps				

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Reinforcement for Toddlers
For more information, please visit: <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR EI PROVIDER

This step-by-step practice guide outlines how to plan for, coach use, and monitor reinforcement for toddlers so that you can be sure this selected evidence-based practice is likely to be used by the caregiver to address the target goal/behavior/skill of the toddler.



STEP 1: PLANNING FOR REINFORCEMENT

The planning step details the initial steps and considerations involved to prepare the caregiver for using reinforcement with a toddler.

- Use the EI Provider Implementation Checklist to coach caregivers to use reinforcement.
- Give the Caregiver Reinforcement Implementation Checklist to caregivers for them to use to follow the steps of using reinforcement with the toddler.

- Select target skill/behavior for toddler with caregiver (e.g., family member, childcare provider)**
 - Invite the caregiver's expert input on the toddler's needs, culture, and priorities
 - Work together to determine the most appropriate toddler skill/behavior to target with reinforcement.
 - Use the Selecting a Target Goal form as a guide to select a target skill/behavior with the caregiver.
- Collect baseline on target goal with caregiver**
 - Observe the toddler in their natural environment interacting with the caregiver.
 - Use the Data Collection: Baseline with the caregiver to collect data on the toddler.
- Discuss reinforcement basics and using steps with caregiver**

Effective discussions about reinforcement include both informing caregivers about how to use reinforcement and also empowering them as the expert about the toddler.

 - Review baseline data with the caregiver.
 - Introduce the main principles of reinforcement and discuss how to be used to address the toddler's target skill/behavior.
 - Ask the caregiver if they have any questions about using reinforcement and be used to address the toddler's target skill/behavior.
 - End with a discussion of caregiver strengths and how those can enhance their use of reinforcement to address the toddler's target skill/behavior.
 - Use the Tip Sheet for Childcare Providers to provide basic information about the practice to professionals working with the toddler.
 - Use the Family Guide to provide basic information about the practice to family members about the practice they are using with their child.
 - Use the Reinforcement FAQ Guide to answer any questions the caregiver has about reinforcement.

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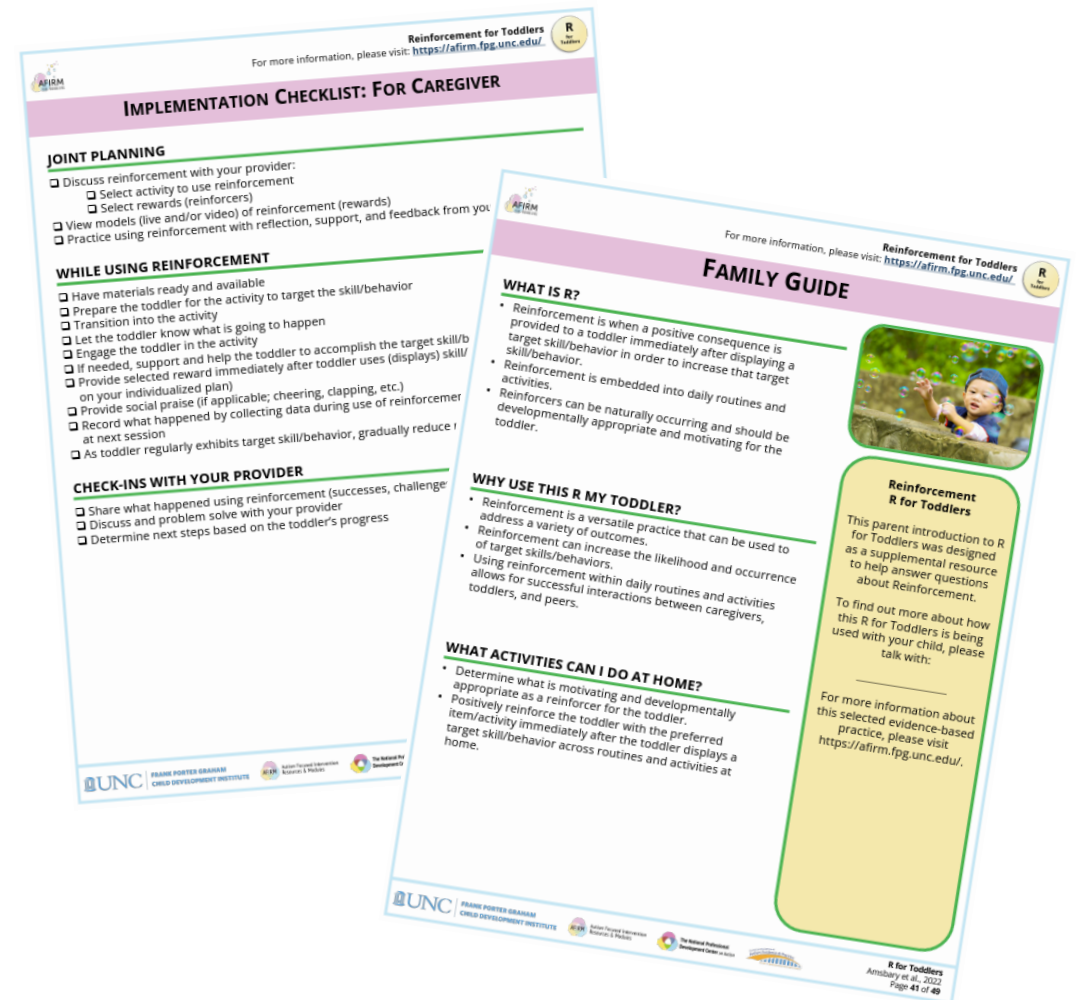
R for Toddlers
Armstrong et al., 2022
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Caregiver Resources

