

## Addressing Adaptive Skills in the Classroom

### Overview of Adaptive Skills

Adaptive skills are those in which the child uses the information and skills acquired in the other domains. **Adaptive skills** are defined as practical, everyday skills needed to function and meet the demands of one's environment, including the skills necessary to effectively and independently take care of oneself and to interact with other people. (Adaptive Skills – PAR – Psychological Assessment Resources)

As adaptive skills develop there are increases in a child's participation in personal care and daily routines. Adaptive skills also include a child's ability to enter a new environment or situation as well as engage in a familiar/desirable activity with minimal prompting.

**The Battelle Developmental Inventory – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (BDI-2)** addresses two subdomains in the Adaptive Domain area:

- Self-care – Skills include feeding, dressing, toileting, and drinking independently
- Personal Responsibility – Child's ability to assume responsibility for actions, put away toys, initiate activities, avoid common dangers

### **Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for ages Birth to 5 years (FELDS)**

documents do not address Adaptive skills as a separate category. However, most adaptive skills related to self-care and participation in routines are addressed in the FELDS category of Physical Development; a few standards in Social-Emotional and Communication categories also address adaptive skills.

Domain Labels in BDI=2 and FELDS	
<i>Battelle Developmental Inventory – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition</i>	<i>Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards</i>
Adaptive	----
Personal-Social	Social-Emotional
Communication	Language and Communication (+Emergent Literacy)
Motor	Physical
Cognitive	Cognitive (+Knowledge)
----	Approaches to Learning

### Development of skills is interrelated across domains.

#### **Examples of the interrelated relationship of adaptive skills to skills in other domains:**

- Understanding the steps in daily routines, responding to adult actions, and anticipating next steps in routines are related to cognitive skills of imitation, memory, cause-and-effect, and problem solving.
- Development of self-care routines can be impacted by a child's motor development. The child's ability to use muscles impacts use of materials in the environment, therefore impacting development in adaptive skills which require standing, balancing, and coordinating movements. Adaptive skills such as eating (holding utensils) are interrelated with the use of small muscles and fine motor skills.
- Communication skills impact development of adaptive skills based on a child's ability to understand and process directions, as well as expressive skills such as requesting help and stating needs for toileting.
- Delays in personal-social development might impact adaptive skills if a child does not understand social expectations associated with tasks such as self-feeding, toileting, and cleaning up materials.

It is important to be aware of the **interrelatedness of domain skills** in order to determine the impact of various delays or difficulties when teaching adaptive skills. It is likely that several domain needs will have to be addressed in order to best teach adaptive skills.

**Correlations of Florida Early Learning and Development Standards that relate to items in the Adaptive Domain of the Battelle Developmental Inventory – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.**

3 years		Physical Development		
Subdomain	FELDS Standards		BDI2	
Gross Motor	A.1	Shows characteristics of appropriate health and development		PR1 PR2 GM27
Self-Help	C.1	Actively participates in self-care		SC18 SC19 SC20 SC21

3 years		Social Emotional Development		
Subdomain	FELDS Standards		BDI-2	
Self-Regulation	B.1	Follows simple rules and familiar routines with support		PR7
	B.2	Begins to use materials with increasing care and safety		PR6

3 years		Communication		
Subdomain	FELDS Standards		BDI-2	
Listening and Understanding	A.1	Listens to and understands spoken language		PR3
	A.2	Shows understanding by following simple directions		PR3
Communicating and Speaking	B.1	Shows improving expressive communication skills		PR5

**Key for labels of BDI-2 Subdomains**

SC = Self Care

PR = Personal Responsibility

GM = Gross Motor

FM = Fine Motor

PM = Perceptual Motor

RC = Receptive Communication

\*Skills related to self-care and independent functioning are found across domains because of the interrelatedness of the development of these skills in young children.



