

HOME & CLASSROOM

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Creating a

SOCIAL

STORY

BY

EMILY VANTASSEL

We move through life social referencing those around us to gain a deeper understanding of the world and other perspectives.

I know that I rely on what I observe and read to build my understanding of social expectations. However, while the skill of social referencing comes naturally to some, it is not the same for everyone. Social stories were designed to support those with communication difficulties, developmental delays, autism, and behavioral challenges using concrete examples.

Social Stories, first developed by Carol Gray in 1991, support children of all ages and stages. They use images and words to portray a particular concept, event, social interaction, skill, or expectation. As the name suggests, Social Stories provide a brief description that illustrates a complex, or new situation in a simple and clear manner. They provide the listener with accurate information that aids in preparing them by making the topic less overwhelming. Often, Social Stories will break down a particular task or event into steps. This provides the child with the predicted sequence of events and helps them to feel safe and secure by knowing what is going to happen and when.

An example of this could be a Social Story for a trip to the pediatrician. The story would separate the event into concrete steps; for example, entering the office, then waiting in the waiting room, and finally going into the exam room to see the Doctor. Even experiencing a stethoscope, which might be cold to the touch could be part of the story. Maybe the story would include people like a familiar nurse, a family member, or all new people. Either way, Social Stories answer the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How questions. Scan the QR code below to see our sample social story for visiting the pediatrician's office.

Right now, you might be feeling inspired and

have a particular child or concept in mind that could benefit from a Social Story. Let's dig a bit deeper into how to create them so that you can take your inspiration and turn it into a wonderful resource!

First and foremost, consider the purpose of the Social Story. Are you writing to support a child in learning how to take turns? Teaching them how to use a tissue? Guiding them through diaper changes? Once you have a goal, think about what the child needs to understand; why is this relevant to this child?

Then, it is time to gather information! You will want to find the answers to the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How questions. Who is involved, what are you to do, when is it going to happen, where does the scenario occur, how does it happen, how long is it, and so on. Gather as much information about the scenario as possible, as well as the child's previous experience level. By doing this, you will be able to adapt and personalize the story in a way that makes it relatable. This allows the child to see themselves within the situation.

Finally, it is time to put it all together and write the story. This is arguably the most challenging part, but the following guidelines help to simplify the process.

- Write in the first-person point of view. "I will go to the sink and turn on the water."
- If there is something that is not guaranteed, use terms like: usually, sometimes, and it is possible.
- Write to the child's comprehension level. Simplify or expand the language based on their development.

You may notice that Social Stories have a few different types of sentences. There are sentences that describe what is going to happen, like "We use walking feet in the classroom." There are also perspective sentences. These bring attention to the thoughts and feelings of the child or others. "It is hard to take turns. Friends may be sad if I don't take turns or share with them." And then

there are directive, or coaching, sentences. These are positively stated sentences that tell the listener what the desired behavior or response is. "I will try and take turns." Or, "I will work on asking for help from a teacher."

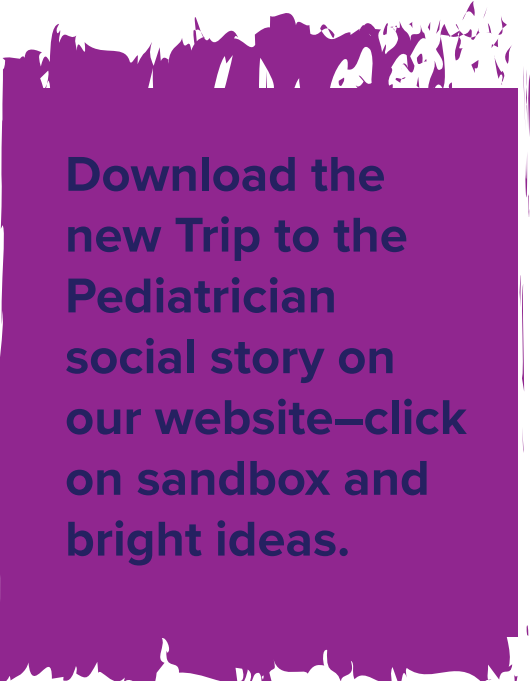
Now that your Social Story has a script, it is time to choose images. Images are a great tool to help tailor your story to a particular child. Perhaps, one of your stories is applicable to multiple children. You could change out the images to include real pictures of each child. You could also use images from relevant places around the room. The images in the story should depict what the words are saying. For example, if the story says, "I will try to raise my hand at breakfast," then you could take a picture of that child raising their hand at breakfast to use in the story. Images help by adding context to the words and support visual learners.

When choosing images, consider the child's needs and comprehension level. There are many ways to play around with images to support everyone. You can choose simple images with minimal background and few colors or complex images that depict the full scene based. If you are working with a child who communicates through American Sign Language, using actual images of ASL signs is a great option.

