

# The NDBI Navigator/*Notes*

FEBRUARY 2025 | ISSUE 01

Leading the Way in NDBI  
Strategies & Support

# ONLINE COURSES

## The NBDI Navigator Academy

<https://courses.thendbinavigator.com>

All Courses

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

23 Lessons

\$20.00



All Courses

ESDM Advanced Workshop Supplemental Modules

96 Lessons



All Courses

T19: NBDI Essentials for Autism Providers

*Technicians*

55 Lessons

\$25.00



All Courses

T18: Patterns in Play (Autism Providers)

*Technicians*

23 Lessons

\$10.00



All Courses

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

43 Lessons

\$25.00



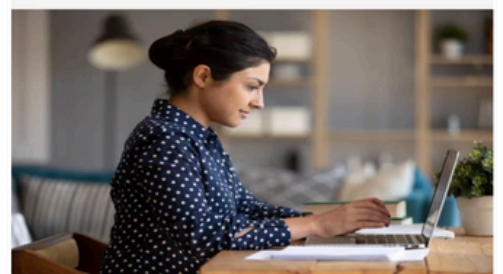
All Courses

MC01: Writing ABA Session Notes Master Class

*Master Class*

3 hours

\$75.00



# The NDBI Navigator/ *Notes*

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NDBI Events



Contact Us

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## NDBI Events



# Letter From the Editors

Dear NDBI Community,

Welcome to the inaugural edition of The NDBI Navigator Notes! We are excited to launch this monthly newsletter, dedicated to supporting professionals who are passionate about implementing Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs) to better serve autistic children and their families.

Our mission is simple yet impactful: to disseminate knowledge, share resources, and provide valuable insights for providers seeking to enhance their understanding and application of NDBI strategies. Whether you're new to NDBIs or an experienced practitioner, this newsletter is here to offer practical tools, expert guidance, and the latest research to empower your work.

Each issue will feature:

- Ask and Answer: Expert Q&As addressing real-world challenges.
- Playful Possibilities: Creative ideas for incorporating play-based strategies with everyday items into your sessions.
- Research Roundup: Summaries of cutting-edge findings in NDBI and autism research, tailored for practical application.
- How-to-Hub: Actionable strategies to enhance your implementation of NDBIs.
- Events: Stay informed about upcoming workshops, webinars, and exclusive opportunities for continued learning.

Through this newsletter, we aim to build a thriving community of professionals dedicated to advancing NDBI implementation and making a meaningful impact. We welcome your feedback and ideas to ensure this resource continues to meet your needs and supports your practice.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.  
Here's to learning, growing, and making a difference together!

Warm regards,

Dr. Jamie & Dr. Sienna  
Editors, The NDBI Navigator Notes

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



**Dr. Sienna**



# Research Roundup

The Effect of Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions and Aided AAC on the Language Development of Children on the Autism Spectrum with Minimal Speech: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis.

## Key Takeaways

This systematic review of research on language interventions for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) highlights the effectiveness of both naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions (NDBIs) and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) in supporting language development. Notably, NDBIs that integrate AAC may result in greater language gains compared to NDBIs implemented without AAC, particularly for children with limited speech. Incorporating AAC into NDBI protocols enhances their impact and can be achieved with minimal modifications to existing practices. The combined use of NDBIs and AAC has shown positive effects across various language domains, including expression, comprehension, social communication, requesting, semantics, and syntax. However, for optimal results, AAC systems should be tailored to align with each child's individual strengths and needs. Additionally, introducing AAC at the onset of intervention proves to be more effective than introducing it later as a supplementary tool. The review also emphasizes the need for further research, particularly in understanding the effects of AAC and NDBIs on language comprehension and their impact on underrepresented groups.

Pope, L., Light, J., & Laubscher, E. (2024). The Effect of Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions and Aided AAC on the Language Development of Children on the Autism Spectrum with Minimal Speech: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 10.1007/s10803-024-06382-7. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-024-06382-7>

## Reflection Questions

1. What are the key features of NDBIs and how do they differ from other interventions?
2. How does AAC impact language development within NDBIs, and why is it important to describe AAC features in research?
3. What is the difference between single-case and group study designs, and what are the limitations of comparing effect sizes?
4. What are the gaps in the research and what future directions should research take?



## Explore More NBDI Articles

Duncan, A. L., Keene, H., & Shepley, C. (2024). Do Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions improve family quality of life? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Autism: the International Journal of Research and Practice*, 28(9), 2152–2165.

Siller, M., Landa, R., Vivanti, G., Ingersoll, B., Jobin, A., Murphy, M., Pellecchia, M., Boyd, B., D'Agostino, S., Zierhut Ursu, C., Stapel-Wax, J., Fuhrmeister, S., & 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.