**Correlations of Florida Early Learning and Development Standards that relate to items in the Adaptive Domain of the Battelle Developmental Inventory – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.**

4 – 5 years		Physical Development		
Subdomain	FELDS Standards		BDI-2	
Health and Wellness	A.1	Shows characteristics of good health to facilitate learning		
	A.2	Shows visual abilities to facilitate learning and healthy growth and development		GM33
	A.3	Demonstrates auditory ability to facilitate learning and healthy growth and development		RC18
	A.5	Shows familiarity with health care providers in relation to health and wellness		PR5
	A.6	Demonstrates self-control, interpersonal, and social skills in relation to mental health		PR7
	A.8	Actively takes part in basic health and safety routines		SC22 PR5 PR6
	A.10	Makes healthy food choices		SC22 SC23
Self-Help	B.1	Actively participates in self-care		SC23 SC24 SC25 FM19
	B.2	Helps carry out classroom routines		PR7
Fine Motor	D.1	Demonstrates increasing control of small motor muscles to perform simple tasks		FM17 FM18 FM20 PM7 PM9
	D.2	Uses eye-hand coordination to perform fine motor tasks		FM17 FM18 FM20 PM7 PM9

4 – 5 years		Social Emotional Development		
Subdomain	FELDS Standards		BDI-2	
Social-Emotional Domain	B. Life/Adaptive	1. Follows simple rules, agreements, and familiar routines		PR7 PR9
		2. Begins to use materials with increasing care and safety		PR6

4 – 5 years		Communication		
Subdomain	FELDS Standard		BDI-2	
Listening and Understanding	A.1	Increases knowledge through listening		PR7
	A.2	Follows multi-step directions		PR7
Vocabulary	C.1	Shows an understanding of words and their meanings		PR5

## General Strategies for Teaching Self-care Skills

- Understand the steps involved in each skill
- Provide frequent and purposeful opportunities to practice the skill
- Ensure the student has the time they need to successfully complete the task
- Use strategies that are appropriate for your individual child, including hand-over-hand physical assistance, guided practice, visuals, modeling
- Provide specific and positive feedback and praise
- Be aware of reducing the level of prompting so that you do not fall into a pattern of “over-prompting” or helping too much
- Be patient and do not to move on to the next step until your student is ready
- Consult with and include therapists and therapists so that you can develop generalization across settings.

## Promoting SELF-HELP

The following guidelines, which form the acronym “**SELF-HELP**” can assist teachers in being more successful when promoting self-help skills in children with disabilities.



**S** - *Select* appropriate prompts.  
**E** - *Establish* a routine.  
**L** - *Learning*, rather than time, should be the focus.  
**F** - *Find* appropriate rewards.

**H** - *Help* from related professionals is critical.  
**E** - *Expect* positive outcomes.  
**L** - *Learning* should be embedded in the curriculum  
**P** - *Parent* involvement is the foundation for success.



## Visual Supports

Visual schedules are vital components of teaching skills to children with developmental delays and/or disabilities. Students with delays often have difficulties completing multi-step tasks, understanding and following directions, recalling the steps of tasks, and completing the motor actions involved.

**Visual supports** are useful for many reasons:

- Providing an example of the task
- Reinforcing the verbal/modeled direction with a picture, allowing for longer processing time
- Showing what to “do next” as well as showing when the task is “finished”
- Reducing the need for verbal redirection and hand-over-hand assistance
- Providing the expectation of a reinforcement at the end of the task sequence
- Increasing generalization and independence

**Visual schedules** should be provided for the entire preschool classroom to show the daily routines. However, individual schedules should be provided that are specific to tasks which are giving some children difficulties. These schedules should be intentionally taught throughout the daily routine and should be available in the settings in which they will be used. When you are teaching students to use a visual schedule, make sure the focus is on learning one new skill at a time.

- Place the schedule in a prominent and easy to reach place. Laminate or protect the schedule so that it can be touched and handled.
- Use repetitive, simple, specific language that is easy to understand and focuses on the task.
- Direct your student to check the work system with a visual/verbal prompt (e.g. ‘what do we do first?’)
- Prompt the student to go to the next step by pointing or stating “next”.
- Provide frequent and specific praise and when the child has successfully completed the schedule, ensure you reinforce their efforts, stating the child’s name and the task in your statement of praise.

In addition to visual schedules, visual supports can be provided by use of **cue cards** which show only one picture. These are used to remind a student of what he/she should do to begin a specific task and are helpful for students who have difficulty with task initiation or with using verbal and/or social cues given to the entire group.

**Social stories and social scripts** can provide clear directions for completing tasks and for how students should respond in specific situations. For preschool children, social scripts should be five sentences or less and have pictures or photographs to accompany each sentence.

