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Routines-Based Home Strategies for Families Receiving Early Intervention Support

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**Abstract:**

Early Intervention refers to the services and support in which young children with, or at risk for, developmental delays have access; this includes home visits and collaboration between families and service providers. In order to create a positive working relationship, home visitors and service providers must ensure families feel supported. Not only are they welcoming visitors into their home and personal space, they are continually collaborating with providers to build their toolbox of skills to support their young child. Therefore, it is essential for service providers to honor each family's beliefs and culture (Harry, 2002).

The purpose of routines-based early intervention, one part of this collaboration between families and professionals, is to enhance children's participation in family routines, based on the needs and desires of the family unit (Jennings et al., 2012). This caregiver learning happens through a strategic coaching model. The purpose of this project was to look deeper into Early Intervention caregiver relationship(s), coaching, and routines-based home strategies and interventions. The project consisted of a review of the literature of coaching models and Early Intervention as well as the development of five parent-friendly handouts that correlate to common routine-based home strategies used with Early Intervention caregivers.

Key words: Routines-Based intervention, Early Intervention, Home Visit, Coaching Families.

## **Routines-Based Home Strategies for Families Receiving Early Intervention Support**

### **Introduction:**

Early Intervention refers to the services and support in which young children with developmental delays have access. One of the biggest aspects of Early Intervention programs is parent engagement and coaching. Coaching is a relationship-based process used to support the development of specific skills through various activities such as listening, modeling, and practice (Inbar-Furst et al., 2019).

Caregiver coaching is one method that has been used and recommended in Early Intervention to encourage family-centered practices. In Early Intervention, coaching is a collaborative process where Early intervention service providers use a wide variety of adult learning strategies to support caregivers as they develop skills that will lead to better developmental and learning outcomes for their children (Inbar-Furst et al., 2019).

Coaching families in the child's natural environment promotes the use of interventions, home routines-based strategies and parent-child interactions, that support the child's development in everyday routines and activities (Jennings et al., 2012). The implementation of routines-based home strategies is a proven method to promote learning of young children and their families in the comfort of their home through daily routines (Jennings et al., 2012). This allows service providers to build caregiver capacity and allow caregivers to feel empowered in their child's development and education.

## **Review of Literature**

Six studies were reviewed in the following literature review. Within the six studies four focused on the coaching model with caregivers in the home through Early Intervention, and two focused on specific Routine-Based strategies in Early Intervention. Of the six studies four had mixed method approaches to collecting and analyzing data. The other two were a review of home visiting transcripts or videos taken during ongoing Early Intervention services. The literature in this review digs deeper into home visits and routines-based interventions in homes across the United States in both middle class families and those living below the poverty line. One study examines cultural linguistic backgrounds and Early Intervention outcomes. Overall, the studies demonstrate characteristics of positive caregiver relationships between the Early Intervention team and the use of routines-based home strategies with young children and their caregivers.

### **Caregiver home visitor relationship and coaching**

The core of home visitation is the relationships between caregivers and the Early Intervention team. Parents' development enhances their relationship with the child, which is the foundation for the child's development (Campbell & Sawyer, 2009). The parent/home visitor relationship is dynamic in that it varies both in nature and in effect as a result of personal characteristics of the parents and the home visitor. The personal characteristics, values, and attitudes affect the relationship between the family and the home visitor. In a study by Campbell and Sawyer (2009), the type and frequency of purposeful teaching behaviors that Early Intervention providers used during home visits

and the child, provider, and caregiver characteristics that may have influenced teaching and learning in the home were investigated. They identified four elements essential to forming the parent home visitor relationship: expectations, agenda, roles and setting (Campbell and Sawyer, 2009). First, home visitors discussed with parents their expectations and the parents' expectations; they then set the agenda where they described what they hoped to accomplish with the parent and child. Home visitors and parents also clarified the roles of parent and home visitor in the context of their relationship. Finally, both home visitors and parents need to be comfortable working in the specific setting of the parents' home (Campbell and Sawyer, 2009).

Regardless of a home visiting program's agenda, parents are the final decision makers in their child-rearing practices. When Early Intervention programs are successful, parents' new understanding and skills allow them to be informed when making deliberate decisions, such as, what types of toys to buy to help their child with fine motor development. Parents' informed decision making emerges from their extended interactions and personal relationships with their service providers (Sawyer 2009).

Once a positive relationship is established coaching can begin with the family to encourage family-centered practices and facilitate positive adult and child interactions.. During coaching, service providers use a wide variety of adult learning strategies to support the development of specific skills; activities such as listing, modeling, and practice are used (Inbar-Furst et al., 2020). Ultimately Early Intervention coaching is a collaborative process where care is given to support caregivers as they develop skills

that will lead to better development and learning outcomes for their child (Inbar-Furst et al., 2020).

