

The NDBI Navigator

JUNE 2025 | ISSUE 05

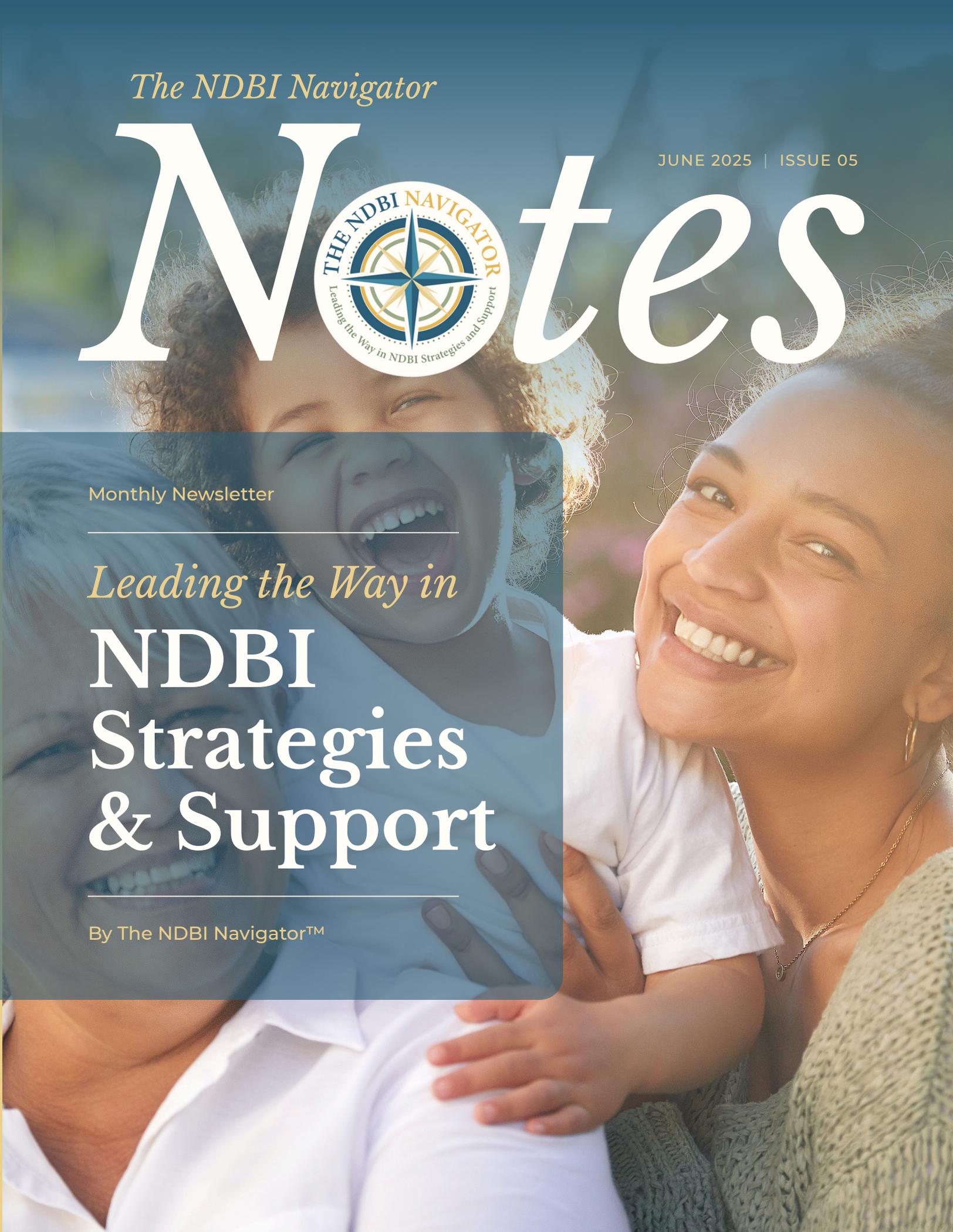
N Notes

Monthly Newsletter

Leading the Way in

NDBI Strategies & Support

By The NDBI Navigator™



Online Courses

The NBDI Navigator Academy | courses.thendbinavigator.com



BA30: Implementing the ESDM to Enhance Social Engagement in Young Autistic Children

