

The NDBI Navigator

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N^{otes}



Monthly Newsletter

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**NDBI
Strategies
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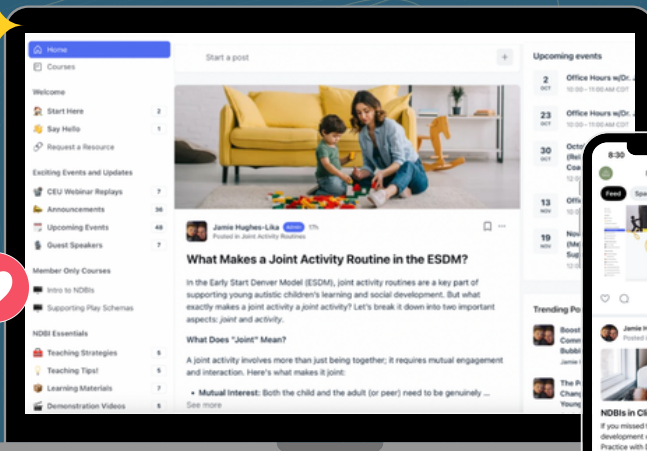
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Letter from the Editors

Dear NDBI Community,

Welcome to the October issue of The NDBI Navigator Notes! As the season shifts and routines settle, it's the perfect time to reflect on how our practices can evolve to meet families where they are—both in person and virtually. This month, we're highlighting research and strategies that show how collaboration can transform everyday interactions.

Our Research Roundup features an article by Simcoe and colleagues (2024) exploring the feasibility and acceptability of a telemedicine coaching model. Authors examined a large-scale telehealth caregiver coaching model designed to increase access to Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs) through partnerships between Early Intervention providers, families of young autistic children, and practitioners trained in NDBIs. Their findings show that virtual coaching is effective and rated positively by stakeholders, boosting caregiver fidelity and improving children's social-communication outcomes while reducing barriers to in-person services.

In Playful Possibilities, we're turning our attention to plastic cups—a simple, versatile material that can be transformed into stacking towers, sound makers, color sorters, and countless other activities to support communication, problem-solving, and joint attention.

In this month's Ask & Answer, we're unpacking why transitions can feel so difficult for young children and sharing actionable strategies you can use right away. From playful closings and countdown cues to offering meaningful choices and transition objects, you'll learn concrete, real-world examples that make moving from one activity to another smoother and less stressful—for both child and adult.

This month's How-To Hub highlights one of the most foundational strategies in Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs): Observe and Join the Child's Focus of Attention. Instead of redirecting children away from their interests, this approach emphasizes pausing, noticing, and joining in with what already captures their curiosity.

As always, our goal is to provide you with evidence-based tools, fresh ideas, and encouragement to enrich your work with children and families. Thank you for being part of this growing community—your commitment makes the difference.

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

Use of telemediated caregiver coaching to increase access to naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions within a statewide early intervention system



Key Takeaways

Simcoe et al. (2024) evaluated a telehealth-based coaching model delivered designed to increase families' access to Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs). This study evaluated the effectiveness and acceptability of a statewide partnership between a university-based medical center and Part C system. Over the course of six, 1-hour telehealth visits, caregivers participated in a series of virtual coaching sessions with trained providers who guided them in implementing NDBI strategies during everyday routines. Early intervention providers joined for two of the six sessions. Researchers assessed caregiver fidelity, child engagement, and social-communication outcomes across the intervention. Findings indicated that telemediated coaching was feasible, acceptable to families, and effective in increasing caregivers' use of NDBI strategies. Children showed gains in social communication and engagement during routine activities and caregivers reported high levels of satisfaction with the service. For practitioners and families, these results underscore that high-quality caregiver coaching for NDBIs can be successfully delivered remotely, expanding access to evidence-based practices and reducing the service burden on families while maintaining benefits for children and families.

Simcoe, K., Stainbrook, J. A., Chazin, K. T., Schnelle, E., Wagner, L., Hooper, M., ... & Warren, Z. (2025). Use of telemediated caregiver coaching to increase access to naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions within a statewide early intervention system. *Autism*, 29(1), 207-221.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the model presented in this study extend existing evidence on caregiver-implemented NDBIs, particularly in terms of scalability and equity of access for families in under-served communities?
2. What strategies might be useful for supporting maintenance and generalization of fidelity of implementation?
3. How might these findings translate to other providers and educators, such as teachers or therapists?



