

The NDBI Navigator

NOVEMBER 2025 | ISSUE 10

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Monthly Newsletter

Leading the Way in
**NDBI
Strategies
& Support**

By The NDBI Navigator™



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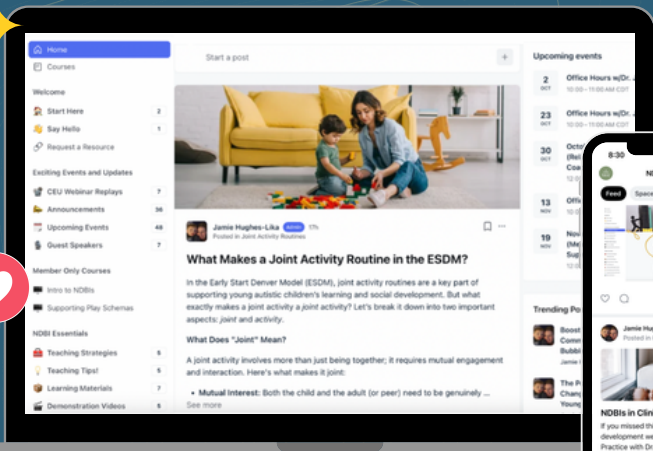
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Letter from the Editors

Dear NDBI Community,

Welcome to the November issue of The NDBI Navigator Notes! As we move toward the end of the year, it's a wonderful time to reflect on how far our field has come—and how we can continue working together to make NDBI practices accessible and sustainable across settings. This month's issue focuses on practical strategies and big-picture questions that help bridge research and everyday practice.

Our Research Roundup features a qualitative study by Pickard et al. (2024) examining the barriers to implementing NDBI within clinical ABA settings. The authors highlight both systemic and practice-level challenges, offering valuable insights into what supports are needed to make developmentally appropriate, naturalistic approaches more feasible and widely adopted.

In our How-To Hub, we're diving into the use of communication temptations and playful sabotage—powerful tools for sparking engagement and encouraging children to communicate with purpose and meaning. You'll find creative examples and easy ways to incorporate these strategies into daily routines. This month's Playful Possibilities turns an everyday item—spray bottles—into a fun and versatile learning tool. From fine motor practice to cause-and-effect play, spray bottles can inspire shared enjoyment and set the stage for supporting a wide range of developmental goals.

In Ask & Answer, we respond to the question: “How can I help a child understand and use gestures like waving, pointing, or nodding during interactions?” We'll explore ways to model, scaffold, and celebrate gestures as meaningful forms of communication that build social connection and pave the way for language growth.

Thank you, as always, for being part of this thoughtful and committed community. Your dedication to integrating play, connection, and evidence-based practice continues to move our field forward—one meaningful interaction at a time.

With appreciation,

Dr. Jamie and Dr. Sienna

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Dr. Jamie



Dr. Sienna



Research Roundup

Research Highlights for Real-World Impact

The Challenges Associated with Changing Practice: Barriers to Implementing Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions in ABA Settings



Key Takeaways

Pickard et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative study exploring barriers to implementing Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs) within Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) clinical service settings. Semi-structured interviews with 18 Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) and Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs) examined how providers perceive NDBI and discrete trial training (DTT) approaches, their training and clinical experience, and the ease and effectiveness of both approaches. Findings revealed generally positive attitudes toward NDBI, with participants emphasizing the possibility for enhanced child engagement, autonomy, and generalization of skills. However, misconceptions about NDBI principles, implementation difficulties, and systemic challenges—such as existing training infrastructure and profit-driven organizational cultures—were a few of the potential barriers to adoption shared by participants. Results highlight the current perception of NDBI strategies among various stakeholders, barriers to use in clinical ABA settings, and next steps for increasing the use of developmental practices across settings.

Pickard, K., Islam, N., Green, N., Chatson, E., Kuhn, J., & Yosick, R. (2024). The challenges associated with changing practice: Barriers to implementing naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions in aba settings. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 17(4), 1074-1088.

Reflection Questions

1. How do the findings from Pickard et al. highlight the gap between conceptual understanding of NBDI principles and their practical implementation within ABA service models? What steps might be necessary at the individual and systems level to close this gap?
2. The authors discuss how billing structures, productivity expectations, and organizational norms can discourage adoption of naturalistic, child-led interventions. How can practitioners and program leaders advocate for systems that value developmental engagement as much as discrete skill acquisition?
3. The study notes tensions between maintaining fidelity to NBDI models and adapting strategies to fit within existing professional contexts. How can providers balance fidelity with contextual adaptation while preserving the overall integrity of NBDI approaches?



Explore More NBDI Articles

Dueñas, A. D., D'Agostino, S. R., Bravo, A., Horton, E., Jobin, A., Salvatore, G. L., ... & Pellecchia, M. (2023). Beyond the task list: A proposed integration of naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions to BCBA training. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 1-16.

