

Systematic Instruction Practices

When teachers of young children identify specific behavior or skills they want a child to learn, they can use systematic instruction practices to teach those targeted skills. By carefully planning and intentionally using teacher-directed instruction strategies, teachers can help a child learn new behavior, continue to use the behavior over time, and use the behavior in different activities and with different people.

Learning Guide: Using Systematic Strategies to Promote Child Learning

- Identify the behavior you want a child to learn. A targeted behavior can be a single, simple action (e.g., touching a desired toy) or a more complex series of several actions (e.g., washing hands). Select behavior that would be useful for participating in everyday activities and ones you can observe the child doing.
- Identify the child's interests, favorites, and preferences for toys, materials, people, activities, and actions to determine reinforcing consequences that could be used when teaching the child the new behavior. Identify what makes the child happy, what the child chooses to do, what captures the child's attention, what the child does frequently.
- Identify existing or new activities that provide the child opportunities to learn to use the targeted behavior and receive an interesting consequence. Engage the child in learning activities you selected. Get the child's attention and provide a cue that lets the child know the learning session is starting.
- Before or while a child performs a new target behavior, provide prompts to assist the child to perform the behavior correctly. You can provide a verbal prompt (e.g., saying, "Try putting that over here."); a gestural prompt (e.g., pointing to a correct choice), a model of the behavior (e.g., saying, "Truck. That is a truck."); or a physical prompt (e.g., using supportive hand-over-hand assistance to get the child to do the behavior). Provide only the amount and type of assistance necessary to help the child be successful. Withdraw the prompts and assistance as the child acquires the target behavior.
- Provide the selected interesting consequence immediately after and each time the child performs or tries to perform the target behavior. Whenever feasible, use a variety of consequences (interesting to the child) that naturally occur in the activity. As the child acquires and uses the target behavior consistently, provide the consequences less frequently.
- Provide multiple opportunities for the child to use the behavior in different activities and with different people and materials. Ensure the environment is rich in naturally reinforcing consequences by providing many interest-based activities and materials.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

You'll know the practice is working if ...

- Children stay engaged during the instructional sessions
- Children acquire adult-identified skills as a result of the instruction
- Children use the new skills in different activities and with different people and materials

A Quick Peek



Megan and the other teachers in her classroom wanted Kyle to be able to match examples of letters he saw in different contexts. Megan developed an activity in which Kyle would match letters in a name in an animal notebook with the letters in the same animal name on a large card. Megan knew that Kyle loved getting attention and praise from teachers, so she decided to cheer for him when he matched the letters. She gave Kyle the animal notebook and observed as he selected the photo of a horse. Megan told Kyle the word said **horse** and together they picked the card with the same word. Then Megan pointed to the letter **e**, and said, "This is the letter **e**. Can you find another letter on the card that looks like this?" She took Kyle's hand and helped him point to the letter, cheering as he did so. With Megan's help, Kyle matched the other letters in the word and then moved on to another animal name in the notebook. They continued matching letters in this way, with Megan cheering each time. Soon, Megan only had to prompt him by asking, "Which one matches?" Over time, Kyle could point to the matched letters in the two words independently. Megan then modified the activity to give him opportunities to match letters when the words were not the same.

Learn more about systematic instructional practices from professional colleagues and from online resources such as [Using the System of Least to Most Prompts](#) by C. J. Fields.