

The NDBI Navigator/ *Notes*

MARCH 2025

ISSUE 02

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

By The NDBI Navigator™



Monthly Newsletter

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*

Table of Contents



Page 4

Note From The Editors

Page 5

Research Roundup

Page 7

Playful Possibilities

Page 12

How-to-Hub

Playful Possibilities

Page 15

Ask and Answer

Page 18

NDBI Events



Contact Us

support@thendbinavigator.com

NDBI Events



Letter From the Editors

Dear NDBI Community,

Welcome to the second issue of The NDBI Navigator Notes! We're thrilled to continue this monthly newsletter, designed to support professionals dedicated to implementing Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs) to better serve autistic children and their families.

Our mission remains the same: to share knowledge, provide practical resources, and offer expert insights to help you enhance your understanding and application of NDBI strategies. Whether you're just starting your journey or have years of experience, this newsletter is here to equip you with practical tools, evidence-based strategies, and the latest research to strengthen your practice.

What's Inside This Issue?

- ◆ Ask & Answer: Expert Q&As addressing real-world challenges in NDBI implementation.
- ◆ Playful Possibilities: Creative ideas for using everyday items to engage children in play-based learning.
- ◆ Research Roundup: Summaries of the latest NDBI and autism research, tailored for practical application.
- ◆ How-To Hub: Actionable strategies to refine and enhance your NDBI practice.
- ◆ Events & Learning: Stay updated on upcoming workshops, webinars, and exclusive professional development opportunities.

Through The NDBI Navigator Notes, we are building a thriving community of professionals committed to advancing developmentally appropriate, evidence-based interventions. Your feedback and ideas are always welcome—we want this newsletter to be a valuable resource that directly supports your work.

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
Sienna Windsor, PhD, BCBA-D, LBA



Dr. Jamie



Dr. Sienna



Research Roundup

Neurodiversity and Autism Intervention: Reconciling Perspectives Through a Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention Framework

