

The NDBI Navigator

DECEMBER 2025 | ISSUE 11

Notes



Monthly Newsletter

Leading the Way in
NDBI
Strategies
& Support

By The NDBI Navigator™

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The NBDI Navigator Academy | courses.thendbinavigator.com



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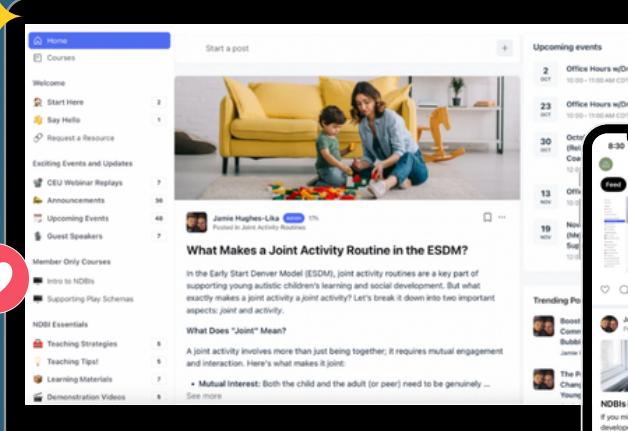
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Playful Possibilities



NDBI Events

Letter from the Editors

Dear NDBI Community,

Welcome to the December issue of The NDBI Navigator Notes! As we wrap up the year, we're taking a moment to celebrate the meaningful work you do every day—supporting children, partnering with families, collaborating across disciplines, and bringing evidence-based, relationship-focused practices to life. It has been a privilege to grow this community with you over the past year.

Our Research Roundup closes out the year with a powerful study by Panganiban et al. (2025). This secondary data analysis underscores the importance of foundational joint attention and play skills as predictors of responsiveness to intervention. The findings remind us just how central these early building blocks are for measuring progress and supporting later learning.

In our Playful Possibilities section, we're getting creative with paper bags. These humble materials open the door to pretend play, sensory exploration, turn-taking games, and endless opportunities to foster engagement and communication.

This month's Ask & Answer addresses a question many caregivers and professionals will resonate with: "How do I help a child learn to wait their turn when waiting feels so hard for them?"

We'll explore responsive, developmentally appropriate strategies that honor children's emotional needs while supporting their growing ability to wait, anticipate, and participate in shared routines.



As we close out the year, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks for your continued enthusiasm, curiosity, and commitment. Your work creates lasting change for children and families, and we're grateful to support the journey—this year and into the next.

Wishing you a restorative end to 2025 and a joyful start to 2026.

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

Meaningful Determinants of Early Response: Predicting and Characterizing Behavioral Changes for Minimally Verbal Autistic Children

Key Takeaways

Panganiban et al. (2025) conducted a secondary analysis of 194 autistic school-age children (ages 5–8) participating in an adaptive intervention study that randomized children to either Discrete Trial Training (DTT) or JASP-EMT, a Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention (NDBI). Children were assessed at baseline and again at week six on standardized measures of cognition, language, and adaptive behavior, and social communication, play, and imitation skills were directly assessed. The authors found that joint attention skills and play development were predictors of early response to intervention and the skills that showed the most improvement short-term were initiating requests and responding to joint attention. These findings highlight the importance of measuring and prioritizing these foundational skills to assist with clinical decision making.

Panganiban, J., Shih, W., Levato, L., Shire, S., Kasari, C., & AIM–ASD Team. (2025). Meaningful Determinants of Early Response: Predicting and Characterizing Behavioral Changes for Minimally Verbal Autistic Children. *Autism Research*.



Reflection Questions

1. Given that initiating requests and responding to joint attention were the skills that improved most in the first six weeks, how might these behaviors serve as early indicators of intervention effectiveness in your own practice?
2. How might assessment tools or data-collection procedures be tailored to ensure important changes in joint attention, requesting, and play skills are consistently captured?
3. What intervention modifications have you found to be useful in your practice when a child is not making progress as expected?