D'Agostino, S. R., Dueñas, A. D., Bravo, A., Tyson, K., Straiton, D., Salvatore, G. L., Pacia, C., & Pellecchia, M. (2023). Toward deeper understanding and wide-scale implementation of naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions. *Autism: the International Journal of Research and Practice*, 27(1), 253–258.



## Creating Meaningful Connections and Fun with Blankets

# Playful Possibilities



Welcome to our new series, "Playful Possibilities: Everyday Items, Endless Fun," where we explore creative ways to use everyday household items to foster learning and interaction for young autistic children. In this article, we'll focus on blankets and how they can be used to create fun, interactive play experiences. By incorporating Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention (NDBI) strategies, we'll show you how to enhance attention, boost motivation, and support social engagement using this simple household item.

### Everyday Items

#### Creative Play with Blankets

Blankets are versatile and can be used in numerous ways to create engaging play experiences that stimulate a child's imagination and developmental skills. They provide a canvas for creativity, transforming into magic carpet rides, peekaboo games, or tunnel games that invite exploration and discovery.

### Endless Fun

## 1

# Magic Carpet Ride

**Description:** Pretend the blanket is a magic carpet and take the child on an imaginative adventure around the house.

**Learning Opportunities:** Use the magic carpet for promoting a shared focus by pointing out interesting sights or objects during the ride (joint attention), encouraging the child to take turns in choosing the direction or speed of the ride (communication), or use the ride as an opportunity to model and encourage social interactions such as waving hello or goodbye to others (greetings)

**NDBI Strategies:** Offer the child choices. Offer them a choice of fast or slow as you pull them around, offer a choice for which direction they want to go (gestures, pointing, etc), use expectant facial expressions and silly sounds to build anticipation before you start to pull them so they have an opportunity to communicate for you to pull them. You can also pause or stop while pulling them (interrupting the routine), which will motivate them to communicate with you to keep going again.



## 2

# Peekaboo Games

**Description:** Use a blanket for peekaboo games to support back-and-forth interactions with your child.

**Learning Opportunities:** Encourage the child to take turns in covering their body with the blanket and then revealing it (turn taking), use the blanket to hide objects or surprises, cue the child to look where you indicate (joint attention), or support physical development by encouraging the child to manipulate the blanket (e.g., pulling it up and down) to cover and uncover you (motor skills).

**NDBI Strategies:** Use environmental arrangements (in sight out of reach). Place the blanket somewhere the child can't reach it. You can point to the blanket or extend your arms (gesture to pick them up) to support communication. Model anticipation and surprise reactions to encourage reciprocal communication.



### 3

## Blanket Tunnels

**Description:** Create tunnels with blankets for children to crawl through.

**Learning Opportunities:** Encourage the child to take turns crawling through the tunnel or waiting for their turn (turn taking), use the tunnel to hide objects or surprises at the end, prompting the child to look and explore (joint attention), or model crawling or moving through the tunnel in different ways (e.g., crawling on hands and knees, army crawling) and encouraging the child to imitate these actions (imitation).

**NDBI Strategies:** Use the tunnel to create opportunities for child-initiated interactions. You can accidentally sit in front of the tunnel (playful obstruction) which will provide the child with an opportunity to communicate for you to move.





**Enhancing Attention** - you can shake the blanket slowly or fast, lift it up over your head, and place it gently (and safely) on the child's head, all while making silly noises that will help get the child's attention focused on you and your actions. If the child enjoys visually watching the blanket go up in the air and then come down and cover them, you can make a silly 'up/down' game that incorporates those actions.

**Boosting Motivation** - Use the blanket to cover preferred objects or people and support your child to find them, maintaining their focus through playful exploration. If the child enjoys being covered, or enclosed in the blanket, you can wrap them up in a 'burrito blanket' game.

**Supporting Social Engagement** - Lift your arms up in the air while holding the blanket and look expectantly at your child. When they look, smile, reach, or gesture toward you/blanket, that is your cue to bring it down and offer it to them. As you pull the child around the room on the blanket you can playfully stop. This should help the child socially orient towards you and provide an opportunity for them to communicate for you to 'go.'

## Conclusion

Blankets are a fantastic tool for creating meaningful connections and fun for young autistic children. They provide a comforting and familiar context within which children can explore, learn, and connect with others, making everyday playtime a meaningful and enriching experience. By incorporating these activities into your routine, you can enhance your child's attention, boost their motivation, and support their social engagement in playful and educational ways. Stay tuned for more ideas on how to use everyday items to foster learning and interaction in our "Playful Possibilities" series.