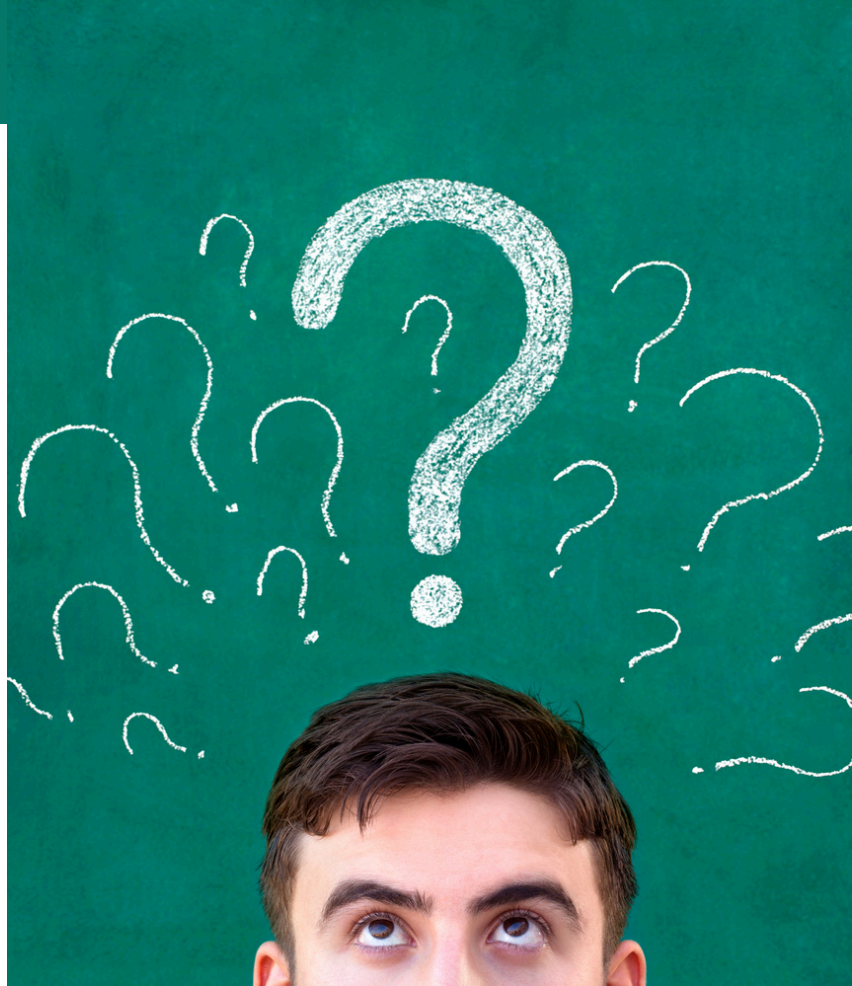
Key Takeaways

This article explores the often-debated divide between autism intervention advocates and the neurodiversity movement. While one side prioritizes intensive interventions to support skill development, the other emphasizes acceptance, autonomy, and respect for neurodivergent ways of being. Acknowledging the historical concerns surrounding behavioral interventions, the authors highlight Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs) as a promising middle ground—an approach that blends evidence-based strategies with a child-led, respectful framework. The article underscores the potential of NDBIs as a bridge between intervention and neurodiversity by promoting a child-led, meaningful approach to skill development. While NDBIs already align more closely with neurodiversity principles than traditional interventions, continued evolution is necessary. By prioritizing well-being, seeking autistic input, and refining social validity measures, NDBIs can serve as a model for more ethical and respectful autism interventions in the future.

Schuck, R. K., Tagavi, D. M., Baiden, K. M. P., Dwyer, P., Williams, Z. J., Osuna, A., Ferguson, E. F., Jimenez Muñoz, M., Poyser, S. K., Johnson, J. F., & Vernon, T. W. (2022). Neurodiversity and Autism Intervention: Reconciling Perspectives Through a Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention Framework. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 52(10), 4625–4645

Reflection Questions

1. What are the potential risks and benefits of focusing on reducing autism “symptom severity” as an intervention outcome, and how might this impact long-term well-being and quality of life?
2. What strategies can professionals use to meaningfully integrate the perspectives and lived experiences of Autistic individuals into the development, implementation, and evaluation of Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs)?
3. Are there particular NDBI strategies that you see as useful for fostering self-determination and self-advocacy skills?



Explore More NBDI Articles

Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Lester, J. N., Sasson, N. J., & Hand, B. N. (2020). Avoiding ableist language: Suggestions for autism researchers. *Autism in Adulthood*.
<https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0014>

Fletcher-Watson, S., Adams, J., Brook, K., Charman, T., Crane, L., Cusack, J., Leekam, S., Milton, D., Parr, J. R., & Pellicano, E. (2019). Making the future together: Shaping autism research through meaningful participation. *Autism*, 23(4), 943–953.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318786721>

Sandbank, M., Bottema-Beutel, K., Crowley, S., Cassidy, M., Dunham, K., Feldman, J. I., Crank, J., Albarran, S. A., Raj, S., Mahbub, P., & Woynaroski, T. G. (2020). Project AIM: Autism intervention meta-analysis for studies of young children. *Psychological Bulletin*, 146(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000215>



Creating Meaningful Connections and Fun with Laundry Baskets

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 laundry baskets 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

Laundry baskets 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 boats, cars, or cozy nooks that invite exploration and discovery. Here are a few ideas:

Endless Fun

1

Boat Ride

- **Description:** Turn the laundry basket into a boat by placing it on a blue blanket to represent water. Provide the child with paddles (such as wooden spoons or sticks) to row their boat. Encourage them to imagine they are sailing to different destinations like a pirate island, a tropical beach, or a fishing adventure.
- **Learning Opportunities:** Use the boat to promote a shared focus of attention by pointing out interesting sights in the 'water' as you push the boat around the room (joint attention), encouraging the child to direct which way to steer the boat (vocalize or point to different locations), or share glances while avoiding various objects that are in the water (shared look). For example, you could place sharks, fish, monsters, etc., on the floor and share the excitement with the child as the boat gets closer to them.
- **NDBI Strategies:** Offer the child choices. You can ask them if they want the boat to go slow or fast, you can ask them which object in the 'water' they would like the boat to move closer to, or you can ask them if they want the ride to be smooth or bumpy (gently shake the laundry basket boat as you push them through the waves). Adjust your animation. As you are pushing the boat around the room, you can make excited sounds, scared gasps, or boat motor sounds. Pay attention to what the child likes, as evident by their smiles, laughter, and shared exchanges with you.



2

Peekaboo Games

- **Description:** The child can hide under the laundry basket for a fun and engaging game of peek-a-boo, then the caregiver can take a turn!
- **Learning Opportunities:** This routine is great for sharing, taking turns, and watching each others' faces as you find the other person. You can hold the basket up high so that the child has an opportunity to reach for it (or point), so that you can lower it back down over them to hide them. You can place the basket on top of your head and hold it there so that the child has an opportunity to request (help, move, go) for you to release it so they can find you. Or each time that the laundry basket is lifted up, you can make silly facial expressions back and forth with the child. See if they copy you, and copy their facial movements for added entertainment (imitate facial expressions).
- **NDBI Strategy:** Instead of covering your head with the basket, keep the laundry basket upright so that it sits on top of your head (silly situation), which will provide an opportunity for shared looks or smiles with the child. As you lift and lower the laundry basket, during your turn pretend that it's stuck on your head and that you can't lift it up without the child's help (playful interruption). This will provide the child with an opportunity to approach you, offer assistance, or communicate with you to lift the basket back up again so that the game can continue.



3

Car Rides

- **Description:** Transform the basket into a car by attaching paper plates as steering wheels and setting up a driving course with pillows and obstacles. Children can take turns driving and navigating their car through the course (as you push them around).
- **Learning Opportunities:** Use the car as a vehicle for communication, as the child directs you where to push them, how fast to push them, when to crash, etc (requesting). Pretend that the car's engine has stopped (make silly engine sputtering sounds) which will provide an opportunity for the child to request help to fix it. Model different gestures for the child while driving the car (e.g., honk the horn, turn the steering wheel, signal to turn, go, or stop, etc.) to promote shared attention (imitation). If they have preferred objects or toys, add those into the routine. Drive the car around the house to collect these items and talk about them as you put them inside the car. If you have toy food, you can drive the car to the 'grocery store' and add the food items into the car, naming them as you pick them up (labeling).
- **NDBI Strategies:** Add objects to the car and take turns with the child pushing them around the room (turn-taking). You can copy the child's driving, and then take a turn modeling a different way to drive the car, which will provide the child with an opportunity to copy your actions. Add different items into the car (positive addition) that you can collect while driving around (e.g., pretend food, toys, animals, clothes, etc). As you push the basket around, pretend that you have run out of gas or the engine stopped (interrupting routines), which will provide the child with an opportunity to request help or to share a look with you to signal for you to keep moving.



Enhancing Attention - adding some 'waves' to the boat ride will surely get the child's attention. As you are pushing them around, you can start to rock the basket back and forth while saying, "Oh, no! Big waves!" Some children find it hilarious to fall out of the boat. You can tilt the laundry basket to one side so that the child gently falls out onto the carpet into the 'water'. If the child enjoys watching things go up and over their head, you can lift the laundry basket up high during the peek-a-boo game. You can then slowly bring it down to hide them again. You can also add silly sounds (positive addition) as you lift the basket up from your head or lower it back down to help maintain the child's attention.

Boosting Motivation - you can push the boat into a wall or couch so that you are 'stuck' (playful obstruction). This provides an opportunity for the child to communicate with you to 'go' 'move' 'turn' or gesture to go another direction to continue the boat ride. During the laundry basket car routine, you can push the child around in an unpredictable way while making silly sounds as you gently crash into items (silly situations). Add silly or shocked facial expressions, use exclamatory sounds (uh oh, oh), phrases (Crash! Oops! Not again!), or gestures (put your hands to your head in disbelief, shake your head oh no). During the peek-a-boo routine, increase motivation by incorporating fun surprises and letting the child control parts of the game, such as making noises or choosing when to "peek" out.