Explore More NBDI Articles

Almirall, D., DiStefano, C., Chang, Y. C., Shire, S., Kaiser, A., Lu, X., Nahum-Shani, I., Landa, R., Mathy, P., & Kasari, C. (2016). Longitudinal Effects of Adaptive Interventions With a Speech-Generating Device in Minimally Verbal Children With ASD. *Journal of clinical child and adolescent psychology : the official journal for the Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, American Psychological Association, Division 53, 45(4), 442–456.

Kasari, C., Shire, S., Shih, W., Kaiser, A., Lord, C., Levato, L., Smith, T., & Almirall, D. (2025). Adaptive Intervention for School-Age, Minimally Verbal Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Community: Primary Aim Results. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 64(6), 674–685.

Latrèche, K., Godel, M., Franchini, M., Journal, F., Kojovic, N., & Schaer, M. (2024). Early trajectories and moderators of autistic language profiles: A longitudinal study in preschoolers. *Autism: the international journal of research and practice*, 28(12), 3043–3062.

Playful Possibilities

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 unpacking the versatility of brown paper bags! With their crinkly texture and endless customization potential, paper bags offer a variety of opportunities for meaningful play and learning. By incorporating NDBI strategies, you can transform these simple household items into powerful tools for fostering communication, engagement, and connection.

Everyday Items



Endless Fun

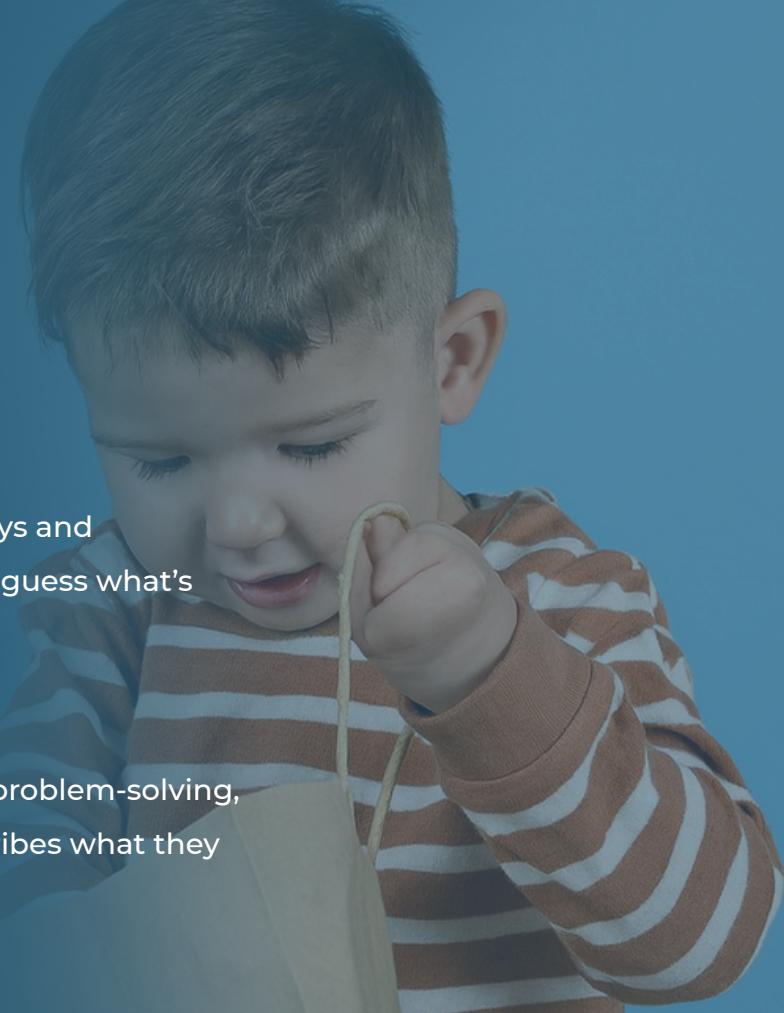
1 Mystery Bag Surprise

Description

Fill a paper bag with small objects or toys and encourage your child to reach inside to guess what's hidden.