- ▶ Implementation Checklist
- ▶ Caregiver Log & Data Collection
- ▶ Reflection form
- ▶ Caregiver Guide

- ▶ Link to PII Brief Packet:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AfTXMd8dHJpZZC0s1Yy94wL7xzjIB2TZ/view?usp=sharing>



Available Modules

- ▶ **Parent-Implemented Intervention for Toddlers in the Home Setting**
- ▶ **Naturalistic Intervention for the Childcare Setting**
- ▶ **Reinforcement**
- ▶ **Prompting**
- ▶ **Visual Supports**
- ▶ **Behavior Supports**
- ▶ **Families in EI**

Coming Soon!



<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules/afirm-for-toddlers/>



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Parent-Implemented Intervention

AM AFIRM Modules

Parent-Implemented Intervention for Toddlers (PI4Todd)

START COURSE



Key Points

- Watch as the parents engage with their toddler during her morning dressing routine.



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<https://afirm-modules.fpg.unc.edu/Parent-Implemented-Intervention-Toddlers/content/#/>

Need for Modules to Support Families too

- ▶ **Additional family focus groups in English and Spanish:**
 - Access and communication challenges
 - Desire to better understand foundational information about autism and child development
 - Parenting and Family Dynamics
 - Benefits of early intervention
 - Types of services available (e.g., OT, speech therapy)
 - Guidance on finding suitable providers
 - Learning through podcasts and mobile-friendly content (Allowing engagement to occur during daily activities like exercising or chores).
- ▶ **Visual aids and real-life examples were suggested for clarity in understanding therapy goals and strategies.**



Families in EI

1. What is Autism?
2. What are EBPs?
3. Working with Your EI Provider
4. Planning for EBPs with Your EBP Provider
5. Using EBPs with Your EI Provider
6. Check-Ins with Your EI Provider

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a lifelong developmental difference of the brain. It affects how toddlers communicate, interact socially, and process the world around them.

Signs can appear before the first birthday but may not be diagnosed until later. An evaluation team will look for:

- Social communication differences
- Restricted and repetitive behaviors

This may involve observations, questions about your child's development, and input from specialists.

Key Features of Autism

1. Social Communication:
 - a. Trouble using/understanding eye contact, facial expressions, gestures
 - b. May not notice emotions unless clearly stated
 - c. Prefers visual learning (pictures can help!)
2. Repetitive & Restrictive Behaviors:
 - a. Repeating movements (e.g., flapping, rocking, spinning)
 - b. Strong interest in routines
 - c. Intense focus on certain topics
 - d. Sensory differences (over- or under-sensitive)
3. Thinking & Learning:
 - a. May struggle with new routines or transitions
 - b. May need support with everyday tasks (e.g., brushing teeth) and often learns best through visuals and step-by-step

How to Support Your Toddler

- Use pictures and simple routines
- Keep language clear and concrete
- Celebrate progress, big and small
- Build on your toddler's strengths and interests
- Connect with professionals for guidance

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice uses clear rules to decide if a strategy is "evidence-based." This means the strategy has been tested and shown to work through strong research.