Supporting Social Engagement - place various objects or toys in the water that you can rescue (positive addition). The child can use their hands or a net to scoop them out of the water and put them inside the basket. You can position some objects or toys where the child can't reach them (in sight but out of reach), which will provide the child with an opportunity to point to them, for you to grab them to hand to the child, to continue the rescue mission. You can sing the Row Your Boat song to help keep the child's attention and motivation on you, while also supporting social engagement. Add different new (novel) verses to the song to keep it interesting (e.g., 1. row your boat gently to the shore, if you see a lion, don't forget to roar; 2. Row your boat gently down the river, if you see a polar bear, don't forget to shiver; 3. Row your boat gently down the stream, if you see a crocodile, don't forget to scream).

Conclusion

These creative play ideas not only enhance imaginative play but also provide valuable opportunities for developing social skills, communication, and problem-solving abilities. The adaptability of laundry baskets makes them an excellent resource for creating dynamic and interactive environments that captivate a child's interest and support their developmental milestones. Through inventive use and shared play, laundry baskets become more than just household items—they become a gateway to learning and fun, enriching a child's playtime and developmental journey. Stay tuned for more ideas on how to use everyday items to foster learning and interaction in our "Playful Possibilities" series.



Inadequate Portion Strategies: Shared Control for Communication and Engagement

How-to-Hub

Welcome to the How-To Hub! This month, we're diving into shared control strategies—powerful techniques that encourage your child's participation and communication by balancing independence with guided support. Instead of giving full access to all materials or controlling an activity entirely, shared control means creating opportunities for your child to communicate, make choices, and engage in meaningful back-and-forth interactions.

When you share control, you provide just enough assistance to help your child stay engaged while encouraging them to communicate their needs. This approach fosters independence, builds language skills, and strengthens your connection through positive, interactive experiences. By allowing your child to take an active role in activities, you create opportunities for meaningful interactions that support their confidence and problem-solving skills.

About This Strategy

🔑 **What to do:** Instead of handing over everything your child wants right away, keep some control of the materials by holding onto key pieces, placing them in a clear container, or requiring your child to request help before continuing an activity.

✨ **Why it works:** This setup encourages turn-taking, requesting, and problem-solving while making activities more interactive. Children stay engaged because they're motivated to get what they want, and they naturally practice communication skills along the way.

💡 **Pro tip:** Match your level of control to your child's developmental stage. For a child just starting to communicate, simple gestures, signs, or single words like "help" or "more" are great first steps. If your child is using phrases, you can encourage more specific requests like "I need the red crayon" or "Can you open this for me?"

Snack Time

🔑 **What to do:** Instead of giving a full portion, keep snacks in a container that requires help to open. Wait for your child to request assistance before opening it.

✨ **Why it works:** It creates a natural reason for your child to communicate, whether through gestures, signs, or words.

💡 **Pro Tip:** If your child reaches for the container but doesn't verbalize, model language by saying, "Help open?" and waiting for them to imitate.

Art and Coloring Activities

🔑 **What to do:** Keep the crayons or markers in a container, handing out one at a time instead of giving free access.

✨ **Why it works:** This encourages turn-taking, choice-making, and requesting.

💡 **Pro Tip:** Offer choices: “Do you want blue or red?” This helps your child practice decision-making and expands their vocabulary.

Playing with Bubbles

🔑 **What to do:** Hold the bubble wand and bottle, letting your child request more bubbles by pointing, signing, or using words.

✨ **Why it works:** Bubbles are highly motivating, making them a great tool for encouraging communication.

