

# It All Comes Down to How You Use Your Marbles . . .

*. . . because what matters is the time between intervention sessions.*



Early detection and early intervention can have a lifetime impact for children with autism. The early signs of autism can have a cascading effect on brain development and lead to significant social, language, and cognitive deficits, as well as challenging behaviors, if they're not caught early. By catching autism early, you can access intervention earlier and guide your child's success.

Research indicates that children with autism should spend at least 25 hours a week **actively and productively engaged in meaningful learning activities** to improve outcomes. This sounds like a lot, but by using activities you are already doing, a few hours here and there each day can provide the intensity needed for children with autism. What matters is how engaged your child is in learning from moment to moment and activity to activity. It



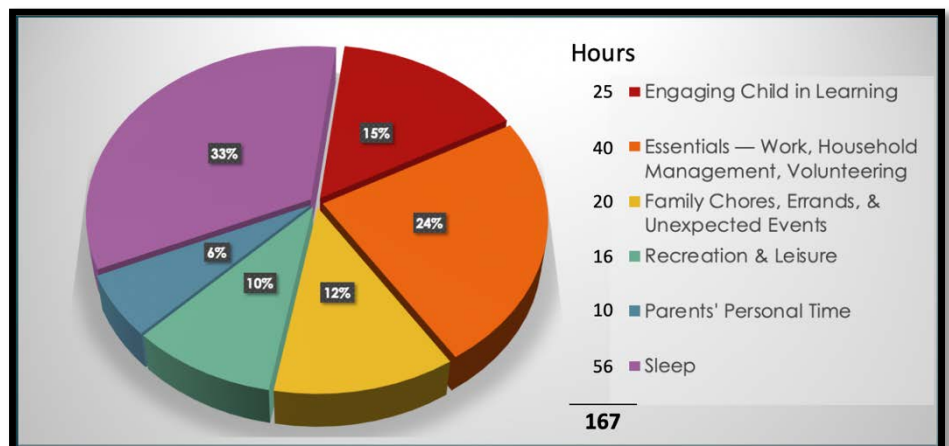
is important to look at a variety of activities spread across the day to support your child's active engagement and promote generalization of learning across activities.

The single marble on the left represents the hour a week you have with your early intervention provider, which is what most families get in early intervention until their child enters preschool. The jar on the right has 167 marbles and represents the 167 hours that go by until your next intervention session.

**What matters most, is the time you have between intervention sessions** — you can make a bigger difference in your child's success than an interventionist who only has an hour or even a few hours a week.

Trying to engage your child 25 hours a week may seem overwhelming. But consider that 25 marbles out of the 167 marbles is just **15%**. So, there is still time for all of the other things you need to do in your week. This chart shows an example of how the 25 hours might fit in. As this becomes second nature, you will be able to support your child's learning in most activities you are already doing, making it easier to achieve the intensity needed.

The hour that your early intervention provider has with you each week would be best spent **coaching you** to figure out **with you** how to improve opportunities for learning in activities you are already doing each day.



## How can my everyday activities help achieve the intensity my child needs?

Think about all the activities you are already doing each day that might have possible learning opportunities for your child — activities that you do together, like meals and snacks, caregiving, and play, as well as activities you need to do but might not yet include your child in, like family chores. *Autism Navigator How-To Guide for Families* offers a **Library of Everyday Activities** with hundreds of videos organized into the following 8 categories of everyday activities to illustrate how parents can promote active engagement in their toddler with autism.

**Everything grows out of productive roles** — you will learn how to help your child participate actively in productive roles. By asking yourself, “What are my hands doing that I can teach my child to do?”, you will learn how to expand the roles your child can do, activity by activity. To get started, this can be as simple as having your child walk into the kitchen

instead of being carried, pull their pants up with less help, or throw away a napkin. This will add minutes, and then hours to achieve the intensity needed to impact your child's learning.

As your child approaches preschool age, you will be thinking about preschool educational settings. Getting your child ready to participate actively and productively in everyday school activities is important to consider. Collaboration with the educational team can help families embed supports in everyday activities at home that can add to learning opportunities at school and further promote generalization of learning across settings.

Many everyday activities at home can offer opportunities for learning concepts needed at school — both academic lessons and rules and responsibilities. For example, family chores like watering the garden, feeding pets, filling soap dispensers, and cleaning windows can be lessons in STEM — Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math. Getting ready for a meal or going out in the yard can teach children to follow rules and take on responsibilities like how to put things away, get out needed materials, pass out food, or take turns while playing with a ball.

