

An Introduction to SPARK Guides: Simple Play Adaptations to Reference for Kids

Adapting Toys and Activities for Access

Overview:

All children can enjoy playing and exploring, but some may need extra support to fully engage with toys and activities. For example, they might:

- Need help moving toys or moving around their environment.
- Use different ways to express their wants and needs.
- Benefit from support to focus their attention.
- See or hear the world differently.

Simple changes, or adaptations, to everyday toys and materials can help ensure all children can play and learn together.

If more support is needed to create an inclusive experience, check out specialized tools like switch-accessible toys, communication devices, and other assistive technologies.

How to Use this Guide:

1. Pick an OCALI [Early Childhood Assistive Technology Kit](#) or an item from the [Early Childhood Inclusion Center of Excellence Collection](#).
2. Find the SPARK Guide that works with the item offering ideas and options for supporting a wide range of children.
3. Need ideas fast? check out Little SPARK! Little SPARK Guides are shorter versions (~2 pages) of their SPARK Guide companions.
4. Check out other resources! Each child's unique needs may not be represented in every SPARK Guide.
5. Let us know if we can help- [Connect with Our Team!](#)

Quick Tip! Not sure what kit/item to start with? Look through the SPARK Guides first to find ideas!

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3	<u>Build It Up:</u>	Make handles, buttons, and knobs easier to use.
4	<u>Stabilize It:</u>	Keep things from sliding or tipping so a child can focus on play.
4	<u>Contain It:</u>	Provide space to play and learn within the environment, big or small!
4	<u>Positioning:</u>	Position materials within view (at a table, on the floor, etc.) and reach of the child as well as child's position (sitting, standing, laying down, etc.).
5	<u>Simplify It:</u>	Make a task easier or more obvious.
5	<u>Basic Play:</u>	Engage with materials in a simple, accessible, and intuitive way.
5	<u>Extended Play:</u>	Expands on basic play by encouraging creativity, exploration, and skill-building.
5	<u>Use Alternatives:</u>	Use readily available do-it-yourself substitutes or incorporate special devices and equipment into daily activities.
6	<u>Play/Use with Others:</u>	Playing and learning with others through cooperating, sharing, and turn-taking.
6	<u>Visual Supports:</u>	Visual cues to support following verbal directions, daily schedules, transitions, and communication.
6	<u>Words to Encourage Play/Interaction:</u>	Vocabulary to support interactions and understanding during play and learning activities.

Check out the [Resources](#) on page 7!



Support Comfort and Ease of Use: Sensory & Physical Supports

- **Add Sensory Cues**

- Help engage and sustain the child's interest and encourage exploration.
- Add textures: soft plush, crinkly fabric, smooth surfaces, rubbery materials, or rough surfaces).
- Add colors: highlighting knobs, buttons or handles, or position toys on contrasting color surface.
- Add sound: bells, rattles, squeakers.
- Add scent: scented markers, scented stickers.



Puzzle pieces with tactile cues, plush and crinkly fabric shown here to aid with matching.

- **Build It Up**

- Toys and tools can be modified to assist children with fine motor challenges who have difficulty holding and/or manipulating toys.
- Handles can be wrapped with duct tape or inserted into foam hair rollers or pool noodles for easier grasping.
- Attach handles to toys and items.



Markers attached to toy cars, glue sticks, and Velcro loops for makeshift handles.

- **Contain It**

- Containing items during play and learning activities help children manipulate, reach, organize, and recognize their materials.
- Examples: baskets, trays, boxes.
- Visual supports can also provide ways to contain during activities.
- Examples: placemats, taped off work spaces, footprints for lining up on, carpet squares, hula hoops, etc.



Hula hoops during parachute activity provides a visual reminder to move in their area.

- **Stabilize It**

- Secure toys and tools from tipping or sliding away helping children grasp, manipulate, and explore objects and activities.
- Examples: non-skid materials under toys, Velcro to adhere items, taping and gluing items to foam board or other bases.



An example of stabilize it a doll and clothing stabilized on a cookie sheet with magnetic strips added to the back.

- **Positioning**

- Whether moving or stationary, many different positions offer opportunities for children to be included in playing and learning activities.
- Examples: kneeling, sitting, standing, half-kneeling, side-lying, back-lying, stomach-lying, etc.
- Positioning the activity is another option.
- Examples: on a table, on the floor, mounted to the wall, place on an easel, etc.



