

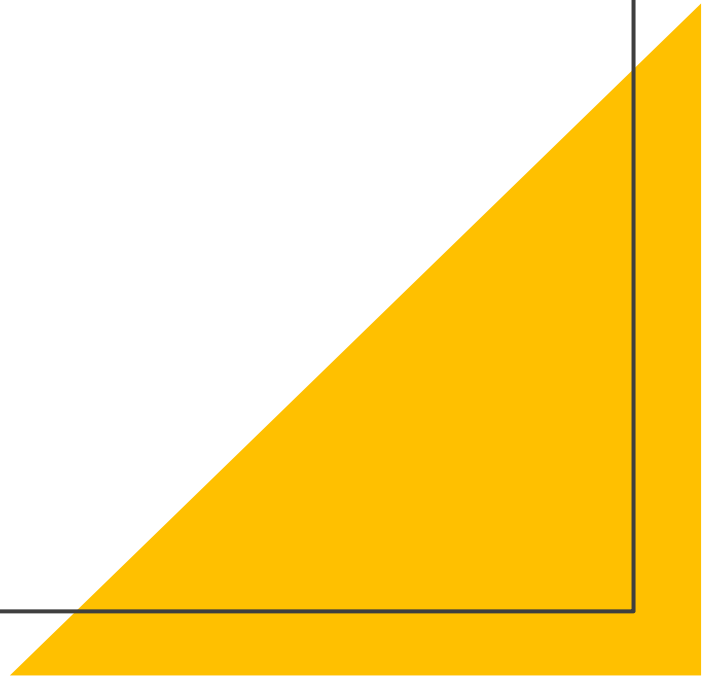
# Bridging the Gap: Linking CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early and the DEC Recommended Practices to Strengthen Early Childhood Inclusion

2026 International Early Childhood  
Inclusion Institute

May 20, 2026

# Act Early and aRPy Ambassadors

- **Melissa Crist**, Idaho
- **Deepa Srinivasavaradan**, New Jersey
- **Amanda Berry**, North Carolina



# Session Objectives:

- Explore LTSAE tools and resources and the DEC Recommended Practices
- Discuss how both can be used to expand access, participation, and supports
- Plan for integration of LTSAE and the DEC Recommended Practices





# Defining Inclusion

***Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society.***

- ***DEC & NAEYC Joint Position Statement, 2009***

# Defining Features

**Access:** Providing access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments.

**Participation:** Promoting belonging, participation, and engagement of children with and without disabilities in inclusive settings in a variety of intentional ways.

**Supports:** Systems-level infrastructure - professional development, collaboration among stakeholders, specialized services, and family engagement as a core strategy.

# Two Initiatives



## **CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early. Ambassadors**

- 2011
- CDC initiative that aims to improve early identification of developmental delays and disabilities by facilitating family-engaged developmental monitoring so children and their families can get the early services and support they need.

## **DEC Recommended Practices (aRPy) Ambassadors**

- 2016
- Reach out to and cultivate relationships with partners committed to improving systems, services, and outcomes for young children with or at risk for disabilities and their families.



Learn the Signs. Act Early

# Family-Engaged Developmental Monitoring

---

“FEDM is defined as an intentional **partnership of families and providers** working to highlight a child’s developmental progress and identify opportunities for support and education for positive outcomes.”



## Your child at 2 years\*

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Age \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

Milestones matter! How your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, and moves offers important clues about his or her development. Check the milestones your child has reached by age 2. Take this with you and talk with your child's doctor at every well-child visit about the milestones your child has reached and what to expect next.



### What most children do by this age:

#### Social/Emotional Milestones

- Notices when others are hurt or upset, like pausing or looking sad when someone is crying
- Looks at your face to see how to react in a new situation

#### Language/Communication Milestones

- Points to things in a book when you ask, like "Where is the bear?"
- Says at least two words together, like "More milk."
- Points to at least two body parts when you ask him to show you
- Uses more gestures than just waving and pointing, like blowing a kiss or nodding yes

#### Cognitive Milestones

##### (learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- Holds something in one hand while using the other hand; for example, holding a container and taking the lid off

- Tries to use switches, knobs, or buttons on a toy
- Plays with more than one toy at the same time, like putting toy food on a toy plate

#### Movement/Physical Development Milestones

- Kicks a ball
- Runs
- Walks (not climbs) up a few stairs with or without help
- Eats with a spoon

**\* It's time for developmental screening!**  
At 2 years, your child is due for an autism screening, as recommended for all children by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Ask the doctor about your child's developmental screening.