24 Lessons
1 CEU



ESDM Advanced Workshop Supplemental Modules

97 Lessons
8.5 CEUs



Behavior Technicians, RBTs, Paraprofessionals

T19: NBDI Essentials for Autism Providers

55 Lessons
4 PDUs



Behavior Technicians, RBTs, Paraprofessionals

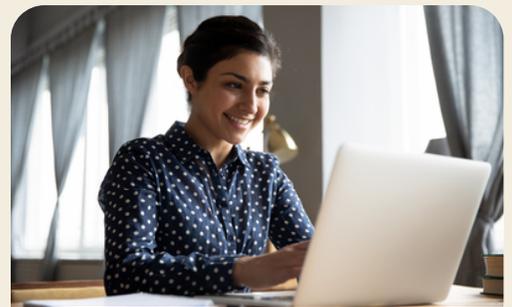
T18. Patterns in Play (Autism Providers)

23 Lessons
1 PDU



BA29: Patterns in Play: Using Play Schemas to Promote Engagement

44 Lessons
2 CEUs



MC01: Writing ABA Session Notes Master Class

40 Lessons
3 CEUs



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Share wins, troubleshoot challenges, and grow—*together.*



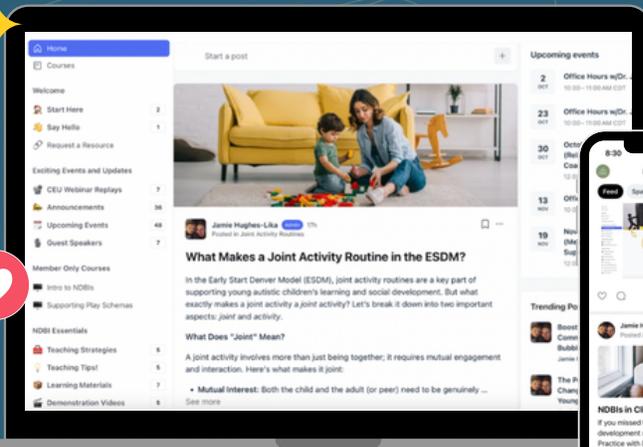
All the Tools, None of the Overwhelm

Everything is streamlined, actionable, and designed to make your job easier



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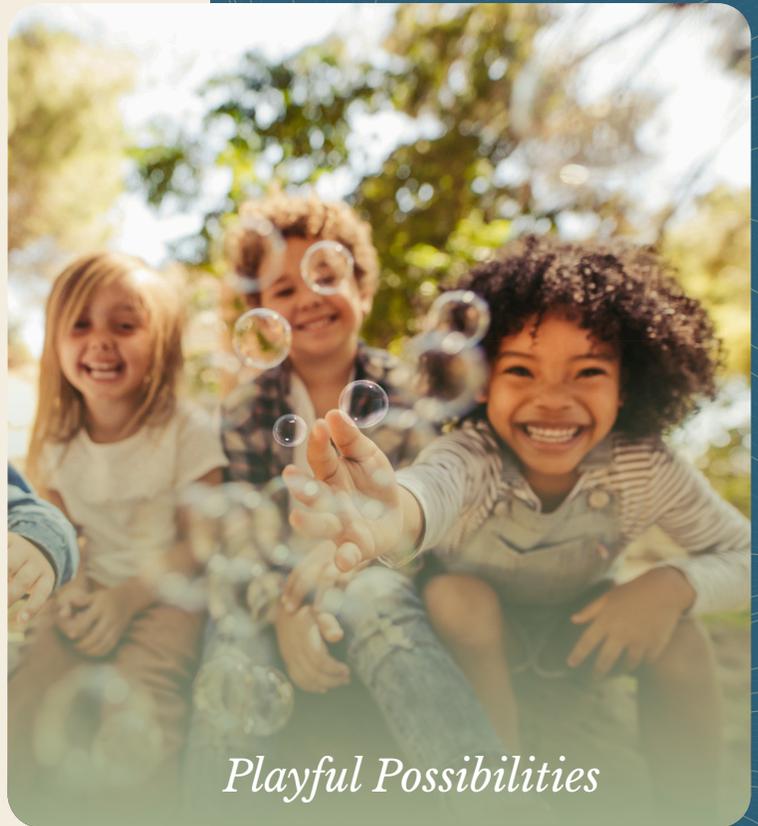
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NDBI Events

Letter from the Editors

Dear NDBI Community,

Welcome to the June issue of The NDBI Navigator Notes! As we move into the heart of summer, we're reminded of the joy and energy that come from connection, play, and presence—foundational elements of Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs) and of this month's content.