Coaching is traditionally conducted in the child's natural setting, such as the family's home, the child's daycare, or grandparents' house. Inbar-Furst et al. (2020) identified the PAR (Plan, Act and Reflect) strategy commonly used in Early Intervention caregiver coaching. In step one, Plan, service providers collaborate with caregivers to identify goals for the child and family and develop a plan for how to achieve these goals. In step two, Act, the service provider observes the caregiver as they interact with the child and demonstrates the identified strategy. Finally, in step three, Reflect, the service provider encourages the caregiver to reflect on their knowledge and skills and provides supportive feedback on what went well and what could be done differently (Inbar-Furst et al., 2020).

Researchers explored the PAR strategy among Early Intervention teams and found that service providers report they feel comfortable implementing the Plan and Act components of the strategy but oftentimes struggle with Reflection and feedback to caregivers (Inbar-Furst et al., 2020, p.22-23). It is a challenging skill because reflection demands time, emotional engagement, questioning one's personal beliefs and values and stepping outside one's comfort zone. However, encouraging reflection is important to promote caregivers independence. According to Inbar-Furst et al. (2020), service providers can use a series of general or specific-in-nature questions to encourage caregiver reflection on their knowledge and skills. Questions can support different types of reflection and allow caregivers to describe the planning or use of practice and help

service providers evaluate and adjust the strategy as needed (Inbar-Furst et al., 2020). Another way to encourage caregivers to reflect is to model reflection to them. The service provider can use different times of reflection to ask themselves questions and answer these out loud. The service provider can also discuss with the caregiver what they have done and how it could help them understand what worked and what changes might be needed in the future (Inbar-Furst et al., 2020).

Much like Inbar-Furst et al. study, Lorio et al. (2020) reviewed problem solving and reflection in caregiver coaching strategies. Lorio et al.(2020) noted the following coaching strategies commonly used with caregivers: joint planning, information sharing, observation, direct teaching, demonstration or modeling, practice, feedback, problem solving and reflection. In Early Intervention problem solving and reflection are two caregiver coaching strategies cited as important for building caregiver capacity and confidence (Lorio et al., 2020) . Even as service providers in the study highlighted the difficulty of problem solving and reflection, they also noted the benefits of problem solving and reflection for the family. One service provider stated, “Letting the parent problem solve and reflect forced me to sit back and give the parent more independence” (Lorio et al 2020, p.38). Reflection is a great tool for families and caregivers; it is also a great way to brainstorm ideas and strategies together to ensure families feel empowered in their child’s success. Overall, the service providers in the study who used reflection found better outcomes for caregivers and families they service (Lorio et al., 2020).

### **Coaching Families with Diverse Backgrounds**



In Early Intervention, service providers often have opportunities to support families of young children from cultures and backgrounds and life experiences that are very different from their own. Home visiting is a major component to Early Intervention and oftentimes service providers obtain more information about the families cultural background and lifestyle simply by being in their home (Klass, 2008). Respecting diversity and being open to understanding and learning about the family lifestyle, opinions and choices is an important requirement for service providers. Sensitivity is the key to working with parents from diverse cultures. Home visitors must respect cultural differences in feeding practices, sleeping, bathrooming, discipline, and the role of family members as well as beliefs about interpreting babies' needs, responding to babies, and considering their parents' point of view (Klass, 2008). When service providers work with families of cultural backgrounds different from their own, respect, rapport building, empathic listening and support are especially important.

In the United States, studies addressing the views and experiences of different groups of families have yielded four key themes that have clear implications for professionals in disability services: the fact that social groups construct disability differently from one another and from professionals, the differential expectations for childhood development and differential interpretations of the etiology and meaning of disabilities, the role of culture in parental coping styles, and the effects of any of the foregoing factors on parental participation in the special education process (Harry, 2002; Klass, 2008). When home visitors work with families of a different culture or background they try to do several important tasks at the same time. These include: being aware of

their own cultural biases, working to understand and respect each family's cultural patterns, and working to see the uniqueness in each family regardless of culture (Harry, 2002). Although culture sensitivity has been around for many years it continues to be an area for service providers to grow in. Harry (2002), discusses the importance of continuing education in cultural competency and the importance of developing a positive relationship with caregivers from all backgrounds.