### Other important things to share with the doctor...

- What are some things you and your child do together?
- What are some things your child likes to do?
- Is there anything your child does or does not do that concerns you?
- Has your child lost any skills he/she once had?
- Does your child have any special healthcare needs or was he/she born prematurely?

**You know your child best.** Don't wait. If your child is not meeting one or more milestones, has lost skills he or she once had, or you have other concerns, act early. Talk with your child's doctor, share your concerns, and ask about developmental screening. If you or the doctor are still concerned:

1. Ask for a referral to a specialist who can evaluate your child more; and
2. Call your state or territory's early intervention program to find out if your child can get services to help. Learn more and find the number at [cdc.gov/FindEI](http://cdc.gov/FindEI).

For more on how to help your child, visit [cdc.gov/Concerned](http://cdc.gov/Concerned).

**Don't wait.**  
Acting early can make  
a real difference!



American Academy  
of Pediatrics  
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

# Milestone Checklists

By the age listed on the milestone checklists, 75% - 90% of all children at that age should be hitting all of the listed developmental milestones.

Checklists address four domains of development

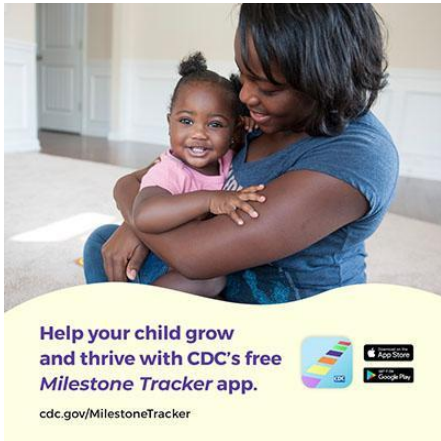
Social

Language

Cognitive

Movement

# “Milestone Tracker” Mobile App

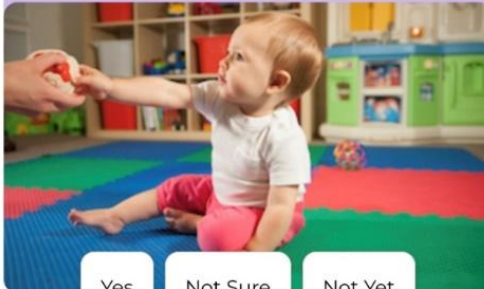


Menu icon Maya ▾ 0


Social 8 to go | Language 3 to go | Cognitive 6 to go | Movement 6 to go | When to Act Early

## 18 Month Milestone Checklist

Likes to hand things to others as play



Yes | Not Sure | Not Yet

Notes will save automatically, enter them here. 

Menu icon Maya ▾ 0

## Maya's 18 Month Summary

Below are the responses you entered for Maya.

- Click "Email Summary" below to email a summary of your child's milestones to yourself or other care providers.
- Click "Show Doctor" to share a summary during your child's doctor visit.

If you have noted any concerns or selected "not yet" or "not sure" for any milestones, talk to your child's doctor, share the summary, ask for developmental screening, and go to [cdc.gov/FindEI](https://cdc.gov/FindEI) to learn more about services that can help. For more information, visit [cdc.gov/Concerned](https://cdc.gov/Concerned).

Email Summary

Show Doctor

English | Español

Unanswered

Menu icon Maya ▾ 0





## Tips and Activities



You can help your child learn and grow. Talk, read, sing, and play together every day. Below are some activities to enjoy with your 18 month old child today.