There are many **programs and applications** available for download which are helpful in providing visual schedules, social scripts. These types of programs are helpful for students who are motivated by use of tablets and other devices.

## Prompts

Prompting a child who is learning a new skill is important in establishing the steps of the task; but just as important is keeping the focus on the child's participation and independence. The order of the hierarchy of prompts will vary from child to child depending on individual needs. A brief description of prompt hierarchy (most to least) is listed below:

- Physical assistance – hand-over-hand help
  - Full physical assistance throughout the entire step of the task if needed
  - Hand-over-hand to start the task
  - Partial physical assistance to get the student started by guiding him/her toward the task
- Modeling and Gesturing – physically showing the student by modeling the action or gesturing to indicate a motion you want him/her to do.
- Visual prompts – schedules, pictures, peer models
- Verbal prompts – making a direct statement of what the student should do

Least-to-most prompting is best used when a student is able to attend to a verbal prompt, understands what is being said, and has sufficient motor skills to initiate the task. In this case, the verbal direction is given, wait time provided, and then additional prompts (visual, modeling, physical assistance) are added as needed. Most-to-least prompting is often needed when a student is unable to initiate a task or does not understand the verbal or visual prompt.

Some important aspects of using prompts are as follows:

- Analyze the skill so that you know the steps of the task you are teaching your students. Break the total task into small steps so that you will know when it is appropriate to combine steps as the student progresses.
- Use varying reinforcement at the steps of the tasks so that the student does not wait to hear you say “good” (example) before going to the next step.
- Remember to use “Wait Time”. This is difficult to do sometimes, but it is necessary for developing independence. After a prompt is given – Wait – in order to give the child time to process the step of the task. Observe carefully so that you don't help too soon.
- Fade prompts as appropriate but don't fade so quickly that you cause frustration. Make the reinforcement for independent participation more exciting than reinforcement for hand-over-hand participation.
- **Keep the focus on increasing the child's participation.**



## References

Didomenico, Kelli. *How to Encourage Self- Help Skills in Children*. The Children's Workshop, Rhode Island College, Feb. 2015.

DiProperzio, Linda. *Teaching Your Child Independence*. Meredith Corporation, 2010.

Gillard, Jackie. *Help yourself! 8 tips for teaching kids to be more independent*. Today's Parent Sept, 2016.

Lynch, Sharon and Simpson, Cynthia. *Those Important Self-Help Skills*. Early Childhood News, Excelligence Learning Corporation, 2008.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools Prekindergarten Program for Children with Disabilities Extended School Year (ESY) Activities \*Home Packet\*

Queensland Department of Education, Training, and Employment provides a series of fact sheets and tip sheets related to teaching self-care and routines in early childhood settings. Links are listed and all are in pdf format:

- Links to resources for all ages: <http://education.qld.gov.au/asd-online-resource-kit/index.html>
- Links to tips sheets for using schedules for young children, including at home <http://education.qld.gov.au/asd-online-resource-kit/families/docs/preparingchild/work-systems-home.doc>
- Links to tip sheets for using daily schedules and routines in classrooms for early childhood <http://education.qld.gov.au/asd-online-resource-kit/families/docs/preparingchild/routines-schedule.doc>

Setting up Supportive Classrooms - Using a System of Prompts. Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center, <http://www.vcuautismcenter.org/>

Examples of Online applications and programs for developing schedules and/or addressing self-care

- App: Time Timer  
Platform: iPhone, iPod Touch, and iPad, Price: iPhone App – \$2.99, iPad App – \$4.99
- App: First Then Visual Schedule  
Platform: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad, Android, Price: \$14.99
- App: Stories2Learn  
Platform: iPhone, iPad, Price: \$13.99
- App: Model Me Going Places by Model Me Kids  
Platform: iPad, iPod Touch, iPhone, Price: Free

Examples of websites that provide visuals and/or ideas for schedules

- <https://www.pinterest.com/explore/visual-schedules/>
- <http://www.child-autism-parent-cafe.com/visual-schedules.html>
- <http://adayinourshoes.com/free-printable-visual-schedules-for-home-and-daily-routines/>
- <http://connectability.ca/visuals-engine/> - This site uses Boardmaker symbols and photos, provides templates, and is free (sponsored by Ronald McDonald Houses project)
- <http://prekese.dadeschools.net/For%20Teachers/teacherhandbook/appendixP.html>