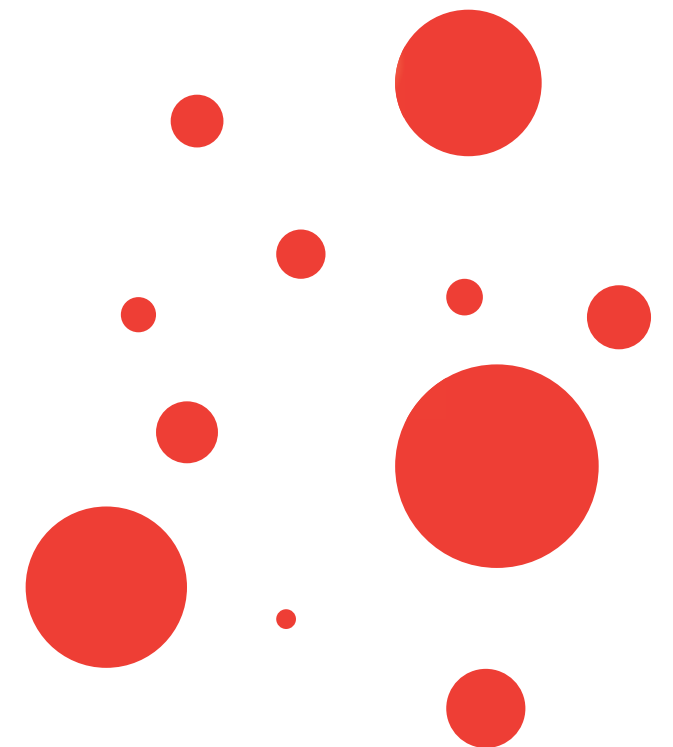
High contrast images support those with visual impairments and are a wonderful inclusive option. Remember to keep the child's culture and identity in mind. Social stories should be representative of the whole child so that might mean finding photos that are representative of the child you are writing for. All in all, think of the images as the third teacher and a comprehension aid for the story.

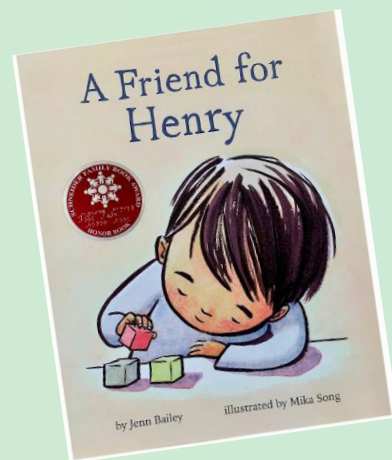
If you are looking for example social stories, you can find some on our website, click on sandbox and then Bright Ideas.

If you would like additional support creating a social story, please reach out to our mental health consultation team.



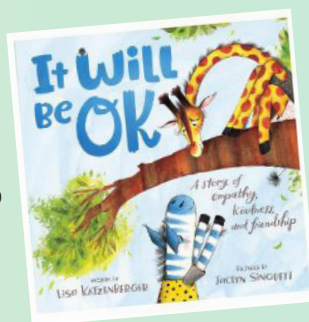
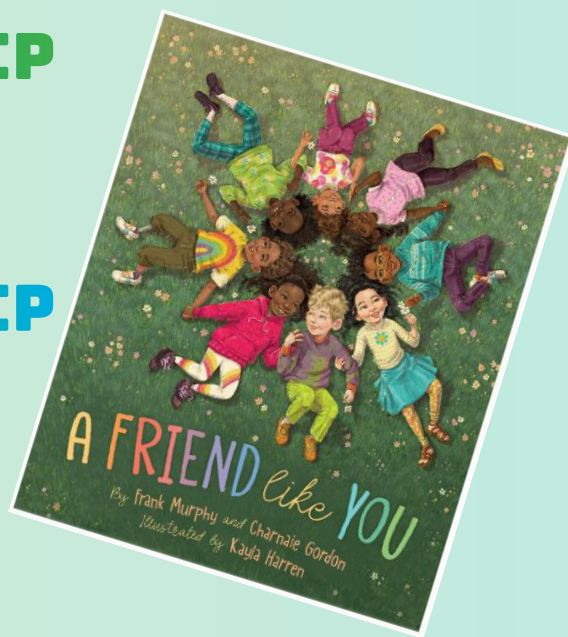
Download the new Trip to the Pediatrician social story on our website—click on sandbox and bright ideas.





FRIENDSHIP BOOKS for FRIENDSHIP SKILLS

BY COLLEEN STERLING



The way you teach friendship skills to children has been on my mind recently. Although not all children are going to be friends; friendship skills are helpful in building a positive community with trusting relationships, the use of manners, and problem-solving skills. Whenever I am trying to teach children specific skills, I look for quality children’s literature to help children think about others perspectives, engage in conversations, and develop activities around them. Here are some of my favorite books on friendship skills and kindness.