### **Routines-Based Strategies**

Early Intervention services for young children are recommended to be in their natural setting; examples may include the home environment, daycare settings, or another familiar routine place for the child (Klass, 2008). Routines-based Intervention is known as routines that occur within the child's natural environment that service providers can focus on scaffolding new learning based on those daily experiences. When caregivers use daily routines as the context for a child's development interventions, they can integrate them into natural activities without disrupting the child's natural routines and daily schedule (Jennings et al., 2012). The child does not need to learn to generalize the skills from a therapy setting into their home. When developmental interventions are embedded into the child's regular routines and activities, skills learned are functional and meaningful for both the child and caregiver (Jennings et al, 2012). Jennings et al., notes the importance of daily routines for young children and their families to learn new skills in a predictable setting. Interventions can be integrated into play, meal times, bath time, or any other daily routine.

Planning and implementing routine-based strategies and interventions in Early Intervention is a multifaceted process. Jennings et al., (2012) describes the 5 step planning process known to support families through implementing routines-based strategies: (1) identify child's targeted developmental outcomes in the IFSP, (2) identify natural environments where the intervention will occur, (3) analyze activities and routines in those environments that have potential for targeted intervention linked to developmental outcomes, (4) develop and implement a plan with embedded intervention strategies and routines, and (5) collect child data and review to monitor progress (p. 16-19).

Early Intervention routines-based intervention and strategies relies on the communication between caregivers and service providers. Coaching cannot happen without family involvement. Coordination through conversation is essential among all Early Intervention team members and the family. After service providers gather information about the child, environments, and routines, the team can collaborate to develop strategies to embed during daily routines (Jennings et al., 2012). One way service providers do this is through caregiver coaching. It is important for service providers to implement routines-based interventions through ongoing collaboration and communication with families and the Early Intervention team. Embedding Early Intervention activities into routines and activities of young children with developmental delays, will help families feel more comfortable and willing to implement the strategies in their daily routines (Jennings et al., 2012).

Daily routines and activities serve as flexible and useful ways to embed instruction for several reasons. Daily routines, by nature, are repeated on a regular basis (Woods & Goldstein 2003). Most routines are consistent and have a predictable sequence to practice the new strategy. The natural variation in routines, such as eating different food for breakfast and watching different cartoons contributes to generalization in the home (Woods & Goldstein 2003).

Wood and Goldstein (2003), noted some “pitfalls” identified in their study that service providers should avoid. First, routines can become so predictable for families that they are more like rituals. Too much consistency may be hard for a young child to generalize and the child may become more rigid to the routine. Second, the home visitor should help the caregiver avoid complacency around the routine. For example, once the routine is moving smoothly the caregiver may forget to continue to expect more from the child. Lastly, Wood and Goldstein (2003), noted it is important to remember that not all routines are created equal. It is essential that the child is actively engaged in the routine and highly motivated to participate in the routine. This will create teaching opportunities for the child and family.

The consistent sequence of routines and familiarity with the materials provide a natural scaffold to support families implementation of the routines based strategy. They can predict when the next opportunity for the strategy will occur in the routine and be prepared to prompt or reinforce their child’s learning. These everyday experiences also make intervention more meaningful and consistent with the families priorities.

## **Conclusion**

Caregivers are the key to a child's success. It is essential for Early Intervention providers to create a positive working relationship with caregivers of all backgrounds. Once a positive relationship is established service providers have the opportunity to directly coach families through their daily routines as they help support their child learn and grow in the home environment. Working with caregivers allows providers to build the caregiver's capacity to continue to implement strategies with their child on a daily basis through the routines of their day. Caregivers are able to identify daily opportunities to continue to practice strategies with their young child. It is also important for home visitors to take time to reflect with the family and discuss how the strategy worked or did not work. This allows caregivers to problem solve and become more independent with identifying other strategies to try or ways to modify home strategies to best fit the needs of the child and their family. Overall, children are better influenced by the caregivers who spend hour after hour with them during the week than they are by home visitors.

**Project Description:**

As part of my final Capstone project I created five parent-friendly handouts to correlate with common routine-based home strategies used with Early Intervention caregivers.

Although caregivers are always coached through routines-based home strategies, in my own experience with my family and through my observation of Early Intervention families, caregivers become busy and tend to forget what was discussed at visits. My goal was to create a quick snapshot of the strategies identified during the homevisit to allow parents to look back on why, who, where, and when of the strategie(s). I look forward to using these handouts in the future with my Early Intervention families as we discuss these routines-based home strategies.