Kasari, C., Shire, S., Shih, W., Landa, R., Levato, L., & Smith, T. (2023). Spoken language outcomes in limited language preschoolers with autism and global developmental delay: RCT of early intervention approaches. *Autism Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2932>

Rogers, S. J., Yoder, P., Estes, A., Warren, Z., McEachin, J., Munson, J., ... & Whelan, F. (2021). A multisite randomized controlled trial comparing the effects of intervention intensity and intervention style on outcomes for young children with autism. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 60(6), 710-722.

Playful Possibilities

Everyday Items, Endless Fun!

Social Engagement and Learning with Water Spray Bottles

Everyday Items



Endless Fun

Welcome to "Playful Possibilities: Everyday Items, Endless Fun," where we explore how everyday items can foster social engagement, motivation, and communication in young autistic children. This month, we're diving into the versatility of water spray bottles! With their fun sensory element and interactive nature, spray bottles offer endless opportunities for meaningful play and learning. By incorporating Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention (NDBI) strategies, you can transform this simple household item into a powerful tool for fostering communication, engagement, and connection.

1 *Spray the* Target

Description

Set up a target (e.g., a chalk drawing, paper on a wall, or a toy) and encourage your child to aim and spray.

Learning Opportunities

This activity builds hand-eye coordination, focus, and following directions.

NDBI Strategies

- ★ **Building Anticipation:** Say, “Ready... aim... spray!” while pointing at the target to excite your child.
- ★ **Expanding Communication:** Model simple phrases like “hit it!” or “more spray!” to encourage language use.
- ★ **Following the Child’s Lead:** If your child sprays something else, join in their exploration by narrating, “You’re spraying the grass—look how it moves!”
- ★ **Celebrate Small Wins:** Cheer when your child sprays the target, saying, “You hit it—great job!”

2 *It's* Raining!

Description

Spray water into the air so it falls gently like raindrops, letting your child feel the “rain” on their hands, face, or body.

Learning Opportunities

This activity promotes sensory exploration, joint attention, and body awareness.

NDBI Strategies

- ★ **Building Anticipation:** Say, “Here comes the rain!” as you hold up the spray bottle and pause before spraying. Encourage your child to look up or hold out their hands to “catch” the rain.
- ★ **Following the Child’s Lead:** If your child giggles or reaches for the water, join in by spraying where they’re focused, like their hands or feet, narrating their actions with phrases like, “You caught the raindrops!”
- ★ **Expanding Communication:** Model words like “rain,” “wet,” or “more” and encourage your child to repeat or use gestures to request another “rainstorm.”
- ★ **Celebrate Small Wins:** Applaud when your child reaches for the water, laughs, or reacts with joy, saying, “You love the rain—great catching those drops!”



3 *Bubble Blast* Spray

Description

Blow bubbles and let your child spray them to pop them.

Learning Opportunities

Enhances visual tracking, hand-eye coordination, and sensory fun.

NDBI Strategies



Following Your Child's Lead: If your child shows interest in specific bubbles, target those together and narrate, “You’re spraying the big bubble!”



Building Anticipation: Pause before blowing bubbles and say, “Are you ready? Here they come!”



Expanding Communication: Encourage your child to say, “Pop!” or “More bubbles!” while playing.



Celebrate Small Wins: Cheer when your child pops a bubble, saying, “You got it—amazing aim!”

Enhancing Attention

Use playful pauses and exaggerated expressions to draw your child's focus. For example, hold the spray bottle and say, "What should we spray next?" Pause dramatically to build anticipation before spraying. For the 'it's raining' activity, hold the spray bottle high, pause dramatically, and say, "Here comes the rain!" Encourage your child to look up or reach out their hands to feel the water. Vary the speed or direction of the "rainfall" to keep their attention, like gently misting over their arms or making a "surprise rainstorm" by spraying faster.

Boosting Motivation

Keep activities fresh by changing targets or introducing new games. For example, use favorite toys or objects to keep your child's interest high. Follow their lead if they find a creative way to use the spray bottle. For the bubble blast spray activity, use different types of bubbles, such as giant bubbles or small clusters, to keep your child intrigued. You can also challenge them by blowing bubbles faster or moving them to different areas, prompting your child to spray and "catch" them.

Supporting Social Engagement

Mirror your child's actions with the spray bottle, adding playful sound effects like "swoosh" or "splash!" Use shared smiles and animated commentary to create a sense of connection and fun. For the 'it's raining' activity, join in by pretending to get caught in the rain, saying, "Oh no, I'm getting wet!" Laugh together as you "hide" under an imaginary umbrella or let the rain fall on you both. For the bubble blast spray activity, blow bubbles for your child and pretend to chase them, saying, "Catch me if you can!" Add playful commentary like, "You popped the big one—wow!" or "Uh-oh, I missed it!" to create a sense of teamwork and fun.