In our Research Roundup, we're highlighting a powerful new article by D'Agostino et al. (2025), which shares the perspectives of autistic adults and parents of young autistic children on the strategies used in NDBI practices within community preschool settings. Their voices provide critical insights that can guide us toward more respectful, responsive, and meaningful implementation across diverse environments.

Our How-To Hub this month zooms in on affect and animation—two essential elements for capturing attention, sparking joy, and enhancing engagement. You'll find tips and reminders for using your facial expressions, tone, and body language to amplify learning in natural ways.

Over in Playful Possibilities, we're embracing the magic of bubbles! Whether indoors or outdoors, bubbles offer endless opportunities for building joint attention, turn-taking, communication, and fun.

And in our Ask & Answer section, we're responding to a thoughtful question about supporting children who get “stuck” on a preferred activity and have difficulty moving on. We'll explore strategies for promoting flexibility while honoring children's interests and emotional needs.

As always, our goal is to provide you with practical, evidence-based tools to support your work—and the children and families you serve. Thank you for being a part of this growing and committed NDBI community.

With appreciation,

Dr. Jamie and Dr. Sienna

Jamie Hughes-Lika, PhD, BCBA-D, LBA, IBA
Sienna Windsor, PhD, BCBA-D, LBA



Dr. Jamie



Dr. Sienna



Research Roundup

Research Highlights for Real-World Impact

Exploring the Social Validity and Diffusion Potential of Common Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention Strategies Implemented in Community Preschools.



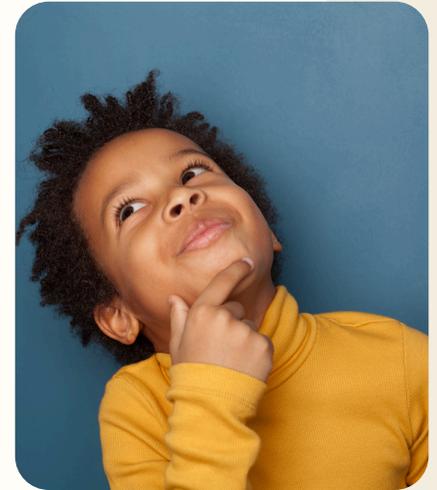
Key Takeaways

This article explores how autistic adults and parents of young autistic children perceive the strategies used in Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs) in community preschool settings. Using both surveys and interviews, researchers found that both groups generally viewed NDBI strategies positively, describing them as natural, respectful, and child-centered. Parents tended to rate NDBIs more favorably than autistic adults, though both groups saw them as beneficial for social communication and overall development. Participants emphasized the need for broader awareness and dissemination of NDBIs and recommended involving autistic individuals in the design and communication of these strategies. The study supports NDBIs as socially valid and highlights their potential for wider use in early intervention.

D'Agostino, S. R., Landon, T. J., Roylance, A., Briggs, A., & Bhana-Lopez, N. (2025). Exploring the Social Validity and Diffusion Potential of Common Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention Strategies Implemented in Community Preschools. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(3), 357.

Reflection Questions

1. Given the identified need for greater dissemination and understanding of NDBIs, what role can practitioners play in increasing awareness and adoption of these strategies within their own communities or professional networks?
2. What tools can be used when implementing NDBI to ensure teaching strategies align with the values and lived experiences of those you aim to support?
3. In what areas is there more or less alignment between the eight common NDBI strategies described in the study (e.g., following the child's lead, modeling language, using communicative temptations) and existing practice guidelines for early childhood education?



Explore More NBDI Articles

Chazin, K. T., Ledford, J. R., Wilson-Moses, J. M., Rajaraman, A., & Juárez, A. P. (2024). Centering autistic perspectives: Social acceptability of goals, learning contexts, and procedures for young autistic children. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 55, 812–831.

Huntington, R. N., Badgett, N., Rosenberg, N., Greeny, K., Bravo, A., Bristol, R., Byun, Y., & Park, M. (2023). Social validity in behavioral research: A selective review. *Perspectives on Behavior Science*, 46(1), 201–215.

Siller, M., Landa, R., Vivanti, G., Ingersoll, B., Jobin, A., Murphy, M., Pellecchia, M., Boyd, B., D'Agostino, S., Zierhut Ursu, C., & Morgan, L. (2024). Bridging priorities between naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions for autism and educational practice in inclusive early childhood education. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 44(1), 45–57.

Playful Possibilities

Everyday Items, Endless Fun!

Welcome to "Playful Possibilities: Everyday Items, Endless Fun," where we explore creative ways to use household items to foster social engagement, attention, and motivation in young autistic children.

