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Support is a Verb: What It Really Means and How to Do It

A Practical Companion to The Inclusion Podcast Episodes 49 & 55 with Actions You Can Use Today

This curated collection of resources offers a comprehensive guide for educators, paraprofessionals, and support staff aiming to foster inclusive classroom environments. It encompasses strategies for providing subtle support, implementing academic accommodations, utilizing visual aids, enhancing communication for nonverbal students, and maximizing paraprofessional effectiveness. By integrating these approaches, educators can create classrooms that are responsive to diverse student needs, promoting engagement, independence, and a sense of belonging for all learners.

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This resource outlines discreet strategies to assist students without drawing attention, such as highlighting key directions, using checklists, and providing subtle cues.

Academic Supports on the Fly
Offers quick, adaptable solutions for common academic challenges, including modifying dense worksheets and providing immediate support for complex concepts.

Effective Use of Visual Supports
Details the implementation of visual aids to enhance understanding and predictability, including the "Sun Diagram" strategy for managing strong emotions.

Supporting Successful Communication
Provides techniques to facilitate communication, such as using sentence starters, idea sharing, and visual choice boards, ensuring all students can express themselves effectively.

11 Tips for Supporting Students Without Verbal Speech
Emphasizes the importance of presuming competence and offers practical tips for engaging nonverbal students, including using age-appropriate interactions and programming communication devices.

110 Ways Paraprofessionals Can Support Students
A comprehensive list of strategies for paraprofessionals to support students throughout the learning process, from classroom setup to fostering social connections.

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20 WAYS TO PROVIDE INVISIBLE OR SILENT SUPPORT

1. HIGHLIGHT THE DIRECTIONS.
On a complex or dense worksheet or lab assignment, highlight the key directions.

2. HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT.
Float around the room and support all students. Check in on the student if they ask or if you notice they are stuck and need support.

3. TEXT A CHECKLIST.
Create a checklist of written directions for the student to follow
1. read with a partner
2. answer the question
3. find another partner and compare

4. PROVIDE A MODEL.
For example, in advance model a similar math problem with the work shown and correct answer on the top of the worksheet.

5. ENLIST A PEER.
For example, say, "Claire, can you work with Javier to find the correct beaker size for this lab?"

6. CREATE MATERIALS IN ADVANCE.
For example, have key vocabulary from the lesson listed and defined in a Google DRIVE document, printed out, or written on the white board for all to use.

7. REDUCE THE WORK.
For example, if the student can do three problems independently. Expect only three problems rather than five.

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8. USE TECHNOLOGY.

For example, provide ongoing feedback and support without peers/others knowing by typing comments on a separate document or space.

9. USE ASK 3 BEFORE ME.

Implement a classroom policy in which all students get help from three peers before asking you or the teacher.

10. HERE FOR ALL.

Rather than supporting a single student, be available to support everyone.

11. PROVIDE STOP-BY SUPPORT.

This means, only stop and check in on the student you support after you've checked in on at least 6 other students. Then repeat.

12. USE A STICKY-NOTE OR A BOOKMARK.

Mark pages in the text that the student needs to open - whether in a printed text or with digital tools.

13. PREP FOR DISCUSSION.

For example, write down several questions the student can ask or comments they can share during a class discussion.

14. SUGGEST A POINTER.

Allow students to share their screen and use their cursor as a pointer during class read alouds or use their finger or finger pointers to follow the text as they read.

15. TRANSITION WORDLESSLY.

Use a timer on your phone to let your student know through a back channel (i.e., send them a text or write a small note) that it is time to transition to the next task or class.

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16. ENGAGE PARTNERS.

Ensure every student has a "go to" peer or partner that can provide support when needed.

17. TEXT SUPPORT.

Use a student's phone to offer support via text or notes.

18. BOOKMARK IT.

Set up the student's device with bookmarked sites so they can easily navigate to frequently used websites— such as email, Google Classroom, Khan Academy, etc.