Conclusion

Water spray bottles are more than just a household item—they're a gateway to playful interaction, sensory exploration, and skill-building. By incorporating NDBI strategies like following your child's lead, embedding language goals, and celebrating small achievements, you can transform everyday moments into meaningful opportunities for learning and connection.

Stay tuned for next month's "Playful Possibilities" feature, where we'll share even more ways to turn simple objects into extraordinary tools for growth and bonding. Together, let's celebrate the small steps that lead to big connections!

How-to-Hub

Sabotage (Withholding a Needed Part)



How-to-Hub

Welcome to the How-To Hub!

This month, we're highlighting an NDBI classic:
"Sabotage" (Withholding a Needed Part).

No, not tricking—engineering teachable moments. By briefly withholding a small but essential piece (the lid, the straw, the puzzle frame, the batteries), you create a natural reason for the child to communicate, problem-solve, and engage with you. Done thoughtfully, sabotage turns "stuck" moments into shared success—without pressure or power struggles.

🔑 What to do:

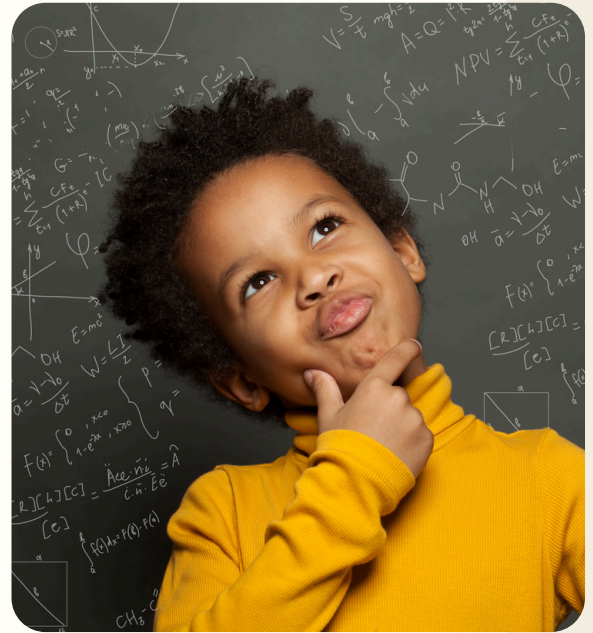
Set up activities so the child needs you (or a partner) to make the fun happen—then pause and wait. When the child signals (reach, look, sound, gesture, word), respond immediately with the needed part or action and celebrate the initiation.

✨ Why it works:

It builds motivation and communication right where the child already cares. The contingency is clear: "My action gets the thing working." That clarity sparks requests, eye gaze, pointing, words/signs, and social reciprocity.

💡 Pro Tip:

Keep the delay short (2–3 seconds), the affect warm, and the "missing piece" obvious. Reinforce any attempt (a reach or look counts) and fade the sabotage over time so independence grows.





Sabotage (Withholding a Needed Part)

By infusing play and routines with joy, warmth, and animation, you can transform everyday interactions into powerful opportunities for connection and learning. Positive affect is not just about having fun—it's a foundational strategy in NDBIs that supports social-emotional growth, language development, and meaningful engagement.



Five Everyday Ways to Use “Sabotage”

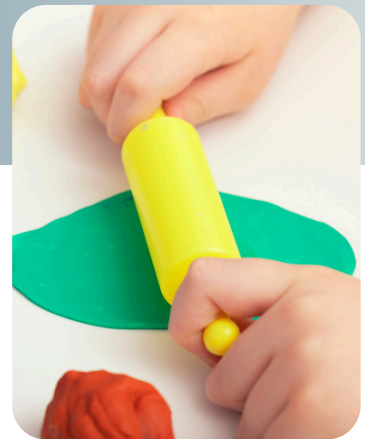
1. Snack Time

- ★ **What to do:** Offer yogurt without a spoon or a pouch without the straw; hold up the missing item and pause expectantly.
- 💡 **Why it works:** The child is already motivated; the missing tool invites a request (“spoon,” point, look).
- ★ **Pro Tip:** Accept any communicative form first; shape to clearer pointing/words later.



2. Art & Play-Dough

- ★ **What to do:** Provide play-dough without cutters/roller or markers without caps off. Wait for a look/gesture.
- 💡 **Why it works:** The blocked action prompts help or more requests.
- ★ **Pro Tip:** Hold the tool near your face to promote eye gaze→tool→eye gaze loops.



3. Building & Puzzles



What to do: Give a puzzle without the frame or blocks without the base; present the missing base after a signal.



Why it works: The “can’t complete it” moment invites joint problem-solving.