Kindness Makes Us Strong (2019)
Author & Illustrator: Sophie Beer
Publisher: National Geographic Books
Age range: 0-3

The illustrations in this book show diversity in skin color, ability, and age. Every page illustrates an act of kindness by doing things like saying hello, helping, and taking turns.

While reading the book, discuss what is happening in the pictures, and for older children how they have used kindness with their friends, family, and neighbors.

While playing with infants and toddlers, be a sportscaster in your play together. Mention when kindness is being used. For example, when you are sharing your crayons while drawing or taking turns with a favorite toy. Praise children when they are kind to others. Remember to be specific, “I like the way you let your brother have a turn with the airplane,” or, “Good job helping us clean up all the toys off the floor.”

This is a good book to read with younger preschoolers as well. Help them make a list of how they can be kind at home or in the classroom.

A Friend for Henry (2019)
Author: Jenn Baily, Illustrator: Mika Song
Publisher: Chronicle Books
Age range: 4-7

Awarded the Schneider Family Book Award by the American Library Association recognizing authors and illustrators for the excellence of portrayal of the disability experience in literature for youth in 2020.

Henry is a child with autism, and he is looking for a friend at school. We will observe interactions that Henry has with his

classmates. Some interactions do not go well, and he gets discouraged that he will find a friend. In the end, he finds Katie likes some of the same things he does, and they become friends. This is a great book to talk about differences in temperaments like activity level and different ways people can think. For example, some children like the feel of paint on their fingers, but Henry does not.

Henry becomes overstimulated by a classmate’s “kaleidoscope” of colors and her “clackety shoes” and another classmate is like “a thunderstorm, booming and crashing.” Some questions to think about while reading:

- Why did Henry paint rainbows on Vivian’s shoes? Explain why he was confused that painting on people is against the rules.
- Why was Henry scared by Samuel?
- Did Katie and Henry like to play with all the same toys?
- What do you like to do with your friends?

Some fun vocabulary to explore with your child: kaleidoscope, clackety, ruined, scales (fish), floated, shimmery, dodged, and hunched.

Extension activity: Have your child make a card or draw a picture for one of their friends. Help your child plan:

- What do you want to draw? What do you like to do together? What will make them happy?
- What materials do you need?
- What should the card say? Help them write it down or use stamps of letters.

It Will Be OK: A story about empathy, kindness, and friendship. (2021)
Author Lisa Katzenberger & Pictures by Jaclyn Sinquett
Publisher: Sourcebooks Explore
Age range: 4-7

Every afternoon, Giraffe and Zebra walk to the watering hole. But one day Giraffe could not go; he was hiding in the tree after he saw a spider. Zebra praises Giraffe to encourage

him to be brave. Zebra didn’t leave Giraffe, he stayed and waited until Giraffe felt safe to come down from the tree.

There is an educator’s guide at the end of the book to help you talk to children about feeling worried, what you can do when you feel anxious, what it means to have empathy, and how to help a worried friend.

Extension Activity: Create a social story with your child (or group) about what to do when they feel worried or anxious. Take pictures of your children acting out what they can do when they are anxious and what they can do for a friend that is worried. You can use ideas that are in the educator’s guide or have the children think of their own. What would make them feel better when they are worried? For example, you may have a cozy corner in your room that is a place a child can be alone to calm down.

A Friend Like You (2021)
Authors: Frank Murphy & Charnaie Gordon
Illustrator: Kayla Harren
Publisher: Sleeping Bear Press
Age range: 5-8

Friends can look a lot alike, and friends can look very different. This beautifully illustrated book depicts a variety of children and families from diverse populations. The book explores different ways you can be friends; for example you can be a curious friend, an open-minded friend, a forgiving friend, or an ally.

The end of the book has a note from the author, highlighting the importance and value of having friendships. There is also an extension activity: writing a letter of gratitude for the friends in your life. Discussions while reading the book:

- There are many interesting vocabulary words that you can explore with children: What does it mean to be open-minded or an ally.
- Talk to children about their feelings when they are playing well with their friends –

- for example sharing and taking turns.
- How does it feel when friends are not sharing or being flexible with you while playing? What words can you use with your friend to solve the problem? Don't forget to practice – solving social conflicts can be tough and practice makes progress.

When reading this book with younger children, you may want to read only a few pages at a time so that you can examine and have rich conversation about what it means to be a friend in your home, program, or community.

Also, check out Charnaie Gordon's website Here Wee Read for her blog with book lists and reviews for children's literature with an emphasis on diversity and inclusion. She also has a podcast with the same name; she interviews authors, illustrators and shares new titles and book reviews.