Explore More NBDI Articles

Ingersoll, B., Wainer, A. L., Berger, N. I., Pickard, K. E., & Bonter, N. (2016). Comparison of a self-directed and therapist-assisted telehealth parent-mediated intervention for children with ASD: A pilot RCT. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 46(7), 2275–2284. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-016-2762-7>

Stahmer, A. C., Rieth, S. R., Lee, E., Reisinger, E. M., Mandell, D. S., Connell, J. E., & Mandell, D. S. (2020). Training teachers to use evidence-based practices for autism: Examining procedural implementation fidelity via telehealth. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(9), 3168–3181. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04410-7>

Wainer, A. L., & Ingersoll, B. (2015). Increasing access to an ASD imitation intervention via a telehealth parent training program. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 45(12), 3877–3890. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-014-2184-7>



Playful Possibilities

Social Engagement and Learning with Plastic Cups

Welcome to Playful Possibilities: Everyday Items, Endless Fun, where we explore how ordinary items can unlock extraordinary opportunities for connection, communication, and learning with young autistic children.

Everyday Items



Endless Fun

This month, we're highlighting the versatility of plastic cups—a household staple that can foster engagement, motivation, and joyful social interaction. By weaving in Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention (NDBI) strategies, you can transform a simple stack of cups into a dynamic tool for meaningful play and skill-building.

1 *Cup Tower* Builders

Description

Stack plastic cups to build towers together. Take turns adding cups, knocking them down, and rebuilding.

Learning Opportunities

Supports turn-taking, fine motor coordination, and joint attention through playful collaboration.

NDBI Strategies

- ★ **Turn-Taking:** Alternate roles by saying, *“Your turn to add a cup!”* and then, *“Now it’s my turn!”* This models reciprocity and helps the child anticipate the flow of play
- ★ **Promoting Shared Attention:** Use exaggerated expressions and excited comments like, *“Wow, it’s getting so tall!”* to draw their gaze and keep them engaged.
- ★ **Expanding Communication:** Encourage words like *“up,” “fall,”* or *“more”* to help the child pair language with action.
- ★ **Celebrate Small Wins:** Clap and cheer when the child adds a cup or gleefully knocks the tower down—*“You made it fall, so fun!”*

Pro Tip: Add a playful twist by turning the tower into a themed scene—a rocket ship, castle, or skyscraper. This makes the activity fresh and opens doors for imaginative play.

2 *Rolling* Cups

Description

Lay cups on their sides and roll them back and forth between you and the child. Add variations like knocking down objects or aiming for a taped “goal.”

Learning Opportunities

Encourages coordination, problem-solving, and back-and-forth social play.

NDBI Strategies

- ★ **Following the Child’s Lead:** If the child spins or taps the cups instead, join in to sustain engagement.
- ★ **Building Anticipation:** Say, “*Ready... set...*” and pause before rolling. Wait for eye contact or a signal to cue your turn.
- ★ **Expanding Communication:** Use playful words like “*roll,*” “*go,*” or “*crash!*” to model expressive language.
- ★ **Celebrate Small Wins:** Applaud each roll—“*Great job! You rolled it so far!*”—to reinforce effort and persistence.

Pro Tip: Turn rolling into a team challenge—set up toy figurines or blocks as pins and celebrate together each time something falls down.



3 *Hidden* Treasure Cups

Description

Hide a small object under one of three cups and shuffle them. Encourage the child to find the “treasure.”

Learning Opportunities

Builds problem-solving, sustained attention, and turn-taking.

NDBI Strategies

- ★ **Turn-Taking:** Give the child a chance to hide the object and shuffle for you, saying, *“Now it’s my turn to guess!”*
- ★ **Promoting Shared Attention:** Use suspenseful tones as you peek: *“Is it here? No? Let’s try another!”*
- ★ **Expanding Communication:** Model simple words like *“where,” “found it,”* or *“not here!”* to expand vocabulary.
- ★ **Celebrate Small Wins:** When the child finds the treasure, clap and cheer—*“You did it, so clever!”*

Pro Tip: Personalize the activity by hiding favorite toys or decorating the cups with stickers. A little anticipation goes a long way in keeping curiosity alive.



