



Building Partnerships to Develop Foundations for Early Self-Determination in Young Children

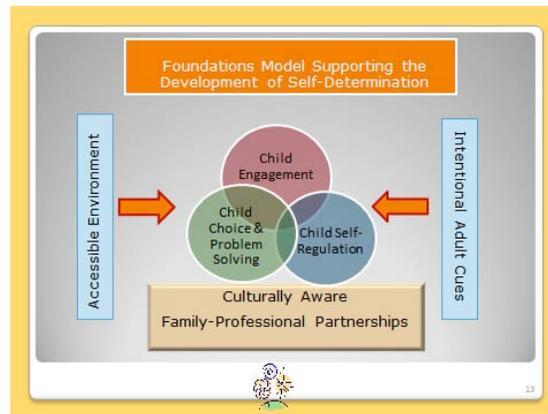
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Self- Determination is

...one's ability to define and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself (Field & Hoffman, 1994)

Foundational Skills for Self-Determination

The purpose of the Foundations Project is to develop an effective and practical intervention to help families and early childhood practitioners nourish young children to learn skills leading to self-determination. We believe self-determination helps to equip children with disabilities to become independent and successful adults. In preschool-aged children, we have identified skills that are critical precursors to later self-determination. We also believe that it is essential to develop these skills in the context of a strong family-professional partnership. Here is our Foundations model:

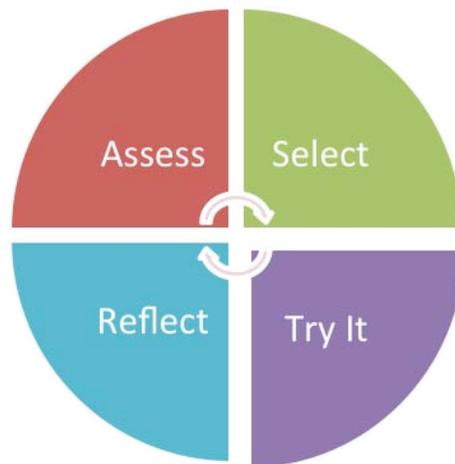


Culturally-aware family-professional partnerships are important because the concept of self-determination has many different interpretations in different cultures, so that decisions about **what** skills to nourish, and **how**, needs to be embedded in the culture of the family and the context of the program. Also, we believe that children who receive consistent messages between home and school learn faster and better.

Working in this collaborative partnership, families and professionals will identify goals and implement strategies to help young children improve their skills in three critical foundational areas: (a) making age-appropriate **decisions and choices**, (b) enhancing **self-regulation**, and (c) increasing appropriate **engagement** with materials and others. We believe they can build these skills by:

Creating accessible environments: Children can have opportunities to exercise choices, engage in activities on their own, and develop a sense of autonomy, self-regulation, and control, when they are able to access their physical world on their own. This includes, for example, having drawers or toy boxes at their own height, or small nooks or play areas where the child can be safe, but also in control.

Providing intentional adult cues: For children with disabilities, adults need to be purposeful in presenting children with opportunities to practice choice-making, engagement, and self-regulation. Intentional efforts need to be embedded within the family and preschool routine rather than becoming additional activities to be squeezed into an already-busy daily schedule.



The Foundations “Wheel” is a simple problem-solving procedure including four steps:

- Step 1: **Assess** what you need to support self-determination. The assessment process will be done with the family-practitioner partnership to identify family cultural preferences, home and classroom routines, and child characteristics, strengths, and needs. The Partners will select and prioritize broad goals for enhancing Foundations skills in the child.
- Step 2: **Select** targeted interventions. Based on the assessment, the Partners will select from our Treasure Chest, which will contain a variety of activities, home/classroom modifications, or other intentional suggestions, related to the specific goals for the child. The Partners will develop a Goal Attainment Scale for their expected results in both the home and classroom.
- Step 3: **Try** the selected interventions. The Partners will each have a portable video camera to use in documenting their use of the selected intervention in home and classroom. Partners in the development phase will also participate in on-line dialogue with other participants in the study, to compare experiences and suggest changes.
- Step 4: **Reflect** on results. The Partners will rate and discuss results using the Goal Attainment Scales, and will decide on changes in goals or next steps.

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