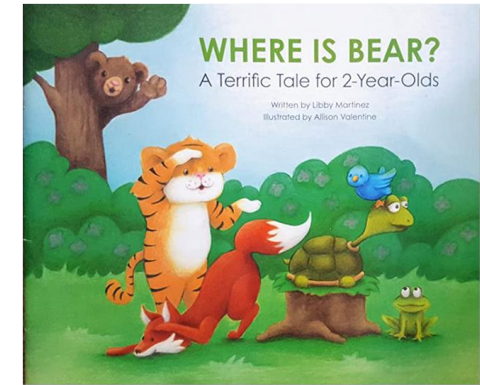
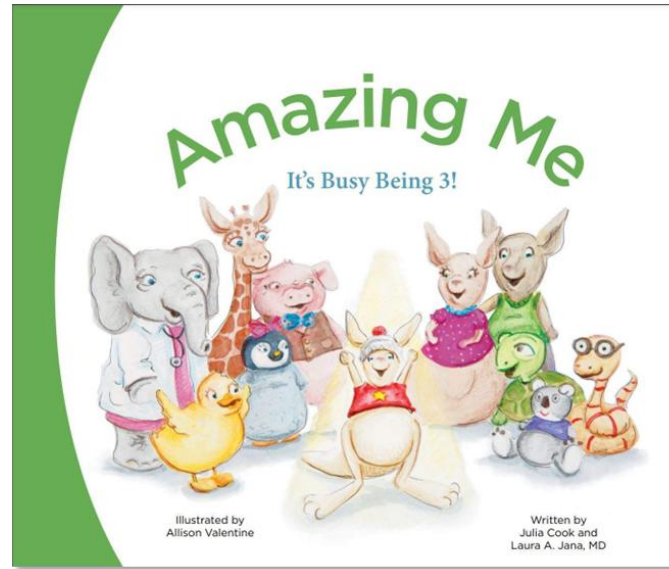
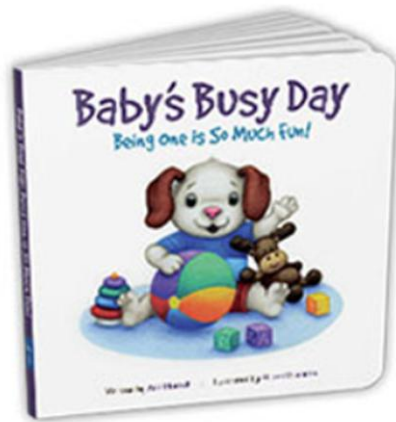
All ▾

Provide a safe, loving environment. It's important to be consistent and predictable.

 Favorite  Remind Me

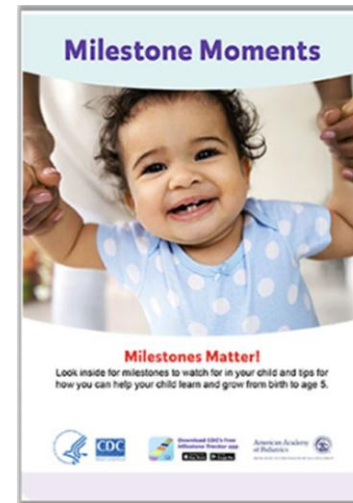
Praise good behaviors more than you punish bad behaviors (use only very brief time outs).

 Favorite  Remind Me



Let's Explore!