Enhancing Attention

Use pauses, playful cues, and dramatic expressions. For example, pretend the tower is wobbling before it falls, or slowly tilt a cup as you say, “Rea-dy... set... roll!”

Boosting Motivation

Add novelty—try colorful cups, decorate with faces, or turn towers into themed creations. Keep activities fresh with new challenges like aiming rolls or hiding surprises.

Supporting Social Engagement

Mirror your child’s actions, share smiles, and layer in sound effects (“Zoom!” or “Crash!”). Celebrate together with high-fives, cheers, or silly dances when goals are reached.

Final Thoughts

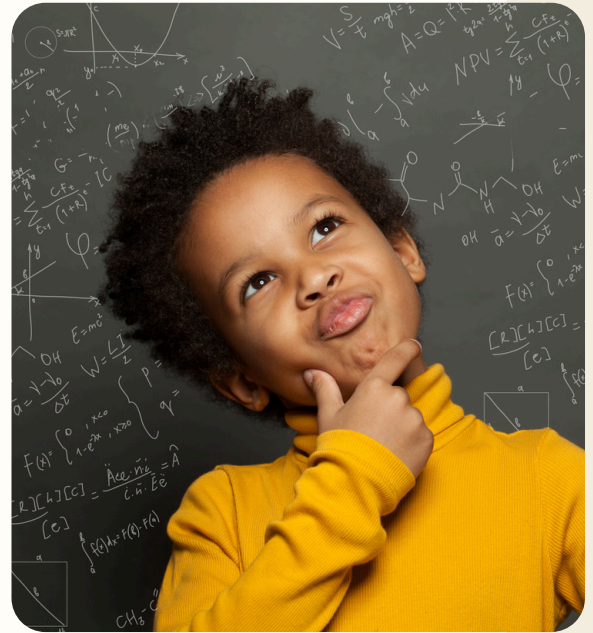
Plastic cups are more than just household items—they’re gateways to joy, learning, and connection. With NDBI strategies like following the child’s lead, embedding language, and celebrating small wins, everyday moments with cups become powerful opportunities for growth. Stay tuned for next month’s Playful Possibilities feature, where we’ll share more ways to turn everyday objects into extraordinary opportunities for bonding and skill-building. Remember: every playful interaction builds stronger connections and brighter futures!

Discover Practical Tips for Achieving Real Results



This month, we're highlighting one of the most foundational NDBI strategies: Observe and Join the Child's Focus of Attention. Children learn and connect best when we meet them where they are—literally and figuratively. Instead of redirecting a child to what we want them to do, we first take time to notice what has captured their attention, and then join in. This simple but powerful strategy helps children feel seen, builds trust, and creates natural opportunities for communication and learning.

When you join the child's focus—whether it's spinning a toy, staring at a shadow, or lining up blocks—you send a clear message: "I see you, and what you're interested in matters." From there, you can build connection, add variation, and gently expand the interaction into shared learning moments.





Why it Works:

Joining in validates the child's interests, making interaction feel safe and motivating. It transforms solitary play into a shared experience, which builds joint attention, engagement, and social reciprocity.



Five Everyday Ways to Observe and Join the Child's Focus

1. Snack Time

- ★ **What to do:** If the child is focused on squeezing a juice box, join by gently squeezing yours and saying, “*Squeeze!*”
- 💡 **Why it works:** You’re connecting to their sensory interest and turning it into a shared game.
- ★ **Pro Tip:** Mirror their timing—wait until they squeeze before you copy them.



2. Outdoor Play

- ★ **What to do:** If the child is watching ants, kneel down beside them and comment, “*Tiny ants walking!*”
- 💡 **Why it works:** By sharing attention on something they already find fascinating, you build joint engagement.
- ★ **Pro Tip:** Add a gentle variation like drawing a line in the dirt to see if the ants follow.