## Environmental Arrangement Strategies: Setting the Stage for Engagement and Learning

# How-to-Hub

Welcome to the How-To Hub! This month, we're diving into environmental arrangement strategies—simple, effective ways to create an engaging learning environment that supports young children's development. By setting up your space intentionally, you can encourage communication, play, and participation. Let's explore some actionable strategies to try today!

### 1. Manage Access to Some Items

- 🔑 **What to do:** Place some highly preferred items just out of reach but within sight, like on a shelf or in a clear container.
- 🌟 **Why it works:** This encourages children to communicate their needs, whether through pointing, reaching, vocalizing, or using a word or phrase.
- 💡 **Pro Tip:** Use containers with tight lids that require adult help to open, creating opportunities for children to request assistance.

## 2. Minimize Clutter

🔑 What to do: Simplify the environment by reducing unnecessary toys, decorations, or distractions.

✨ Why it works: A less cluttered space helps children focus on the activity or interaction at hand, reducing overwhelm.

💡 Pro Tip: Rotate toys weekly to maintain novelty and interest while keeping the environment organized.

## 3. Create Clear Play Zones

🔑 What to do: Use rugs, furniture, or bins to define specific areas for different activities, like a puzzle corner or a building block station.

✨ Why it works: Structured spaces help children understand what is expected in each area and make transitions smoother.

💡 Pro Tip: Include visual cues like labels or photos on bins and shelves to reinforce organization and make clean-up easier.

## 4. Incorporate Child Interests

🔑 What to do: Observe the child's interests and embed those preferences into the learning environment. If they love trains, include tracks and accessories in the activity.

✨ Why it works: Using a child's special interests builds motivation and increases their willingness to participate.

💡 Pro Tip: Name and expand on their interest, such as saying, "Wow, the train is going fast! Let's build a longer track!"

## 5. Sit Face-to-Face

🔑 What to do: Arrange seating or position yourself so you're at the child's level during activities.

✨ Why it works: Being at eye level promotes shared attention and makes it easier for children to read your facial expressions and gestures.

💡 Pro Tip: Use a low stool, sit on the floor, or kneel to ensure you are comfortably at the child's level to share their attention.

## 6. Use Novelty to Spark Interest

🔑 What to do: Introduce a new, broken, or rarely used toy during an activity.

✨ Why it works: New or different items naturally draw children's attention and can motivate them to engage in a joint activity.

💡 Pro Tip: Pair novelty items with familiar activities to boost interest without overwhelming the child.

### Encouragement as You Begin

You're already doing incredible work by taking the time to set up an environment that supports a child's growth. Remember, small changes can lead to big impacts. Try one or two of these strategies this week and observe how the child responds.





## Your Questions, Expert Insights

# Ask and 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](mailto:support@thendbinavigator.com)! Together, we can learn, grow, and empower each other to deliver meaningful, evidence-based support.



## Reader Question

"How can I motivate a 3-year-old to engage during sessions in a clinic setting? They often seem disinterested, and I'm struggling to find ways to keep them actively participating."

## Our Answer

### 1. Start with What the Child Loves

Identify the child's preferred activities, toys, or interests and use them as the foundation for your session. If they love cars, for instance, integrate them into joint activities like rolling the car back and forth, creating car races, or even using cars during transitions between activities.

Actionable Idea: Use a "treasure hunt" for their favorite toys to begin the session—hide items around the room and encourage them to find them, embedding opportunities for communication and joint attention.

### 2. Create Opportunities for the Child to Lead

Follow the child's lead during play and build on their actions or interests. If they're stacking blocks, join them by adding blocks to their tower or knocking it down together. This can help them feel in control and more willing to engage with you.

Actionable Idea: Pair a new toy or task with one they're already enjoying. For example, if they're interested in bubbles, blow some bubbles and encourage them to look, reach, point, or take turns popping them.



## REMEMBER!

Every child is unique, so take time to observe and adapt based on what motivates this particular child. Motivation is not a one-size-fits-all concept—it's a dynamic, evolving part of your work. Celebrate small wins and remain patient as you build rapport and trust.

You're doing amazing work by being responsive to their needs!



# NDBI Events

If you missed the 1st Annual NDBI Connections Conference, you can still access it on demand until April 4, 2025.

<https://behaviorlive.com/ndbi/home>



2nd Annual NDBI Connections Conference

February 27, 2025 CalABA Workshop

<https://behaviorlive.com/conferences/calaba/events/optimizing-social-attention-and-motivation-a-5-part-framework-to-enhance-social>



CalABA Conference

February 28, 2025 1:30pm

<https://behaviorlive.com/conferences/calaba/registration>



2nd Annual NDBI Connections Conference

October 23-25, 2025



Save  
The Date



**SEASONS**  
EARLY CHILDHOOD

<https://seasonsearlychildhood.com/>



### **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