Everyday Items



Endless Fun

In this article, we'll dive into the amazing potential of bubbles—a favorite for children of all ages! By incorporating Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention (NDBI) strategies, we'll explore how bubbles can support foundational social skills, from maintaining attention to boosting motivation and engagement.



Creative Play with Bubbles

Bubbles offer a fun, sensory-rich way to spark curiosity, connection, and joyful interaction. Their movement naturally invites attention, anticipation, and shared excitement—creating playful opportunities for social engagement and bonding.

Try these three simple activities to make the most of bubble play!

1 *Bubble* Chase

Description

Blow bubbles in different directions and encourage your child to chase and pop them. Move around as they follow, letting them lead the way.

Learning Opportunities

This activity encourages attention, engagement, and social reciprocity, as your child takes cues from you, follows directions, and participates in shared play.

NDBI Strategies

- ★ **Building Anticipation:** Hold the bubble wand up before blowing and say, “*Ready, set...go!*” This helps your child focus on the moment bubbles are about to appear, sustaining their attention.
- ★ **Encouraging Communication:** When they pop a bubble, celebrate together by saying, “*You got it!*” and see if they react or make sounds in response. You might even ask, “*More bubbles?*” to invite them to express their interest or prompt a gesture, word, or sound.
- ★ **Following Your Child’s Lead:** If they move toward certain bubbles or pop them in a specific way, join in or mimic their actions to build a sense of connection and shared play.

2 *Bubble Pop* Counting Game

Description

Blow a few bubbles at a time and count each bubble out loud as your child pops it. You can take turns blowing bubbles, giving your child the chance to watch, count, or pop them in a back-and-forth interaction.

Learning Opportunities

This game promotes turn-taking, attention, and counting. By making popping bubbles into a game, you're encouraging focused attention on both the bubbles and on you!

NDBI Strategies

- ★ **Turn Taking:** Say, “*My turn to blow bubbles!*” as you blow a few, then, “*Your turn to pop!*” This structured back-and-forth interaction promotes social reciprocity and reinforces that you’re both part of the game.
- ★ **Joint Attention and Counting:** Point to the bubbles and say, “*One, two, three...*” as they pop each bubble. Keep your tone playful and expressive to hold their interest and encourage them to look and listen.
- ★ **Waiting for Your Child’s Response:** Give pauses in between bubbles or counting to see if your child shows anticipation or excitement, helping build patience and attention.

3 *Catch The Bubble* Challenge

Description

Hold a bubble wand close to your child and encourage them to catch or pop the bubbles as they slowly float down. Make it a playful challenge by blowing bubbles one at a time or in bursts, then moving the wand around to add variety.

Learning Opportunities

This game supports coordination, focused attention, and communication, as your child reaches, tracks, and pops bubbles. It also encourages joint play, which helps reinforce social bonds.

NDBI Strategies

- ★ **Providing Choices:** Ask your child, “*Big bubble or Little bubbles?*” and let them indicate a preference. Providing choices builds independence and social engagement.
- ★ **Building Anticipation and Attention:** Before blowing, hold up the wand and look at your child, making an excited face to build anticipation. As bubbles float down, use expressive language like “Here it comes!” or “Catch it if you can!” to keep your child engaged.
- ★ **Narrating Actions:** Describe your child’s actions with positive phrases like “*You got it!*” or “*You’re popping bubbles!*” Narration reinforces joint attention and encourages a sense of shared joy.

Enhancing Attention

When blowing bubbles, try creating playful pauses to build anticipation, like holding the wand up before blowing or making a slow, exaggerated motion. This gives your child more time to watch and focus, building sustained attention through anticipation, and sustain engagement with the child.

Boosting Motivation

For children who love bubble play, add surprise or variety to keep the activity fresh. Try blowing bubbles quickly, then slowly, or blowing a big bubble followed by a flurry of small ones. Observing their reactions can guide you to find what motivates them most, keeping them interested and engaged.

Supporting Social Engagement

Join in your child's excitement by sharing expressions of surprise or joy with each bubble they pop. Narrate play with phrases like, "I'm going to get that bubble!" or "Here comes a big one!" to reinforce joint play. When your child shows excitement or interest, mirror their reactions, building a sense of connection and shared enjoyment.

Conclusion

Bubbles are more than just fun—they're a dynamic, low-cost way to support social engagement, attention, and motivation for young autistic children. By integrating NDBI strategies such as turn-taking, joint engagement, and providing choices, you can transform simple bubble play into an opportunity for meaningful interaction and learning.