<https://hereweeread.com/>

Did you like these books and activities? Let us know by posting on our Facebook page. What type of discussions did you have? What did your children say or do? Do you have a book you want to recommend? Also check out the Book Nooks from New York State Pyramid Model initiative at <http://www.nysecac.org/contact/pyramid-model/book-nook>. These books help support children in developing positive social emotional skills.



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INTENTIONALITY

a special project

by Jenny Edwards

The smell of oil mixed with gasoline is still one of my favorite smells. That is the smell of my father when he would come home from work and give me a great big bear hug, with his bristly face against mine as he lifted me off the ground. My father, who was an auto mechanic, hence the mixed scents of oil and gasoline, taught me the value of having and using the correct tool. Just like auto mechanics, most professions have specific tools they use to accomplish their work.

Our tools include our knowledge of child development, the art of reflection, and applying intentionality in our planned activities and room arrangement. "An intentional teacher acts with purpose and knowledge to ensure that young children acquire the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in school and life. Intentional teaching is planful, thoughtful, and purposeful" (*The Intentional Teacher, NAEYC*). The importance of room arrangement is often overlooked, but when research and intentionality are applied, how a room is set up becomes an integral part of educating children.

This article features a special project and partnership with Hudson Valley Community College's (HVCC) Education and Social Sciences Department. Guided by the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Brightside Up and the Education faculty began a project to revitalize the preschool teaching laboratory. The first step was reflecting on the general arrangement of the room and the placement of the interest centers. The latest research advises that loud interest centers such as dramatic play and blocks are set apart with physical space and furnishings from the quieter centers, like the library center, the cozy spot, and the writing center. Children who need a break from all the activity of a preschool classroom can retreat to the more quiet and less active centers. This helps children with their cognitive focus and emotional control. The arranging we had to do was to add a "buffer center" between the library and block centers. Typical buffer centers are art, science, sand and water tables, math, and fine motor which usually feature quiet materials, limit the number of children, and have a moderate level of activity.

Follow along in this 3-part series as we revitalize and investigate the intention built into the centers at the HVCC preschool teaching lab. In this issue, we will explore the sensory, library, and cozy areas and invite you to look at your own learning spaces as we explore purposeful room arrangement together.

INTENTIONALITY IN THE SENSORY AREA:

What We Changed:

The sensory tables are a part of the science center, but due to the depth of learning and purpose, we have set them separately. We placed the three tables (light, sand, and water) in the middle of the classroom, directly in front of the science center. Then we added specific learning materials to each table. For the light table, we placed x-rays on the adjacent shelf. We also included transparent magna tiles in a container under the table and placed color mixing jars and activities on a shelf right next to the table. The sand and water tables are equipped with many measuring spoons, cups, and seriated containers.

Opportunities for Learning:

An intentional teacher will stock the tables with appropriate tools to maximize learning and facilitate educational conversations. When they are scooping sand into different size containers, they are learning the concepts of size, weight, and volume. When they are pouring from container to container, they are learning the physical properties of liquid and solids. When they are counting how many scoops it takes to fill different size containers, they are learning the value of numbers and the concept of volume.

What's the Big Idea?

There are many learning opportunities through sand and water play, yet let's not overlook just how much of a regulation tool sand and water play is. Sand and water play has a natural centering effect for children. For example, if a child is distressed from separating from a parent, playing in the sand table naturally calms

the child. This is very akin to burying your feet in the warm, smooth sand while ocean side and letting the relaxing feeling move up from your feet to eventually envelop you.

In addition to helping to regulate a child emotionally, children are learning the self-regulation skills of keeping the sand and water in the tables and learning gross and fine motor control skills with pouring and scooping.

The Rating Scale:

Sand and water play may occur indoors or outdoors. Alternate materials must be safe and not cause any health or safety issues related to choking, getting stuck in noses or ears, or aspiration. Using food is not considered an appropriate material because children can become confused about how food is used; food is for eating and not for playing. Additionally, it is an ethical issue related to world hunger and wasting food. There must be enough material and tools so that children can dig, scoop, pour, fill containers, and experiment with the material in a satisfying way.

Expanding the Learning:

Intentional interactions will facilitate much learning. For example, when children are playing in the sand table, you might notice children counting scoops of sand. Join them and ask open-ended questions: "How many scoops of sand will fill this container?" "What if we used a smaller scoop?" "What if we used a larger scoop?" If the children seem to be interested in this experiment, begin a chart with tally marks to track of how many scoops it takes to fill the small container, medium container, and large container. Then you could introduce the concept of changing the size of the scoops and keeping the containers the same. This would be a wonderful spot to introduce the making predictions and writing them down, then conducting the experiment with the larger and smaller scoops. The sensory tables, when organized wisely and include frequent interactions with the educator, can facilitate learning in all academic areas: math, science, language, literacy, writing, and social/emotional development.