---



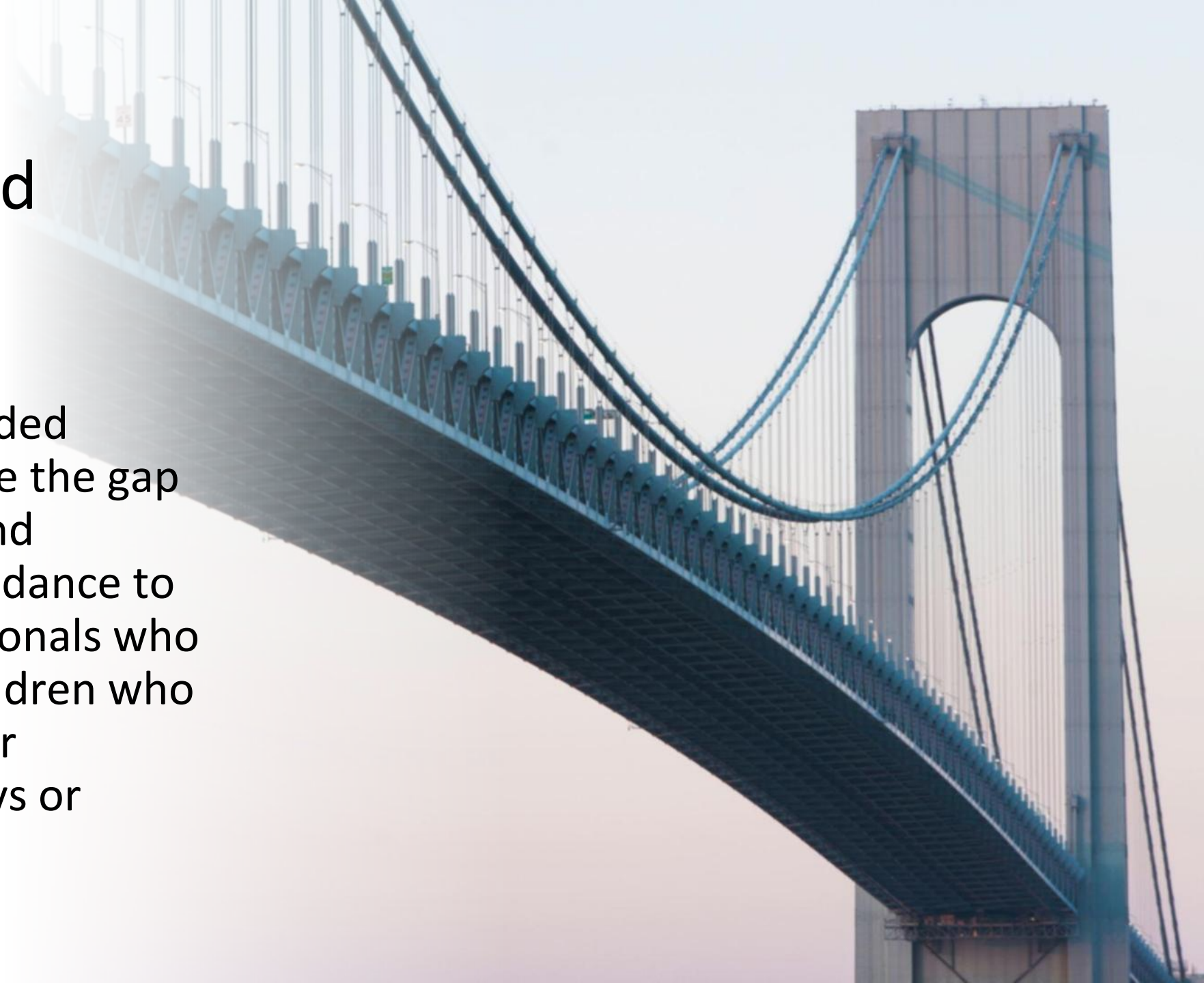
# Resources for All

- [Healthcare Providers](#)
- [Early Care and Education Programs](#)
- [Early Head Start/Head Start Programs](#)
- [WIC Programs](#)
- [Home Visiting Programs](#)
- [ALL RESOURCES](#)



# DEC Recommended Practices

The DEC Recommended Practices (RPs) bridge the gap between research and practice, offering guidance to parents and professionals who work with young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays or disabilities.





# RP Topic Areas

- Leadership – 14 practices
- Assessment – 11 practices
- Environment – 6 practices
- Family – 10 practices
- Instruction – 13 practices
- Interaction – 5 practices
- Teaming and Collaboration – 5 practices
- Transition – 2 practices



# Recommended Practices and Inclusion

# Purpose of DEC RPs

The purpose of the DEC Recommended Practices is to highlight those practices specifically known to promote the outcomes of young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays/disabilities and to support their families in accordance with the DEC/NAEYC (2009) position statement on early childhood inclusion.