Using Positive Affect & Animation

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.



1. Peekaboo Play

- ★ **What to do:** Make your voice playful, vary your tone (“*Where’s Jamie?... BOO!*”), and add big facial expressions.
- 💡 **Why it works:** Surprise and predictability in peekaboo spark anticipation and joy—core elements of social connection.
- ★ **Pro Tip:** Pause before the “*BOO!*” moment to build anticipation and encourage your child to initiate



2. Singing Songs & Fingerplays

- ★ **What to do:** Use sing-song voice, add hand motions, and exaggerate the rhythm and gestures (e.g., “*Twinkle, Twinkle*” or “*The Wheels on the Bus*”).
- 💡 **Why it works:** Music and rhythm boost memory and help children predict what’s coming next, supporting communication and participation.
- ★ **Pro Tip:** Pause at key moments to invite your child to fill in the blank (e.g., “*The horn on the bus goes...*”).



3. Storytime or Book Reading

- ★ **What to do:** Change your voice for different characters, use dramatic pauses, and point to pictures with excitement.
- 💡 **Why it works:** Animated storytelling builds attention, joint focus, and interest in language.
- ★ **Pro Tip:** Act surprised or silly when something happens in the story—*“Oh no! The bear is still asleep!”*

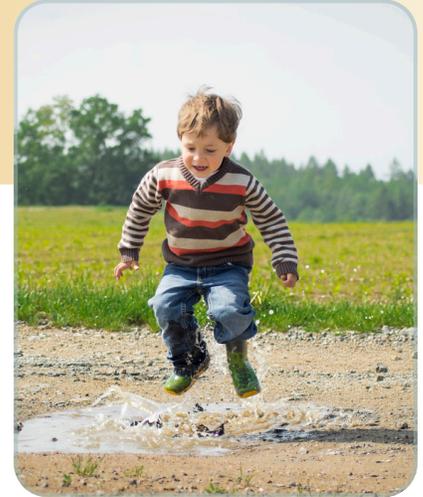


4. Toy Play

- ★ **What to do:** Give voices to toys, make playful sound effects (*“Vroom! Beep beep!”*), and react dramatically when something silly happens.
- 💡 **Why it works:** Adds life and emotion to toys, helping children connect and engage in pretend or symbolic play.
- ★ **Pro Tip:** Use exaggerated reactions—*“Whoa! That truck is going SO fast!”*—to encourage shared attention and imitation.



5. Movement Games (Tickles, Chase)



What to do: Pair physical actions with excited tones and exaggerated expressions—*“Ready...set...GO!”*



Why it works: Movement paired with positive affect boosts anticipation, supports communication (like requesting *“Go!”*), and encourages turn-taking.



Pro Tip: Try adding silly options: *“Should I spin you like a dinosaur or a race car?”* and act them out with over-the-top animation.



Ask and Answer

Your Questions, Expert Insights



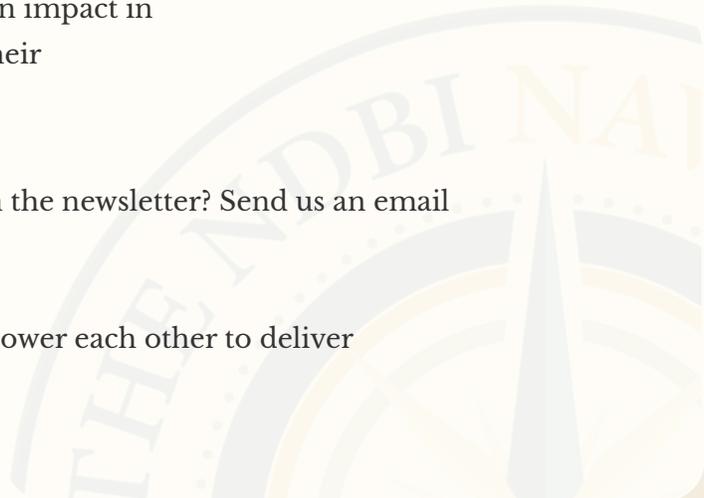
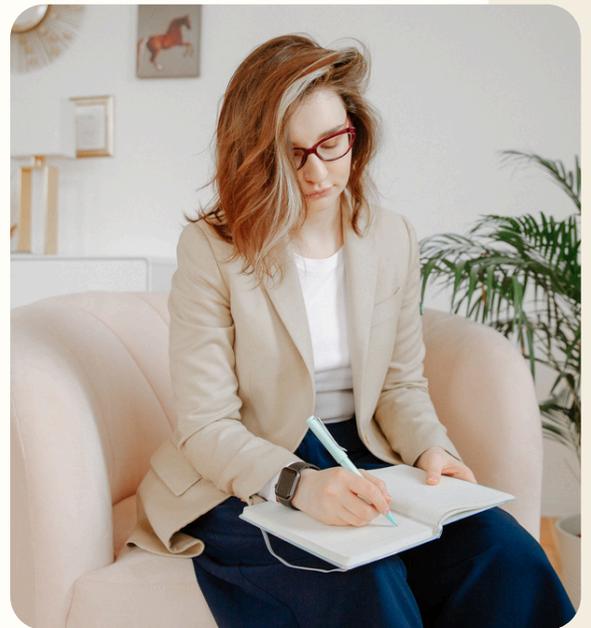
Ask & Answer