Learning Opportunities

This activity fosters tactile exploration, problem-solving, and communication as your child describes what they feel or find.



NDBI Strategies



Building Anticipation: Shake the bag and say, “What’s inside? Let’s find out!” to pique your child’s curiosity.



Expanding Communication: Model simple phrases like “It’s a ball!” or “I feel something soft!” to encourage expressive language.



Following the Child’s Lead: If your child takes longer to explore an item, join them by commenting, “You’re feeling it carefully—it’s bumpy!”



Celebrate Small Wins: Applaud each discovery with excitement, saying, “You found it—great job!”

2 Paper Bag Puppets

Description

Decorate brown paper bags with markers, googly eyes, or stickers to create puppets, then act out silly stories together.

Learning Opportunities

This activity supports creativity, turn-taking, and language development through storytelling and pretend play.

NDBI Strategies

- Building Anticipation:** Say, “Who will our puppet be?” while offering decorating options to engage your child in planning.
- Expanding Communication:** Encourage your child to name the puppet or make it “talk” with simple words like “Hi!” or “Let’s play!”
- Supporting Social Engagement:** Take turns using the puppets, narrating their actions with enthusiasm, like, “Your puppet is jumping—wow!”
- Celebrate Small Wins:** Cheer when your child creates a puppet or engages in back-and-forth play, saying, “You made a funny story—great job!”

3 Paper Bag Jumping

Description

Lay several paper bags flat on the ground and secure them with painter's tape to prevent slipping. Encourage your child to jump from bag to bag.

Learning Opportunities

This activity promotes gross motor skills, spatial awareness, and turn-taking as the child navigates the course.

NDBI Strategies



Building Anticipation: Say, “Ready, set... jump!” as your child prepares to leap onto the next bag. Add playful sound effects, like “Boing!” to keep their focus and excitement high.



Boosting Motivation: Mix things up by adding a challenge, like jumping to bags with specific colors or shapes drawn on them. Let your child choose the pattern to follow to increase engagement.



Supporting Social Engagement: Jump alongside your child or take turns, narrating your actions with phrases like, “Now it’s my turn to hop!” or “You made it to the blue bag—amazing!”



Celebrate Small Wins: Applaud each jump, saying, “You jumped so far!” or “You landed right on the bag—great work!”

Enhancing Attention

Use playful pauses and exaggerated gestures to keep your child focused. For example, shake the bag dramatically during the Mystery Bag Surprise game and say, “What’s in here?” Pause to build suspense and wait for your child to look at you or the bag before revealing the surprise.

Boosting Motivation

Add variety by customizing activities to match your child’s interests. For example, during the Paper Bag Puppets activity, decorate puppets with your child’s favorite colors or characters. For Crinkle Trail, change the layout or use new objects at the end of the trail to maintain their excitement.

Supporting Social Engagement

Mirror your child’s actions and use animated expressions to encourage connection. For instance, if they make their puppet “jump,” copy their action and add commentary like, “My puppet is jumping too!” During Mystery Bag Surprise, celebrate each discovery together by sharing excited expressions and saying, “You found it—we did it!”

Conclusion

Brown paper bags are more than just a container—they’re a gateway to creativity, exploration, and connection! By incorporating NDBI strategies like following your child’s lead, embedding language goals, and celebrating small achievements, you can transform these simple items into powerful tools for learning and bonding.

Stay tuned for next month’s “Playful Possibilities” feature, where we’ll explore even more ways to turn everyday objects into extraordinary opportunities for growth and connection. Together, let’s celebrate the small steps that lead to big connections!



How-to-Hub

Discover Practical Tips for Achieving Real Results



How-to-Hub

Welcome to the How-To Hub!

This month, we're highlighting one of the most practical and effective NDBI strategies: Inadequate Portions — intentionally offering just a few pieces of a toy set, puzzle, or snack to create natural opportunities for communication.

By doing this, you're not withholding control — you're inviting interaction. The goal is to create a small, motivating problem for the child to solve through communication (gestures, looks, words, or signs). This helps children learn that communication is powerful and meaningful — it gets results!