# RP Examples

---

L3

Leaders develop and implement policies, structures, and practices that promote shared decision making with practitioners and families.

Examples

- *A preschool program director encourages practitioners to provide feedback on policies and practices that impact their work and takes constructive action based on this feedback.*
- *A Head Start director provides opportunities for active and meaningful participation of family members in advisory capacities and takes constructive action based on the advice of families.*

A7

Practitioners obtain information about the child's skills in daily activities, routines, and environments such as home, center, and community.

Examples

- *A family member reports that the child has some challenging behaviors in the early evening. An early interventionist schedules a home visit at that time to try to understand the issues and find potential solutions with the family.*
- *A family reports that their child, who is very quiet in his preschool setting, talks a lot at home. An early childhood teacher asks the family to capture some examples of his communication on a video to share with her.*

# RP Examples

---

E1

Practitioners 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.

Examples

- *An occupational therapist visits a family during meal time in their home to help the parents problem solve positioning or feeding strategies, so their child can eat and socialize with the entire family instead of eating before or after the rest of the family.*
- *A physical therapist goes on a shopping trip to assist a parent of a child who uses an assistive device for mobility, to develop a new routine to ensure the child's safety while navigating the parking lot and store.*

TC1

Practitioners representing multiple disciplines and families work together as a team to plan and implement supports and services to meet the unique needs of each child and family.

Examples

- *A physical therapist and special instructor meet to talk with the family about the child's current abilities and progress and modify current strategies to align with the child's current level of performance.*
- *An early childhood teacher discusses her ideas and concerns about a child's progress with the consulting speech language pathologist and they develop additional teaching strategies.*

# Performance Checklists and Practice Guides

## Types



### [Performance Checklists](#)

Promote use the DECRRPs, perform practitioner self-evaluation



### [Practice Guides for Practitioners](#)

Explain the practices, and recognize signs of success



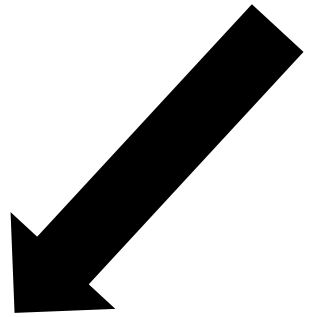
### [Practice Guides for Families](#)

Explain the practices, and recognize signs of success



### [aRPy Ambassadors](#)

Find one near you!



# Practice Guides

INSTRUCTION Practice Guide for Practitioners 3 of 4

## Embedded Instruction

Embedded instruction involves multiple, brief teaching interactions between a teacher and child during everyday classroom activities.

By identifying functional behavior targets, selecting classroom activities best suited for embedded learning opportunities, and using planned and intentional instructional strategies, teachers can help children learn new behavior for participating in classroom activities throughout the day.



DEC Recommended Practices: Instruction 1, 2, 4–6

© 2026 ECTA Center <https://ectacenter.org/decrp>

**ecta** Early Childhood  
Technical Assistance Center

## Planning for and Using Embedded Instruction Practices

- Identify behavior and skills the child needs to learn to participate in everyday classroom activities. Observe the child in different activities to determine which child behavior would be useful and important for promoting the child's engagement and independence in the activities. Select target behavior that build on the child's current capabilities.
- Examine the classroom schedule to identify those activities and routines that would provide opportunities for the child to use the target behaviors. Select times of the day and classroom happenings where the behavior likely would occur as a natural part of participation. Embed learning opportunities across different activities and routines that are of interest to the child.
- Arrange the environment in ways that ensure the child's engagement in the selected activities and cue the child to the target behavior. For example, to encourage a child to use a gesture and vocalization to request an object, provide toys and materials of interest to the child and set them slightly out of reach.
- Pay attention to the child while he or she is engaged in the selected activities. Join in the child's activity and take turns with the child to keep them engaged. When the child shows interest in an object or action, prompt the child to use the target behavior by providing a cue (for example, looking at the child expectantly), asking a question ("What would you like to do?"), or giving an instruction ("Tell me what you want.")
- Provide the child assistance to ensure that he or she has success doing the target behavior. You can draw the child's attention to the "correct" behavioral response by pointing or tapping an appropriate object. Demonstrate the target behavior by providing a verbal or physical model. If needed, assist the child physically to help them do the behavior (for example, guiding their hand with yours). Provide the child enough time and only as much support as needed to do the target behavior. Decrease the amount of assistance as the child learns the target behavior.
- Respond positively to the child's use of the target behavior. Provide descriptive praise, access to the toys or materials of interest, assistance in doing a desired action, or continued participation in the activity. Provide the child multiple opportunities to use the target behavior in different activities throughout the day.