Pro Tip: Narrate minimally (“Need base?”) and wait; avoid over-prompting.



4. Bubbles & Wind-Ups



What to do: Hand the closed bubble bottle or wind-up toy without turning it; pause before the “go” action.



Why it works: Creates high-value chances for ‘open,’ ‘help,’ ‘go,’ ‘more.’



Pro Tip: Use a consistent cue (“Ready...?”) then wait to invite initiation.



5. Routines & Getting Dressed



What to do: Offer the coat without the zipper started or shoes without opening the Velcro. Wait for a request or look.



Why it works: Everyday moments become functional communication practice.



Pro Tip: Reinforce with the natural outcome (zip starts, shoe opens), plus a quick smile or “You did it!”



Bottom line: Smart, short, and supportive “sabotage” transforms everyday hiccups into high-motivation communication moments, strengthening initiation, shared attention, and confidence—one joyful fix at a time.



Ask and Answer

Your Questions, Expert Insights



Ask & Answer

Welcome to the Ask and Answer section of the newsletter, where we address your most pressing questions about Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs). This is your space to explore the “how-to’s” of integrating NDBI strategies into your practice, gain insights on common challenges, and discover practical solutions from experts in the field.

Whether you’re curious about coaching caregivers, adapting NDBI for a specific setting, or fine-tuning your intervention strategies, we’ve got you covered. Each month, we select reader-submitted questions and provide thoughtful, actionable answers to help you make an impact in your work with autistic children and their families.

Have a question you’d like answered in the newsletter? Send us an email at support@thendbinavigator.com

Together, we can learn, grow, and empower each other to deliver meaningful, evidence-based support.





Reader Question

How can I help a child understand and use gestures like waving, pointing, or nodding during interactions?



Our Answer

That's a great question! In NDBI, gestures are powerful “bridge” skills —fast, flexible ways to communicate that reduce frustration and invite connection. Children learn them best when gestures are modeled naturally, practiced inside play, and reinforced by meaningful outcomes (not stickers). The goal is for gestures to feel useful and joyful—not drilled—so kids choose them on their own.

From Question to Action in 5 Steps

1 Model & Mirror in Real Moments

Children learn what they see, especially when timing matches the moment.

- ✓ Exaggerate friendly gestures in context (big wave when someone arrives/leaves)
- ✓ Pair each gesture with the same short phrase (“Hi!” + wave; “All done” + palm-out)
- ✓ Mirror the child’s movements and add one simple gesture on top
- ✓ Celebrate *any* attempt—tiny finger lift toward a point counts!



From Question to Action in 5 Steps

2 Embed Gestures in Play/JARs

Build gestures into Joint Activity Routines so they repeat predictably.



- ✓ Pointing: *place two visible choices; pause and wait for an index finger reach*
- ✓ Waving: add “hello/goodbye” to characters, vehicles, or puppets in the routine
- ✓ Nodding/shaking: *make yes/no games (e.g., “Is the duck on my head?!”)*
- ✓ Use quick loops (setup → action → close) so a gesture “makes the magic happen”

3 Use Natural Payoffs (Function First)

Make the gesture work—the consequence should be exactly what the child wants.



- ✓ Point → gets that item/action immediately
- ✓ Wave “bye” → you hide/put away the toy with a playful flourish
- ✓ Nod “yes” → you start the preferred activity right away
- ✓ Keep reinforcement inside the activity (not tokens) so it stays meaningful

From Question to Action in 5 Steps

4

Scaffold, Then Fade

Support the motor pattern, then step back quickly.



- ✓ Start with least-to-most prompts: model → gesture hint → light physical cue (if needed)
- ✓ Add visual supports (choice cards, arrow to object, head icons for yes/no)
- ✓ Use expectant pause (2–3s) and an animated face to invite the try
- ✓ Fade prompts as soon as the child shows even a small independent movement

5

Gradually Expand Tolerance for Change

Help gestures travel beyond the therapy room.



- ✓ Practice with different partners (parent, teacher, sibling) and settings (home, playground)
- ✓ Use gestures for multiple functions: request, protest, greet, share, comment
- ✓ Keep language short and consistent (“Want?” with point; “Yes/No?” with head cue)
- ✓ Respect sensory/cultural differences (some children prefer subtle waves or chin points)

When gestures are modeled naturally, embedded in playful routines, and followed by immediate, meaningful outcomes, children discover that gestures work. Over time, you’ll see more spontaneous waving, pointing, and nodding—less frustration, more connection, and richer communication for everyone.

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Dr. Sienna Windsor

PhD, BCBA-D, LBA



Individualized Intervention

Assessments, goal setting, and one-on-one teaching.



Coaching and Family Education

Support using NDBI strategies with your child across daily routines to address challenges and achieve goals that are important to your family.



Consultation and Training

Resources and guidance for families, educators, and organizations on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood.