

About Transactional Supports



What are Transactional Supports?

The term “Transactional Supports” refers to the supports or strategies used by parents to promote their child’s learning and development. The following evidence-based intervention supports and strategies can be used in everyday activities with your child to promote active engagement and social communication development. These supports are organized into three layers; 1) Supports for a Shared Agenda, 2) Supports for Social Reciprocity, and 3) Supports for Better Skills. Like making a layer cake, it’s important to develop the first layer before adding the second and third layers. Below is a suggested order for introducing each support within a layer. Because they are cumulative, later supports rely on earlier supports being in place.



First Layer: Supports for a Shared agenda

(so that you and your child are participating in the activity together)

1. **A motivating activity** is something your child wants to do that includes interesting materials. Activities such as hand washing are necessary but may not be motivating. Knowing that a fun activity is coming after a necessary activity is one way to make a necessary activity motivating. Adding interesting materials or other supports for a shared agenda can also help make necessary activities more interesting or sensible for your child and might even make them more fun.
2. **A productive role** lets your child know exactly what to do and that they are expected to use materials in an appropriate way and actively attend and participate. Roles can be as simple as turning a page, dropping clothes into a hamper from the dryer, or gathering materials for a painting activity.
3. **Predictability of the activity** lets your child know what is coming next by making the beginning, middle, and end of each activity clear to your child.
4. **Positioning** yourself so that you are close by, at your child’s level, and face-to-face to make it easier for your child to notice you, look at you, and interact with you.
5. **Follow your child’s attentional focus** means noticing and talking about what your child is paying attention to, doing, or experiencing. Asking your child to shift their attention to something else is placing more burden on your child’s social attention and can interfere with establishing a shared agenda.

Second Layer: Supports for Social Reciprocity

(so that there is a give and take in interaction)

6. **Promote child initiation** by setting up a reason for your child to communicate, then waiting. When you ask your child to say a word they practice responding- not initiating communication. Natural pauses encourage your child to practice communicating their own ideas.
7. **Balance turns** so that you take no more than 1 ½ turns for each of your child's turns. Keep in mind that your turn can be a comment, gesture or action that supports your child to take a turn next. Your child may also take turns using actions, gestures, or words.
8. **Natural reinforcers** such as offering help, comfort, a favorite snack or toy, shared enjoyment, or shared interest naturally reward your child's communication. Saying "good talking!" has no connection with the intention your child is trying to communicate and therefore does not help your child learn that their words have power and meaning.
9. **Clear messages to ensure comprehension** make it clear to your child that you expect them to listen to and act on your words. Gestures or other contextual support are offered to ensure that your child understands your message. Language that is optional for your child to listen to may give the impression that the language of others can be "tuned out" or disregarded.

Third Layer: Supports for Better Skills

(to promote social communication development)

10. **Model language, play, and interaction** to help your child know what they could say or do. Model language just above your child's level, and use their perspective when possible, "as they would say it if they could". Providing a model of language or behavior builds better skills by example and by giving the turn back to your child. Giving directions or asking questions can provide a more limited response and may not build better skills.
11. **Extend the activity, roles, and transitions** to build on play, interaction, and connectedness. "Stretching" engaged time spent in activities and expanding roles your child can take on during transitions can add up quickly to more engaged time per week.
12. **Adjust expectations and demands** by offering more support when your child is struggling, and increasing expectations when things are going well to keep your child moving forward. Over time, you should be able to do less of the "work" and shift more responsibility to your child to keep interaction and communication going.
13. **Balance interaction and independence** by supporting interaction but also building independence with an eye toward what your child needs to learn in a group setting to prepare for the skills needed in preschool and kindergarten classrooms.



You can promote your child's learning and development by putting supports and strategies in place in everyday activities. Soon you will feel confident making every moment an opportunity to practice and learn! This allows you, with the support of your EI provider, the opportunity to achieve the intensity needed to support active engagement for your child with ASD. Supporting your child's ability to be flexible, to use a variety of materials, easily shift attention between materials or topics and people and not show rigidity or resistance to change, may indicate a good balance between the ability to work alone and to include others, setting the stage for self-directed learning and classroom success.