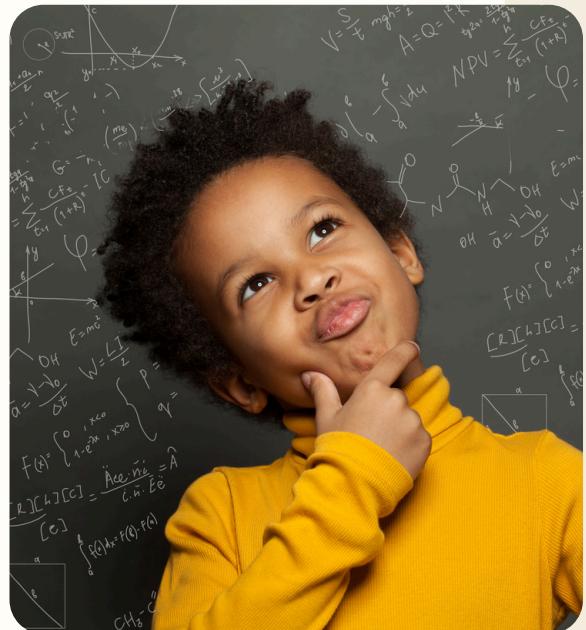
What to Do

Offer just part of what the child wants — a few blocks, two puzzle pieces, a small sip of juice — and pause expectantly. Look, lean in, and wait. When the child reaches, gestures, or vocalizes, model or expand their communication (e.g., “More blocks!” or “Want juice?”).

Why It Works

Children learn best when communication is functional and directly linked to their motivation. Inadequate Portions creates authentic “communication moments” within play and routines — no flashcards needed! It also builds the foundation for turn-taking, requesting, and persistence in social interactions.

Be sure your tone stays playful and supportive — not withholding or controlling. The goal is shared problem-solving, not frustration. Adjust the amount offered so the child *can* communicate before becoming dysregulated.





Use Inadequate Portions to Spark Communication

By offering just enough — but not all — you're creating moments where children need you to complete the action. These moments become powerful teaching opportunities that naturally strengthen engagement, communication, and connection — one small portion at a time.



Five Everyday Ways to Use Inadequate Portions

1. Snack Time



What to do: Offer just a few crackers instead of the whole pack. Pause and wait.



Why it works: Creates a natural moment for the child to request “more,” point, or use gestures.



Pro Tip: Pair the request with a smile and verbal model (“More crackers!”).



2. Playdough Fun



What to do: Give a small piece of playdough and keep the rest visible.



Why it works: Encourages communication for “more,” “big piece,” or color requests.



Pro Tip: Model expanding language as you give the next piece (“*More blue dough*”).



3. Building Toys



What to do: Hand over two blocks or a few train tracks at a time.



Why it works: Motivates the child to keep the exchange going — communication drives the play!



Pro Tip: Mix in a surprise piece occasionally to keep engagement high.



4. Art Activities



What to do: Offer one marker or sticker, then pause before giving another.



Why it works: Builds repetition in requesting and keeps attention on the shared interaction.



Pro Tip: Add gentle humor (*“Oh no, the stickers are hiding!”*) to sustain engagement.

5. Bath Time or Sensory Play



What to do: Pour a little water into the cup — not full — then pause expectantly.



Why it works: Turns a simple routine into a back-and-forth exchange.



Pro Tip: Match your energy to the child — calm and rhythmic or lively and playful.



By offering just enough — but not all — you're creating moments where children need you to complete the action. These moments become powerful teaching opportunities that naturally strengthen engagement, communication, and connection — one small portion at a time.