INTENTIONALITY IN THE LIBRARY CENTER:

What We Changed:

In the preschool lab, we brought all the books together in one place and created the Library Center. This took some intentional sorting to make sure that the books were good quality and appropriate. The library center can contribute to the overall representation of diversity in the classroom if the books are carefully chosen. There are many books that show different races, cultures, ages, abilities, and gender roles (traditional and non-traditional). Other books to enhance the library are fantasy/ fiction books, non-fiction books, and books that feature other academic areas such as math, science, and social studies. As you intentionally choose appropriate materials, it is a good time to also discard inappropriate materials such as books that depict violence or frightening images or books that stereotype cultures, abilities, ages, and races.

The library interest center is also an area that can include many soft furnishings such as pillows, cushions, and small couches and chairs. Think of the library and cozy spot as an area where children can escape the "hardness" of the classroom (the tile floors and thin carpets in the other areas). To include softness to our center, we added a bean bag chair and a carpet.

Opportunities for learning:

When sharing books with children, introduce all the parts of the book: the cover, inside cover illustrations, and the title page. This is where you can introduce conversations about the cover art and the inside illustrations. Ask how the illustrator created the images. What medium and colors the illustrator chose. Then conduct a "story walk" where they flip through the pages to get a feel for what the

■ ■ *An intentional teacher acts with purpose and knowledge to ensure that young children acquire the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in school and life. Intentional teaching is playful, thoughtful, and purposeful.*

story is about. This is where you can encourage conversations about the book through asking open ended questions such as: "Let's look at the cover, what do you think this book is about?" "Who do you think is the main character?" "Why did you guess that? What clues did you use?"

When they begin to read the story, draw attention to certain letters when pointing to the text while reading. This helps the young child gain print awareness; where letters make up words to convey meaning.

What's the Big Idea?

A library center naturally increases a child's vocabulary when an educator is intentional about interacting with children and sharing books with them. Additionally, when you warmly and comfortably share a book with a child, the child learns to associate those positive feelings with books. Reading aloud to children is the number one indicator of future academic success and formal and informal reading times included in the daily schedule helps to ensure adequate exposure.

The Rating Scale:

A high-quality program's library center is well defined and be separated from the block center and dramatic play center. It should have a variety of books displayed with the covers facing out and not overcrowded. All

the books must be appropriate for the age group and should not contain violent images or stereotypes. A library center should also include an abundance of softness.

Expanding the Learning:

When children are excited about a story, they naturally want to do more with it. For example, if they enjoyed *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, they may want to create beautiful butterflies with art materials. They could also graph the foods the caterpillar ate to determine what it ate the most, building data collection and counting skills. If it is the right time of the year, bring caterpillars into the science center to observe their life cycle. This activity could naturally lead to learning about Monarchs and planting a milk weed patch. Children can create puppets to re-tell the story and incorporate fruits and vegetables from the dramatic play center. This could also lead to a discussion about healthy and unhealthy foods. Extend the learning into a study of life cycles, and discovery of other life cycles through books and research. If the children are really desiring more knowledge, they could create a map of the Monarch's path to Mexico and watch videos of them overwintering there. This could lead to a study about Mexico, and so on.

INTENTIONALITY IN THE COZY CORNER:

What We Changed:

A cozy corner is a place in the classroom where a child can retreat to take a break and relax. It can also be a place where a child can go when upset and needing some time to re-establish a sense of calmness. We decided to integrate the cozy corner into our library area. This classroom's cozy spot includes sensory jars, soft furnishings, books about emotions, and many puzzles featuring all different kinds of families (more diversity!).

Opportunities for learning:

A cozy corner is an excellent area to discuss all the different kinds of emotions and what tools we can use when our emotions are very big. It also naturally leads to conversations about

regulation, self-control, and the choices we make. It is a wonderful area of the classroom to help children understand who they are, how important they are, and that their actions do not change the love that we have for them. This can help them understand they are accepted and belong.

What's the Big Idea?

The main purpose of the cozy corner is to help children regulate themselves when the need arises. Each child is different; therefore, a cozy corner should be equipped with various tools to help each child get back to center. Soft furnishings, sensory jars, fidget toys, puzzles, and books are examples of some tools to include. You can support each child individually to help them find what works best.

The Rating Scale:

The rating scale requires that a high-quality program have at least five interest centers and one of them must be a cozy corner. This is a clearly defined space with a substantial amount of softness where children may lounge, daydream, read, or play quietly. It must supply enough softness so that a child may escape the typical hardness of the classroom such as a couple of bean bag chairs or large pillows or a child-sized couch.

Expanding the Learning:

When children are given words for their feelings, they will eventually replace abrupt actions for verbalizing what they feel, if we encourage them. Therefore, having charts and posters about feelings/emotions in the cozy corner will help them build their understanding of all the different emotions plus add to their vocabulary.