## Using Visuals in the Home: Stop Sign

Created by: Hallie Zander, Early Intervention Teacher



Why?	When?	Who?	How?	What if my child is ready to move on?
<p>Provides visual support to go with spoken direction.</p> <p>Allows caregivers to be in control of the activity.</p>	<p>Use a stop sign when you want a child to stay away from materials (pantry, pens and pencils) or a specific room (parents' bedroom)</p> <p><b>Use in the home or in the community!</b></p>	<p>Parents, caregivers, and even older siblings can help support with implementing the stop sign.</p>	<p>Tape the stop sign to certain areas around the house at the child's eye level to indicate "no entry."</p> <p>Make sure you pair the use of the stop sign with verbal language. Use simple concise language, keep it consistent!</p> <p><b>LESS IS MORE: "Stop"</b></p>	<p>Once a child understands to stop, expand using pictures or verbal language to indicate what they want out of the specific areas. For example, put a ring of pictures that have food choices on them next to the stop sign on the fridge, or put a ring of pictures of outside choices next to the door.</p> <p><b>Talk with your service provider to determine the best approach when reaching this step.</b></p>

Examples:



***PLEASE: Update your service provider on how the strategy is working within your daily routines.***

Research that support the use of visual stop signs can be found in the following article:

Spencer, T. D., Petersen, D. B., & Gillam, S. L. (2008). Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) or Sign Language: An evidence-based decision-making example. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 41(2), 40–47.



# Using Visuals in the Home: Visual Schedule (First, Then)



Created by: Hallie Zander, Early Intervention Teacher

Why?	When?	Who?	How?	What if my child is ready to move on?
<p>Allows the visual support to go with verbal direction of what is happening next in a child's routine of the day.</p>	<p>Use a visual "first, then" schedule when transitioning your child to the next activity.</p> <p><b>Use in the home or in the community! (First: Store, Then: Playground)</b></p>	<p>Parents, caregivers, and even older siblings can help support with a visual schedule.</p> <p><b>Do not let your child have control over the schedule unless you are offering choices that the child can understand.</b></p>	<p>Have the visuals ready before the child sees you place it on the schedule.</p> <p>Make sure you are pairing the visual with verbal language. Use simple concise language, keep it consistent!</p> <p><b>LESS IS MORE:</b> Avoid LONG language like "You need to go to the bathroom and wash your hands, and then we will eat dinner in the kitchen at the table!"</p> <p><b>Instead, use: "First wash hands, then dinner" or "First jacket, then outside" or "First cat, then playground" etc.</b></p>	<p><b>Start with a "first, then" schedule and increase to a longer visual schedule with more activities as you see your child can handle the routine.</b> Talk with your service provider to determine the best approach when reaching this step.</p> <p>Incorporate harder routines into the schedule. (ex. If your child has a hard time with the bathroom, have preferred activities before and after. .ie. "toys, bathroom, ipad")</p>

**Examples:**



**"First Bathroom--then read book"**



**"First, snack--Then, bath"**

***PLEASE: Talk with your service provider to determine the best use of pictures on your child's first, then schedule.***

Research that support the use of visual first/then schedules can be found in the following article:

Zimmerman, K. N., Ledford, J. R., & Barton, E. E. (2017). Using visual activity schedules for young children with challenging behavior. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 39(4), 339–358.





# Using Visuals in the Home: Visual Schedule

Created by: Hallie Zander , Early Intervention Teacher



Why?	When?	Who?	How?	What if my child is ready to move on?
<p>Allows the visual support to go with verbal direction of what is happening next in your child’s routine of the day.</p>	<p>Use a visual schedule to show your child what activities are in their day.</p> <p>Use a visual schedule during self-care routines to break down each step.</p> <p><b>Use in the home or in the community! (First: store, Then: park)</b></p>	<p>Parents, caregivers, and even older siblings can help support with a visual schedule.</p> <p><b>Do not let your child have control over the schedule unless you are offering choices that the child can understand.</b></p>	<p>Have the visuals ready before the child sees you place it on the schedule.</p> <p>Make sure you are pairing the visual with verbal language. Use simple concise language, keep it consistent!</p> <p><b>LESS IS MORE:</b> Avoid LONG language like “You need to go to the bathroom and wash your hands, and then we will eat dinner in the kitchen at the table!”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Instead, use: “First wash hands, then dinner” or “First jacket, then outside” or “First car, then playground” etc</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Start with a “first, then” schedule and increase to a longer visual schedule with more activities as you see your child can handle the routine.</b> Talk with your service provider to determine the best approach when reaching this step.</p> <p>Incorporate harder routines into the schedule. (ex. If your child has a hard time with the bathroom, have preferred activities before and after. .ie. “toys, bathroom, ipad”)</p>

Examples:



***PLEASE: Talk with your service provider to determine the best use of pictures on your child’s schedule.***

Research that support the use of visual schedules can be found in the following article:

Zimmerman, K. N., Ledford, J. R., & Barton, E. E. (2017). Using Visual Activity Schedules for Young Children with Challenging Behavior. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 39(4), 339–358.