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 support a child who gets 'stuck' on one activity and resists moving on to something else?



Our Answer

That's a great question! Many young children—especially those who prefer predictability and repetition—can become deeply engaged in a favorite activity and resist shifting gears. In Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs), we support children by building flexibility within routines first, then gradually expanding to help them transition across activities. The key is to start where the child is and gently scaffold change through connection, play, and predictable variation.

From Question to Action in 5 Steps

1 Understand Why the Activity is So Reinforcing

Before you make changes, take a moment to reflect on what makes the current activity so engaging. Ask yourself:

- ✓ Is it the sensory feedback (e.g., spinning, bouncing, sounds)?
- ✓ Is the child feeling in control or confident during this activity?
- ✓ Is there a predictable structure or routine they rely on?

Understanding this will help you maintain the core elements they love, while introducing change in a way that feels safe.



From Question to Action in 5 Steps

2

Embed Small Variations Within the Activity

Rather than trying to stop or end the activity abruptly, introduce tiny, playful shifts within it:



- ✓ Offer small choices: *“Do you want the blue block or the red one next?”*
- ✓ Add a new prop or character: If they love pushing a truck, have a toy animal *‘hop in’* for a ride.
- ✓ Make it silly: Introduce fun surprises like *“Uh-oh! The truck went the wrong way!”* or change your voice.

These micro-variations keep the activity engaging while preparing the child for future flexibility.

3

Scaffold the Transition Using Predictable Cues

Children often benefit from knowing what’s coming. Try:



- ✓ Visual supports (e.g., a picture schedule or countdown strip)
- ✓ Auditory signals (*“One more time, then clean up!”* or *“After this turn, we’ll do bubbles”*)
- ✓ Transitional routines (singing a cleanup song, or using a *“transition toy”* they carry to the next activity)

Transitions work best when they are familiar, fun, and consistent.

From Question to Action in 5 Steps

4

Reinforce Flexibility and Shifting Attention

Support and celebrate the child's small steps toward flexibility:



- ✓ **Praise effort:** *“You switched so fast! That was awesome!”*
- ✓ **Use special reinforcement:** Pair transitions with something they enjoy (e.g., favorite song, sensory break).
- ✓ **Model flexibility yourself:** *“Oops! I wanted the red block, but I’ll take the yellow instead!”*

Let your modeling show that being flexible can be fun and okay.

5

Gradually Expand Tolerance for Change

Once the child can handle small variations or brief transitions, you can:



- ✓ **Extend the time between preferred activities**
- ✓ **Introduce new routines in short, structured bursts**
- ✓ **Offer more open-ended play opportunities with shared control**

Each successful step builds their capacity to adapt and navigate change with more ease.

By honoring the child's preferences and introducing change through play, connection, and predictability, you're helping them develop the flexibility they need—without taking away the sense of comfort and joy that comes from engaging in something they love.

Webinar Events

Learn Today. Apply Tomorrow.



JUN
25

Natalia Santamaria, M.Sc.
**NDBI Caregiver
Coaching**



JUL
10

Janet Harder, R-SLP
**AAC and Supporting
Communication**



AUG
28

Dr. Jamie Hughes-Lika
**Finding and Building
Engagement in ESDM**



SEP
25

Dr. Laurie Vismara
**Enhancing Coaching
Practices to Support
Fidelity**

NDBI *Connections* CONFERENCE



*Connecting Developmental and Behavioral Science to
Improve Interventions For Young Autistic Children*



Where



When

Live via BehaviorLive

October 23-25, 2025

<https://behaviorlive.com/conferences/ndbi2025/home>

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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.