## A Quick Peek

After observing Tucker in different classroom activities, Peg and the other classroom teachers determined that he could have more participation in activities, if he were able to use simple signs to label desired objects and materials. They decided to embed numerous opportunities for learning several signs during the activities he most enjoyed.

They determined that they could use activities such as lunchtime, morning and afternoon snack, and playtime in the home living area to embed opportunities for learning to make the sign for milk.

During snack time, Peg watched as Tucker reached for his cup of milk. Peg smiled at Tucker and said, "What do you want to drink?"

Tucker looked at her, grinned, and looked at the cup of milk.

Peg made the sign for milk as she said, "Milk? You want milk?"

After Tucker looked at his cup again, Peg said, "Milk," helped him make the sign for milk, and then gave him the cup of milk to drink.

Peg and the other teachers gave him many opportunities during the selected activities to make this sign. Gradually, they needed to provide him less help, and soon, when Tucker was ready for something to drink, he eagerly could look at Peg and make the sign for milk.

## Signs of Success

- Children stay engaged in everyday classroom activities for longer periods of time
- Children have fun and enjoy taking the lead during classroom activities
- Children are more independent when participating in everyday classroom activities



Volodymyr Tverdohkhib, Shutterstock

The ECTA Center is a program of the FPG Child Development Institute of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, funded through cooperative agreement number H326P220002 from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the Department of Education's position or policy.

Project Officer: Julia Martin Eile





*Scan me!*




## **DEC Recommended Practices with Examples**

# Let's Explore!

---

## So Why Use Both LTSAE and DEC RPs to support inclusion?

- ★ **LTSAE** helps families and caregivers identify concerns EARLY and empowers families with the tools and resources needed to access services and support. Builds caregiver knowledge of child development and community resources.
  - ★ **DEC RPs** guide everything families and professionals do next with a priority on inclusion.
- 



# Meet Maria and Liam

- Maria is the mother of Liam, a 3-year-old boy who recently began attending a local childcare center. Liam lives with his mother and older sister in a suburban community. Maria works full-time and enrolled Liam in childcare to support his early learning and social development.

# Emerging Developmental Concerns

- Over the past six months, Maria has become increasingly concerned because Liam speaks very few words and rarely interacts with other children. At home, he often plays alone, avoids eye contact, and becomes upset when routines change. Although Maria initially believed Liam was simply “a late talker,” staff at the childcare center expressed concerns about his development and behavior.
- Maria feels overwhelmed, guilty, and unsure of what to do next. She worries that she may have missed early warning signs and is fearful about Liam’s future.

How can you utilize both Learn the Signs. Act Early and the DEC RPs to support Maria and Liam?



Questions?

**aRPy**

*Ambassadors*



Learn the Signs. Act Early.

Ambassadors

# Action Plan

---

- What is one thing you learned?
- What is one thing you will do?
- What will you need to do it?



# Thank you!

**Melissa Crist**, Idaho Act Early Ambassador/aRPy Ambassador,  
[mcrist@uidaho.edu](mailto:mcrist@uidaho.edu)

**Deepa Srinivasavaradan**, New Jersey Act Early  
Ambassador/aRPy Ambassador, [deepas@spanadvocacy.org](mailto:deepas@spanadvocacy.org)

**Amanda Berry**, North Carolina Act Early Ambassador/aRPy  
Ambassador, [amanda@firstwnc.org](mailto:amanda@firstwnc.org)