A seating pillow helps prop up a child to be upright during an activity.



Make it Easier to Understand: Cognitive Supports

• Simplify It

- Decreasing the complexity of an activity helps children feel successful.
- Break down the activity into multiple steps.
- Decrease the number of steps to complete.
- Provide multi-sensory directions using both pictures and verbal directions, and possibly additional directions.
- Use fewer items, color coding, sequencing strips, etc.
- Cover and reduce the number of options, holes, or spaces available in an activity, like a puzzle.



Mr. Potato Head with a picture for instruction and limited attachments/choices to complete the activity.

• Basic Play/Extended Play

- Support simple, intuitive engagement with materials, focusing on exploring textures, movements, or functions.
- Expand play by incorporating more structure or more imaginative activities that promote problem-solving skills and creativity.

• Use Alternatives

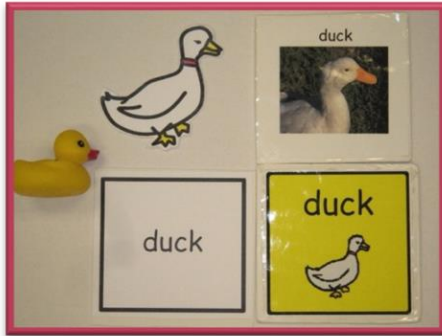
- Readily available materials can be substituted for the activity the child wants to do.
- Examples: beans bags to stack instead of blocks, painting with objects instead of paintbrushes, or playing catch with plush toys instead of ball.



A potato carved to a rounded point to use as a paintbrush with a larger grip.

- **Visual Supports**

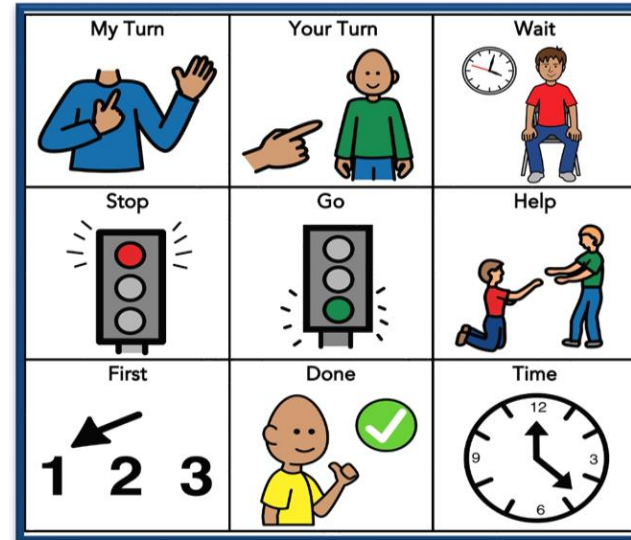
- Examples: Real objects, photographs, black & white or color line drawings of symbols, etc.
- Can be used for First-Then visual schedules, daily schedule, or multiple representations of the same item/materials for an activity.



Five representations of the word duck from object to printed word can be incorporated in play areas or other activities.

- **Words to Encourage Play/Interaction**

- Responding, commenting, protesting, directing, or asking questions help to model communication for meaningful interactions during play and learning.
- Describe actions and object and ask open-ended questions.



A grid with words and Boardmaker graphics relevant to using a timer. The words from left to right, My Turn, Your Turn, Wait, Stop, Go, Help, First, Done, Time.



Social & Interactive Engagement

- **Play and Use with Others**

- Cooperative play can be encouraged with incentive charts, social narratives, “wait”, “my turn”, “your turn” cards; see example below for your Turn and My Turn.



Resources:

- [Simon Pacer Center](#)
- [Early Childhood Building Blocks: UDL in Early Childhood Inclusive Classrooms](#)
- CAST website: <https://www.cast.org>
- The National Center to Improve Practice (NCIP) video: <https://www2.edc.org/ncip>
- [Modes for Adapting Toys](#)
- [Play Sheets](#)
- [Hasbro Toy Box Tools](#)
- [AT&AEM Website](#)
- SIFTs: <https://sifts.ocali.org/>
- Assistive Technology Internet Modules (ATIM): <https://atinternetmodules.org/>
- OCALI Lending Library: https://www.ocali.org/project/lending_library

*"Adaptations" adapted from: Haugen's Modes for Adapting Toys based on materials from the "Let's Play" Project at the University of Buffalo