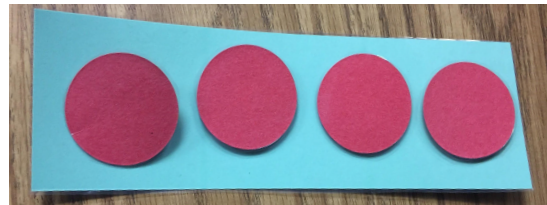
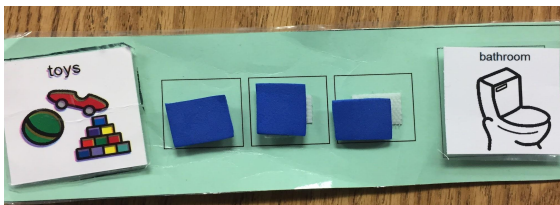
# Using Visuals in the Home: Visual Timers

Created by: Hallie Zander- Early Intervention Teacher



Why?	When?	Who?	How?	What if my child is ready to move on?
<p>Allows the visual support to go with verbal direction of what is happening next in your child's routine of the day.</p> <p>Easing transitions and increasing time on task with an activity.</p> <p>Allows caregivers to be in control of the time in an activity or situation.</p> <p>Visual timers are adjustable based on the needs of the child and situation.</p>	<p>Use a visual timer when <b>transitioning</b> your child to the next activity.</p> <p>To keep a child engaged in an activity or task.</p> <p>When wait time is needed between activities.</p> <p><b>Use in the home or in the community!</b></p>	<p>Parents, caregivers, and even older siblings can help support the child with visual timers.</p> <p><b>Do not let the child have control over the timer.</b></p>	<p>Have the visual timer ready before approaching the child.</p> <p>Use preferred activity before moving onto activities that are harder for the child to transition from.</p> <p>Start with a small duration of time and work towards a longer duration.</p> <p>Make sure you are pairing the visual with verbal language. Use simple concise language, keep it consistent!</p> <p><b>LESS IS MORE: Minimize your use of language and redirect to visual timer ex. "One more, then play"</b></p>	<p><b>Increase the time between activities as the child can handle it.</b></p> <p>Talk with your service provider to determine the best approach when reaching this step.</p> <p>Incorporate harder routines into the schedule. (ex. If the child has a hard time with the bathroom, have preferred activities after (ie. "three more then ipad")</p>

Examples:



**PLEASE: Talk with your service provider to determine the best use of pictures on your child's visual timer.**

Research that support the use of visual timers can be found in the following article:

Spencer, T. D., Petersen, D. B., & Gillam, S. L. (2008). Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) or Sign Language: An Evidence-Based Decision-Making Example. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 41(2), 40–47.



# Using Visuals in the Home: Wait Card

Created by: Hallie Zander-Early Intervention Teacher



Why?	When?	Who?	How?	What if my child is ready to move on?
<p>Allows the visual support to go with verbal direction.</p> <p>Allows caregivers to be in control of the activity.</p>	<p>Use a wait card when having your child wait for a specific activity.</p> <p>Sharing or trading toys/objects</p> <p>When wait time is needed between activities.</p> <p><b>Use in the home or in the community!</b></p>	<p>Parents, caregivers, and even older siblings can help support with waiting.</p>	<p>Hand the wait card to the child when expecting them to wait.</p> <p>Put a wait card near doors or exits to indicate to wait for an adult.</p> <p>Make sure you are pairing the visual with verbal language. Use simple concise language, keep it consistent!</p> <p><b>LESS IS MORE: "Waiting"</b></p>	<p><b>Move away from visual to verbal reminders to wait once they are ready to move on.</b></p> <p>Talk with your service provider to determine the best approach when reaching this step.</p> <p>Incorporate harder routines into waiting.</p>

Examples:



***PLEASE: Update your service provider on how the strategy is working within your daily routines.***

Research that support the use of wait cards can be found in the following article:

Spencer, T. D., Petersen, D. B., & Gillam, S. L. (2008). Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) or Sign Language: An evidence-based decision-making example. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 41(2), 40–47

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Zimmerman, K. N., Ledford, J. R., & Barton, E. E. (2017). Using visual activity schedules for young children with challenging behavior. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 39(4), 339–358.