According to their 2020 report, a practice is considered evidence-based if it has been studied in scientific journals using:

- At least 2 studies with groups of people where researchers compare results (called randomized or group design studies),
- or
- At least 5 studies that follow one person or a small group over time (called single subject or case studies),
- or
- A mix of both: 1 group study and 3 single subject or case studies.

Reinforcement – responding to your toddler in a way that increases how much they use a certain skill or behavior

Prompting – helping or reminding the toddler to use specific skills; often done with words, hand gestures, or by physically helping them do an action.

Visual Supports – showing the child something visual that will prompt them to use a certain skill or behavior (e.g., helping them remember steps in a routine, what to do during an activity, etc.)

Behavior Supports – determining why the toddler is doing a specific thing that interferes with their learning or safety and finding a replacement or positive alternative.

R VS **VS**

PP **BEH**

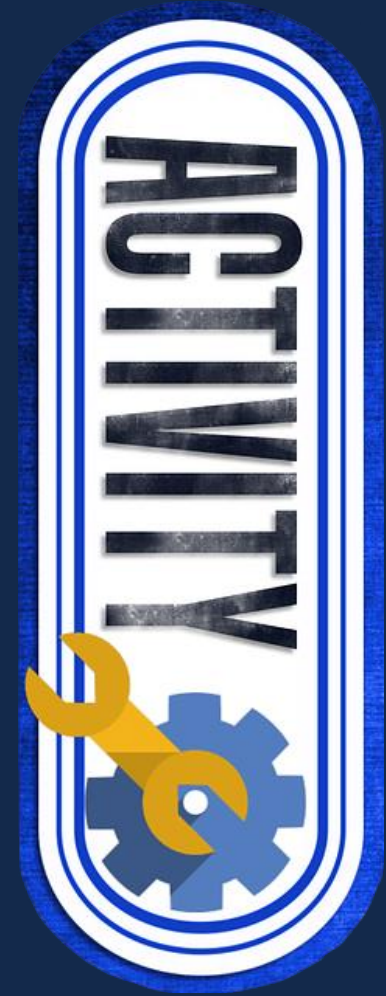


Case Study for EI

Liam is a 28-month-old toddler with autism receiving home-based early intervention services. He has limited verbal communication and difficulty engaging in social play.

His early intervention provider wants to use evidence-based, caregiver-mediated strategies that embed learning opportunities into daily routines. However, Liam's parents prefer that the provider work directly with Liam during sessions because they feel unsure about implementing strategies themselves.

Dilemma: How can the provider balance evidence-based caregiver coaching with the family's preference for direct child intervention while maintaining a collaborative, family-centered approach?



**Use PII Packet to Guide Your Ideas



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Discussion Questions:

- ▶ **What EBPs would be most helpful for Liam's needs?**
- ▶ **How can Maria explain the rationale for caregiver coaching in a family-centered manner?**
- ▶ **What steps could the provider take to support caregiver confidence while still using evidence-based practices?**
- ▶ **How might Maria adapt her coaching while remaining consistent with EBPs?**

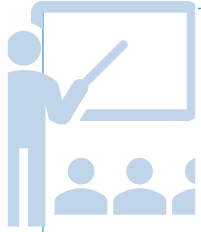


Example of EI provider working with Family

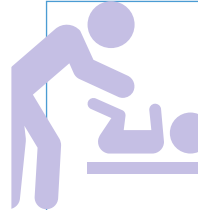
▶ <https://hml.fpg.unc.edu/Play/18468>



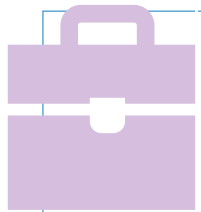
Action Planning



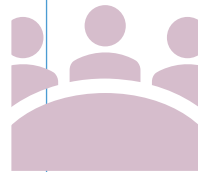
How will you use AFT resources in your setting?



How could you use AFT to support parents and caregivers?



What additional supports would be helpful in your work?



Small group discussion



**What will you use
in your work?**

**What are you
excited to try?**



**What questions do
you have?**



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