At school, level of active engagement can vary by degree of teacher direction —

whether the teacher is directing the teaching trial, lesson, assignment, and work agenda or this has been delegated to the student. This can also vary by group size — from individual instruction, to peer partners or small groups, to whole class instruction. To promote inclusive education, it is important to increase child-directed learning. Early intervention can build social communication skills critical for active self-directed learning that sets the stage for school success.

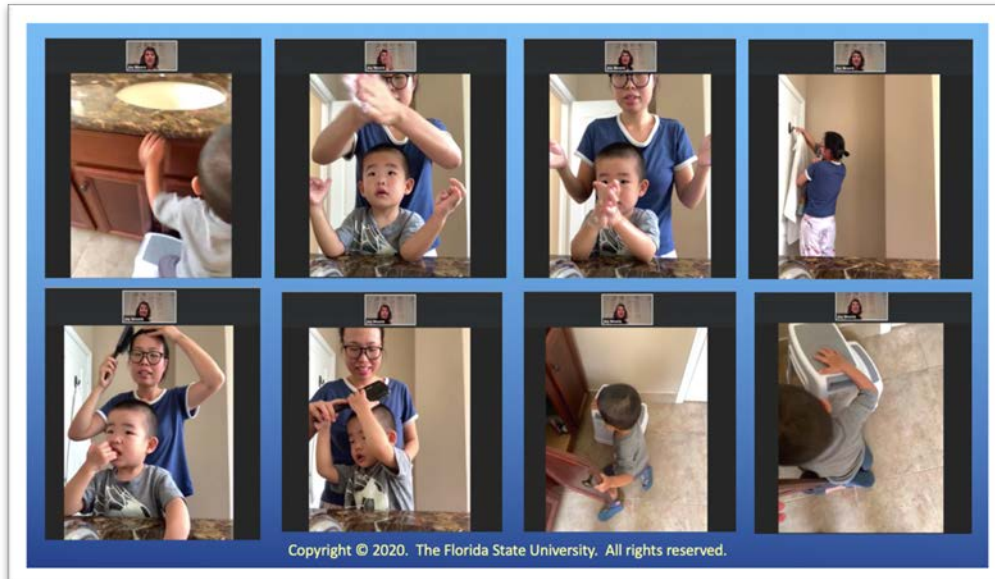


## How can early intervention be done virtually?

Virtual or mobile coaching may be necessary during COVID-19 restrictions. As families and providers gain experience, **the many advantages may become clear and lead to telehealth continuing as common practice**. Here are a few questions you may have, and tips to help you get the most out of mobile coaching sessions with your provider.

### What will you do in the session?

- You will do what you usually do with your child . . . play, eat, get dressed, wash hands, or feed the pets. Coaching sessions will focus on how to embed intervention strategies to support your child's active engagement and social communication skills in your everyday activities.
- You have all the materials you need in your home . . . toys, kitchen pots and pans, hand soap and a sink, and laundry to be put in the dryer and folded. Siblings or other family members can have a role in these activities, if they are available.
- Your everyday activities can be the best learning opportunities. Aiming to include 5 different activities across categories will help you make the most of your coaching sessions. Each session should help build your capacity so that you can practice and provide lots of opportunities for your child to learn each day. Remember we want to make the most of your marbles — the 1 hour we have for our intervention session should get you ready to embed strategies throughout the day in multiple activities to achieve the 25 hours that your child is actively engaged.



### How will you prepare for the session?

- Your provider will help work out a plan for using technology with you. Your tablet or smart phone are portable and easy to move around the house or yard. A laptop computer is also easy to manage in the session by just moving it to any stable surface as you go. Give input to your provider about priorities for each session and see what technology works best. And don't worry — technology is wonderful when it works and sometimes it doesn't. Experience will make it more comfortable.
- By sharing information about what typically happens during activities and how it is going, you and your provider can figure out what to target and what new strategies may be needed. Give feedback to your provider about what did and didn't work between sessions so you can problem solve together.

### Coaching to build your capacity . . .

A collaborative coaching model can build your capacity to engage your child actively and productively in the everyday activities that you are already doing. Coaching sessions should offer opportunities to reflect on what you have been practicing, try out new intervention strategies with feedback, and problem solve things that need help. With the one hour that we have together, we can build your confidence as you practice engaging your child between sessions and impact your child's development and learning.