In the next issue, join us as we look at diversity, fine motor centers, and classroom displays.



cozy corner



library



sand table



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A

by Emily Vantassel

Learning Journey

What is life like for you today? What words come to mind when you ponder this? You might have felt the stresses of adulthood; rushed, demanding, and chaotic. Or maybe your mind went to the wonderful and inspiring experiences that life can bring. Life is all of this and so much more; it is complex, fast moving and distracting, yet beautiful and full of exciting possibilities. If this is our experience as adults, can you imagine how children, who have decades less experience, are feeling? It makes me wonder how to help children thrive, now and in the years to come.

Mind in the Making, founded by Ellen Galinsky in 2000, is a learning journey driven by science yet built on relationships. It digs deeper into what Galinsky views as the seven essential life skills and how we can foster them within ourselves and in children. The foundations of her work are the executive functions of the brain. Executive functioning occurs in the prefrontal cortex of the brain and helps to manage our attention, emotions, and behavior. These functions appear during the preschool years and continue to mature into early adulthood.

Mind in the Making explores three executive functions of the brain and how they nurture the seven essential life skills. Cognitive flexibility allows one to see a situation in diverse ways and think outside of the box. Working memory involves holding information in mind while using it. For example, doing mental arithmetic or processing a story. Inhibitory control is the ability to go off “autopilot” and do what is right, even if your instincts are telling you to do something else. Like not eating playdough even though it may look delicious.

The key takeaway from Mind in the Making is that you already have what it takes to engage children in developing their executive functioning and essential skills. It does not require intense programs, fancy equipment, or elaborate materials. Re-thinking the things you already do throughout the day can make all the difference. Here are examples of how you can promote executive functioning skills through daily interactions.

COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

Encourage pretend play and imaginative storytelling. This encourages children to imagine and wonder while developing their own play using their surroundings and experiences. This requires thinking on your feet to maneuver the sudden twists and turns that imaginative interactions bring.

Puzzles. One must look at each puzzle piece from every perspective to try and figure out where the piece fits; trying again and thinking ‘if not here, then where?’

Sorting games with changing rules. Engaging children in short games and

activities and then altering the rules mid-way gives them an opportunity to think outside of the game’s original rules. For example, first sorting items by color and then by shape or size.

WORKING MEMORY

Games that have rules. When playing any game with rules, it requires a tremendous amount of brain effort to first recall the rules and then allows them to guide their response. My favorite is Simon Says, (although I usually switch it up and call it ‘Ms. Emily says’ or ‘teacher says’) as you can play it with one direction or make it challenging by giving two. Simon says touch your knees then your toes.

Encourage pretend play. Pretend play allows children to create their own character and then develop it as the play evolves. Additionally, staying in character require them to recall the plots they have developed so far and be mindful of their peers’ influence in the story.

Have children develop and implement a plan and then reflect on their experience. This is something that young children (preschool to school age) can do; everything from selecting a play center to creating a plan for building an obstacle course. As the adult, you can drive the experience further by engaging them in a conversation where they reflect on their experience.

INHIBITORY CONTROL

Play ‘tricky’ games. You can take any of your favorite games and put a unique spin on it to change the traditional rules. This will require the child to be mindful of the rule switch and practice self-control. My favorites are, “Simon Says,

Do the Opposite” and “Blue Light, Orange Light” instead of “Red Light, Green Light.”

Have children think about their answer first. Every day in the morning, once everyone was in school, I would sing the good morning song and present to them the “Question of the Day.” I would have children think about their answer and then lock it in their brain until breakfast time. During breakfast, we talked with each other about our answers to the question. This gave each child the opportunity to think about their answer before sharing and then holding on to it rather than blurting it out. There are so many ways you can get creative and incorporate having the children think about their answer first within your daily routine.

Coordinated games. Activities like board games, freeze dance, yoga and freeze tag are all notable examples of games that encourage children to inhibit their automatic response and follow the directions at hand. You can make one up on the fly or take an activity you are already doing and add coordinated complexity to it.

MMMA

mindful moment

with Kim Polstein, LMSW

SAVORING

Savoring is the practice of “stepping outside” of an experience to acknowledge and appreciate it in real time. Savoring helps us to increase the intensity and duration of positive experiences and helps us to build our practice of gratitude.

I recently attended the wedding of a friend whom I had fallen out of contact with. I was delighted to reconnect and attend this event with other old friends. There was a moment on the dancefloor where I was able to step back while my friends were dancing, and I decided to savor that moment. I took a deep breath and paid close attention to what I was seeing, hearing, and feeling, and in doing so I felt joy, nostalgia, and connection. Taking the time to step outside this moment helped me savor it more than if I had been moving through the evening on autopilot.

Now it’s your turn to practice.