Ask and Answer

Your Questions, Expert Insights



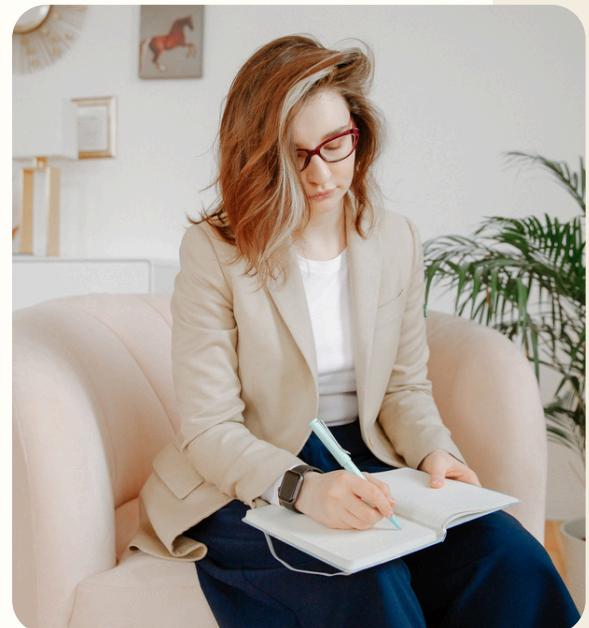
Ask & Answer

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 do I help a child learn to wait their turn when waiting feels so hard for them?



Our Answer

That's a great question! Learning to wait is one of the hardest early social skills because it requires self-regulation, shared attention, and trust that something good is coming. In NDBI, we teach waiting through short, supported experiences that are embedded in play—not by demanding patience, but by helping the child feel successful and connected while waiting.

From Question to Action in 5 Steps

1

Start Small

Waiting should feel achievable, not frustrating.

- ✓ Begin with 1–2 seconds of waiting and gradually build time.
- ✓ Use short songs, countdowns, or visuals (“1...2...go!”) to make waiting predictable.
- ✓ Praise even brief moments of waiting (“You waited! Now it’s your turn!”).



From Question to Action in 5 Steps

2

Keep Waiting Active

Waiting doesn't have to mean doing *nothing*.



- ✓ Offer a simple job (e.g., *“Hold the ball while I count,”* or *“Can you point to who’s next?”*).
- ✓ Use sensory tools like fidgets, a *“waiting rock,”* or a picture card to hold.
- ✓ Keep engagement going with eye contact, smiles, or playful anticipation (*“It’s almost time...”*).

3

Build Waiting Into Play

Embed waiting naturally into fun activities.



- ✓ Turn-taking games (*rolling a ball, building blocks, bubbles*) are perfect for practicing.
- ✓ Narrate each turn (*“My turn... your turn!”*) to make turn order predictable.
- ✓ Add playful suspense—*pause before the “go” moment to teach patience in context.*

From Question to Action in 5 Steps

4

Use Visuals and Social Cues

Visual supports make waiting concrete.



- ✓ Use a “wait” card, timer, or picture sequence.”
- ✓ Pair the visual with consistent language (“Wait... now go!”).
- ✓ Model calm waiting and name feelings (“It’s hard to wait, but you’re doing it!”).

5

Celebrate Success

End each waiting turn with positive feedback and shared joy.



- ✓ Acknowledge the effort (“You waited so nicely!”).
- ✓ Keep the reward natural—the next turn, a fun sound, or favorite activity.
- ✓ Use smiles, high-fives, or short cheers to reinforce success.

Waiting is not just about control—it’s about trust and connection. By keeping waiting short, supported, and embedded in joyful play, children learn that patience leads to predictable, positive outcomes. Over time, waiting becomes not just tolerable—but part of the fun.

Webinar Events

Learn Today. Apply Tomorrow.



DEC
11

Dr. Brooke Ingersoll, PhD, BCBA-D

Project ImPACT



JAN
15

*Dr. Jamie Hughes-Lika,
PhD, BCBA-D, IBA, LBA*

**Extending Engagement
in the ESDM**



FEB
12

*Dr. Thanos Vostanis, UKBA (Cert),
BCBA-D, IBA, QTS*

**Teaching Bids For
Joint Attention**



MAR
12

*Dr. Jamie Hughes-Lika &
Dr. Laurie Vismara*

NDBI Coaching That Sticks

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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.