💡 **Pro Tip:** If your child loves action words, model and expand their language by encouraging phrases like “Blow again!” or “More bubbles”

Encouragement as You Begin

You’re already doing incredible work by creating routines that support a child’s development. Remember, small changes can lead to big impacts. Try one or two of these activities 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! Together, we can learn, grow, and empower each other to deliver meaningful, evidence-based support.



Reader Question

“I have a 4-year-old child I support who doesn't seem interested in playing with toys. What can I do?”

Our Answer

That's a great question! Every child engages with the world in their own way, and when a child doesn't seem interested in toys, it's important to meet them where they are rather than trying to fit them into traditional play expectations. Instead of focusing on typical toy play, try to identify what already interests the child, observe their natural play patterns, and use those to build engagement.

Step 1: Identify the Reinforcing Properties of How the Child Currently Engages with the World

Even if a child doesn't engage with toys in a conventional way, they are still exploring and learning through their environment. Ask yourself:

- What does the child gravitate toward? (e.g., spinning objects, water play, opening and closing doors, lining up objects)
- What sensory experiences seem to bring them joy? (e.g., movement, texture, sound)
- What actions do they repeat often?

By pinpointing these reinforcing properties, you can introduce materials that match their interests and gradually expand their play in a way that feels natural to them.

Step 2: Observe for Play Schemas

Many children engage in play schemas, which are patterns of repeated actions that help them learn. Common play schemas include:

- Transporting (carrying objects from one place to another)
- Enclosing (putting items inside containers)
- Trajectory (throwing or dropping objects)
- Rotation (spinning objects, watching wheels turn)

Instead of introducing toys that don't align with their interests, find ways to enhance and expand on their existing play schemas. For example:

- If they enjoy putting objects into containers, provide different-sized boxes, tunnels, or shape sorters.
- If they like spinning things, try tops, wind-up toys, or mixing paint with a spoon.
- If they love water play, introduce pouring activities, sponges, or floating objects.

Step 3: Use Materials That Interest the Child (Not Just Traditional Toys!)

Instead of expecting the child to engage with typical toys, bring in materials that naturally fit their interests:

- ✓ If they enjoy movement → Try balloons, ribbons, or rolling balls.
- ✓ If they like sensory play → Use playdough, kinetic sand, or water beads.
- ✓ If they explore objects non-traditionally → Provide loose parts like lids, scarves, or fabric scraps.
- ✓ If they prefer visual stimuli → Offer light-up toys, shadows, or bubbles.

This shifts the focus from “playing with toys” to engaging with materials in a meaningful way.

Step 4: Imitate First, Then Scaffold Play

One of the most effective ways to encourage engagement is to imitate how the child is already playing. If they are:

- Lining up cars → Sit beside them and line up cars, too.
- Flipping pages in a book → Do the same, then point to a picture and comment.
- Spinning in circles → Join in and add a fun phrase like “Spin, spin, spin!”

Once they are comfortable with you joining in their world, you can gently scaffold their play by adding small variations:

- ➔ If they line up objects, try rolling one to see if they notice.
- ➔ If they love opening and closing containers, put a small toy inside for them to discover.
- ➔ If they enjoy watching wheels spin, model rolling a car back and forth.

By respecting their play style and slowly expanding on it, you create opportunities for engagement without overwhelming them.

Instead of focusing on what play “should” look like, celebrate the moments of connection, curiosity, and exploration. Even if it doesn’t look like traditional play, your child is still learning and engaging in a way that makes sense to them. By following their lead, validating their interests, and slowly introducing new ideas, you help build positive, shared experiences—which is the foundation of meaningful play!

REMEMBER! →





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>



March NDBI Essentials Webinar (March 27, 2025)
NDBI in Community-Based EI Settings - Dr. Melanie Pellecchia



ESDM Social Engagement Workshop (May 23, 2025)
ABAI Annual Conference by Dr. Jamie Hughes-Lika



April NDBI Essentials Webinar (April 24, 2025)
Developmentally Appropriate Practice - Mallory Ndalo, BCBA



2nd Annual NDBI Connections Conference
October 23-25, 2025





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