Each day, find one thing to savor! It doesn’t have to be anything grand; it might simply be a quiet moment during your break at work, or the first bite of dinner with your family. It is just one moment you choose to truly enjoy. Notice what is going on around you, and internally. What do you see? Hear? Feel? Smell? Take a minute to truly notice what is happening and grant yourself the time to appreciate the moment.

Let us know how savoring small moments each day impacts your week, month and year! ⚡

LOOSE PARTS INSPIRATION FOR THE PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM

Loose parts can be a great way to introduce open ended materials into your preschool classroom. Recycled materials and loose parts can spark the imagination, add fresh interest to an area, or become a problem-solving provocation for a group of children. Below are some commonly found recycled materials and loose parts that can be used effectively within your learning environments. Use this as a springboard for ideas for your classroom.

Recycled cardboard boxes are great addition to children's open-ended play. Adding these to dramatic play or the block area can become an open invitation for children. It is developmentally appropriate for children to want to build enclosures. Giving children materials such as masking tape and writing implements can help enhance this exploration further.

The tops of squeezable yogurt caps are a colorful and fun recycled material that can be used in a variety of way within the classroom. Children love sorting these by color and can be a new and exciting way to explore colors as well as counting. These recycled caps can be used in imaginative play as well. Whether it is as money in the cash register or food in the play pan, children will have endless possibilities

Collections of natural materials within the preschool classroom can help increase engagement within the science area. Children can get hands on experience feeling nature. Conversations around texture and feel of each material can lead to deep learning of their five senses.

TRY PAIRING YOGURT CAPS WITH:

- A variety of recycled jars and containers to make homemade musical instruments
- In math manipulatives area as a color sorting activity, one to one correspondence tool, or measurement manipulative.



*Inspiration for infants & toddlers
and the preschool classroom*

by: Emily Cuccio



TRY PAIRING SHELLS WITH:

- Sensory/Water table for children to experience what the shells feel like with sand and/or water
- Science area with Microscope for children to see the markings from a new perspective.
- Art area with paint for imprints or seeing how the paint can enhance the shell.

TRY PAIRING CARDBOARD BOXES WITH:

- Dramatic play and masking tape for children to build houses
- Science center with flashlights to discover shadows
- Library with plush toys to create a cozy reading area



LOOSE PARTS FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Infants and toddlers are natural scientists who explore materials with all their senses and enjoy cause-and-effect reactions. Providing a variety of textures helps them learn about the world. Loose parts are engaging materials to investigate because they are open-ended, diverse, and provide unlimited play possibilities. They can be made of many different materials, such as wood, metal, plastic, fabric, or objects from nature. When including loose parts for infants into the environment, consider materials that encourage babies to touch, mouth, and explore. Toddlers love to fill and dump, as well as carry things, so materials that they may transform, transport, and build with will support these interests.

Young children learn through investigation and discovery. Infants and toddlers need opportunities to learn about the world by actively engaging in meaningful learning experiences. Loose parts can be used in variety of ways, which encourages a child's creativity and imagination. Children can fill and dump, transport, collect, mix, connect, take apart, line up, and stack loose parts. Because there is no right or wrong way to use these materials, infants and toddlers may use them according to their ability and interest.

Loose parts do require special considerations when it comes to safety. Extra precaution is needed to consider their size, durability, and age

appropriateness. When selecting loose parts for the environment, check to be sure the parts are large and sturdy enough not to be a choking hazard. Careful supervision is always important and an attentive, responsive adult is essential for keeping young children safe.

Incorporating loose parts involves careful observation and reflection to determine the child's interests. Loose parts should be placed in an environment with a responsive and intentional approach to support learning. Presenting loose parts as invitations for play encourages curiosity, engagement, and discovery. When items appeal to the five senses, children are more likely to spend time exploring and playing. The way loose parts are displayed in the environment can affect the way young children engage with them. When setting up the area, consider what will happen there by determining whether the materials will be used for building, engaging in imaginative play, or encouraging sensory exploration. Think about the containers that will hold the loose parts and how they will fit in the area. Keeping materials out for several days will allow infants and toddlers time to become familiar with them.

When arranging loose parts, think about how infants and toddlers will access them. Setting up loose parts so children can see and reach objects is essential. This can be done by placing items on low shelves or in

open baskets within the child's reach. Allowing plenty of time for exploring materials and offering opportunities to move items around requires some flexibility. Organizing materials will help children easily find the items that they are looking for. Selecting the right amount of loose parts to display is also important. Too many items can be overwhelming, too few can cause frustration. Defining the area using rugs, trays, or mats and allowing enough space for children to work will promote independence. Placing loose parts on top of a non-breakable mirror or providing interesting backgrounds will invite young children to further explore the materials.