3. Book Reading



What to do: If the child fixates on turning pages quickly, join in by turning with them and saying, “*Flip, flip, flip!*”



Why it works: You’re honoring their interest while adding playful language.



Pro Tip: Once they’re engaged, pause on a page briefly and point out one picture.



4. Pretend Play



What to do: If the child is lining up cars, line up your own car beside theirs and say, “*Car goes here.*”



Why it works: You’re turning a repetitive play style into a shared routine.



Pro Tip: Slowly add a small variation, like making one car “*zoom*” away, to invite flexibility.



5. Everyday Routines



What to do: If the child is fascinated by water running from the tap, place your hand in too and say, “*Splash, splash!*”



Why it works: You’re connecting socially through a shared sensory interest.



Pro Tip: Add a playful twist by filling a cup together and pouring it out.

By observing and joining a child’s focus of attention, you create natural entry points for connection, communication, and learning. Over time, this strategy builds trust, deepens engagement, and opens the door for new skills to grow—because every meaningful interaction begins with, “I see what you see.”



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

A child I work with struggles to transition between activities and gets upset when play ends. How can I support smoother transitions?



Our Answer

That's a great question! When children have a hard time moving on from play, it often signals that we need to support how activities close and how the next step is introduced. In NDBI, transitions work best when they're predictable, playful, and paired with choice and motivation. The goal is to help the child feel safe and supported—not surprised or rushed—so they can shift smoothly from one activity to the next.

From Question to Action in 5 Steps

1 Signal the Ending Clearly

Children thrive on predictability. Letting them know an activity is ending helps reduce surprise and resistance.

- ✓ Use a visual or verbal countdown (e.g., “2 more turns, then all done”)
- ✓ Sing a short cleanup or goodbye song to signal closure
- ✓ Give a gentle warning cue before shifting: “Last roll, then we’ll clean up!”
- ✓ Pair consistent phrases like “All done” or “Finished” with gestures



From Question to Action in 5 Steps

2 Add Playful Closings

Endings don't have to feel abrupt—they can be part of the fun.



- ✓ Pretend the tower “goes to sleep” under a blanket when play ends
- ✓ Use silly sound effects as you put toys away (“Goodbye, crash!”)
- ✓ Offer a “high five” or cheer to celebrate finishing together
- ✓ Turn clean-up itself into a short game (e.g., race to put cups in the bin)

3 Offer Choices for What's Next

When children feel some control, transitions are smoother.



- ✓ “Do you want to read a book or play with blocks next?”
- ✓ “Should we walk like a robot or a bunny to the table?”
- ✓ Give a visual choice board to support decision-making
- ✓ Keep choices limited (2–3 options) to prevent overwhelm

From Question to Action in 5 Steps

4 Use Transitional Objects or Routines

A familiar “bridge” item or routine can help the child carry comfort from one activity to another.



- ✓ Let them bring one toy along to the next space
- ✓ Use a fidget or small object as a transition support
- ✓ Create consistent rituals (e.g., always waving goodbye to the toys before leaving)

5 Embed Motivation in the Next Activity

If the next activity feels exciting, leaving the current one gets easier.



- ✓ Pair the transition with a favorite song or movement (“Let’s hop to the next game!”)
- ✓ Start the next activity with a surprise element (a hidden toy or new variation)
- ✓ Use a “first–then” structure: “First clean up, then bubbles!”

By designing transitions that are clear, playful, and supported with choice, children begin to see endings not as losses but as steps toward something new. Over time, smoother transitions build flexibility, reduce stress, and create more positive experiences for both child and adult.

Webinar Events

Learn Today. Apply Tomorrow.



OCT
30

Anna Dvortcsak, MS, CCC-SLP
**Supporting Social
Pragmatics**



NOV
6

Katherine Pickard, PhD
**Supporting Staff Training
in NDBI Settings**



DEC
11

Brooke Ingersoll, PhD, BCBA-D
Project ImPACT



JAN
15

*Jamie Hughes-Lika, PhD, BCBA-D,
LBA, IBA*
**Extending Engagement
in the ESDM**

NDBI *Connections* CONFERENCE



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



Where

Live via BehaviorLive



When

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.