Adding loose parts into the learning environment promotes exploration and discovery in an intentional and responsive way. As young children engage with loose parts, they are continuously investigating and experimenting to make sense of how the world works. Loose parts offer rich learning experiences because infants and toddlers are actively engaged in and in charge of their own play. The best materials do not need to be expensive. They just need to be thoughtfully selected. Discount stores offer a wide variety of loose parts such as loofahs to explore texture, metal napkin rings for sound exploration, and colorful containers for light investigations. The possibilities are endless.



Become a BRIGHT SIDER

Visit brightsideup.org for brightsider insights and ways to get involved in creating a world where all children are understood.

ODE TO OATS BY BONNIE SCHULTZ

Dear oat, how will I use you?
Whole grain and healthy cholesterol buster.
Fiber-rich satisfier.
Refrigerated overnight,
Cooked in a microwave or on a stove top.
Rolled oats come in three types:
Old fashioned oats, quick cook, and instant
Less processed, longer-cooking steel-cut oats keep their chewy bite
All so good for us depending on what we add in.
Mix in cinnamon, nutmeg, or vanilla
Perfect with very ripe fruits and/or nut butters
Frozen blueberries provide a swirl of juice for eye appeal.
Brown banana blends to a smooth sweetness.
Apple chunks brighten a bowl, adding crunch
For a different twist, serve it savory with a sauce or salsa
Bake it into fruity oatmeal bites
Eat oatmeal the ways you find right.
Your body will thank you.

100% FRUIT SWEETENED BANANA OAT BITES

Makes 20 bites, serves 10

CACFP creditable as 0.5 oz whole grain and 3/8 cup fruit/serving

INGREDIENTS

- 2 ripe banana
- 2 cups rolled oats
- ½ cup apple sauce
- ½ cup raisins
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

DIRECTIONS

1. **Peel** and **mash** the bananas
2. **Measure** and **combine** ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Mix
3. **Grease** baking sheet. Drop mounded teaspoons of mixture on the baking sheet. Flatten to ¼ inch thick with the back of a spoon.
4. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Bake oat bites for about 15 minutes. Flip bites and bake for about 10 more minutes until crispy on the outside and soft on the inside.
5. **Loosen** with a spatula. Enjoy! Store in the refrigerator for up to 4 days or freeze. They rewarm quickly in a toaster oven or oven.

Children may be able to help with the bolded steps.

Spotlight MAPLE LEAF GUILDERLAND

CREATING CALM IN THE CLASSROOM by Rebecca DelGiudice

In the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, it is often said that *“the environment is the third teacher.”* Child care providers and educators alike can use their environment to create a sense of calmness. In this issue, we are celebrating two programs and their approach to creating calm using the environment.

Toddlers are known for experiencing a range of emotions, sometimes over the course of mere minutes. What is one to do when they have a classroom full of toddlers? Create a cozy corner! Maple Leaf Guilderland reached out to us for

support in managing big behaviors.

Together, we created a space for the big feelings that go along with toddlerhood.

Below is an image of their cozy corner, complete with a bean bag chair, feelings board, fidgets, and even a fun sign made by Harley Rescelo and Megan Woods.



BEFORE

AFTER

The before picture shows the classroom's calm corner before rearranging. Although there is a beautiful sign and a big comfy chair, Maple Leaf teachers felt there were still challenging behaviors occurring in this area.

Ultimately the teaching team created more space in the calm area with less opportunity for overstimulation. Too many choices available in a calm area can inadvertently cause unwanted behaviors. You may notice some sensory bottles scattered over here – rest assured; a calm area is a place for children to express their feelings. That means it's okay for children to shake those sensory bottles silly and squeeze pillows extra hard. Remember to teach children how to use the calm area when everyone is in a regulated state.

TIP: Turn shelves away from the seated area and use the back of the shelf wall to post a feelings board, photos children bring in from home, or visual cues to help children manage big feelings.

Spotlight NORTHERN RIVERS FAMILY OF CHILDREN SERVICES EARLY HEAD START

Calming spaces are not just for children. They can benefit the adults who work with children, too. Administrators from Northern Rivers Early Head Start exemplify this practice as they welcome staff back to a new school year with a new space for the adults. What once was a brightly lit resource room is now a dimly lit soothing space for parents, educators, family support workers, and other support staff at the Early Head Start. Any adult who visits is welcome to enter the new calming space.

Administrators listened to staff when they requested a space to take breaks, write notes, and create their own sense of calm during busy days. Courtney Devoe and Sharon Hutchinson-Jones used their summer break to create the space pictured below.



In addition to comfortable furniture and soothing lighting, administrators outfitted the new space with a mini fridge filled with healthy drinks and snacks for adults to enjoy. Space is differentiated between relaxing and working, as pictured below.



Encouraging décor that says, "YOU GOT THIS!"

Parsons acquired a variety of fidgets for staff to play with. Tune in to Shorties to hear about our favorite fidget toys.

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