19. SIMPLIFY.

If directions or language is complex, complicated, or speedy, write it down in simplified language, use icons and images, slow the speed of a speech to text app, or chunk the task into a few different parts.

20. GUIDE THEM.

Create a graphic organizer or other guided notes template to help students organize key ideas from a lesson.

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ACADEMIC SUPPORTS ON THE FLY

ACADEMIC CHALLENGE	ACADEMIC SUPPORT ON-THE-FLY	TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION
Worksheet is too dense or crowded	Cut the paper up and isolate sections to minimize an overly crowded page.	Use scissors on the teacher's desk.
The work cannot be done independently	Provide support from a peer partner or small group.	Ask the teacher quietly if they would consider allowing students to partner or work in small groups for the activity because you didn't have time to prepare adapted text in advance.
Concepts are complex or complicated	Provide visuals for a more concrete explanation.	Use a tablet, laptop, or smart phone to find images of objects or ideas that are depicted abstractly in a story. Share them with the student right on the device or print them out in the teacher's office (or wherever you have access to a printer).

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| ACADEMIC CHALLENGE	ACADEMIC SUPPORT ON-THE-FLY	TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION
Connections/ relationships between concepts are unclear	• Draw arrows in the worksheet or text to show which ideas are connected/related. • Write/ draw the relationships on a separate piece of paper.	Find a pencil, pen, and paper. Check in with the teacher if you want to ensure your connections are accurate.
Reading level is too advanced	• Use a laptop or tablet to find an adapted version of the history text on BookShare. • Pull up the Cliff Notes of the novel. • Use the website NEWSELA to find a similar article that addresses the same concepts at a more accessible reading level.	If you don't have a tablet or laptop with you or the student, see if you can borrow one from the general or special education teacher, librarian, or administrator.
Math problems are too complex	Quickly rewrite problems or directions so the student can complete the math operations at their level (e.g. use a calculator to complete long division; multiply whole numbers rather than fractions; write out the operation needed to find volume).	Complete this while the teacher is giving directions if possible.
Complex or open-ended questions are not accessible	Turn open-ended questions into multiple-choice or yes or no questions.	If the teacher asked the question verbally, write the new question and possible multiple choice or yes/no answers down for the student. If the question is on an assignment or worksheet, change it right on the paper or overlay a strip of paper (or index card) with the new question.

EFFECTIVE USE OF VISUAL SUPPORTS
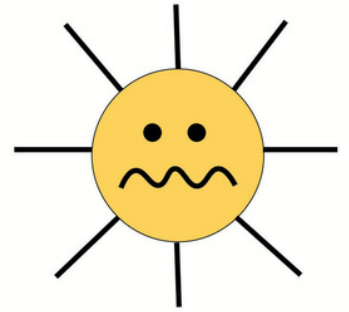
VISUAL SUPPORTS CAN BE USED ANYTIME, ANYWHERE, AND FOR A WIDE VARIETY OF REASONS.

For example, visual supports are **useful** when:

- Children may not understand how much longer they have until their turn
- Children are learning to play with toys with increased complexity
- Children are struggling with adjusting their responses when rules different at home, at school, and in the community

Visual supports can be used to help children **identify the steps needed to solve a problem or to devise a plan** in terms of where they are going to play and what they are going to do when they get there.

Visual supports can also be used when there is a **misunderstanding** (or potential for it), or even when there are multiple choices that may be overwhelming through auditory channels (i.e., the information is delivered in a way that is too limiting for the child to process),

Visual supports can also help when a child is **experiencing a strong emotion** and need help to regain a more neutral emotional state.

HOW TO USE VISUAL SUPPORTS EFFECTIVELY

My colleague Barbara Avila from Synergy Autism Center, an expert in working with children and students with autism, shares that visual supports make the "unpredictable, predictable."

Barbara suggests using visual supports that **range** from concrete to abstract, and from simple to complex.

- Actual objects
- Photos
- Drawings
- Colored line drawings
- Black and white line drawings
- Written words
- Written phrases

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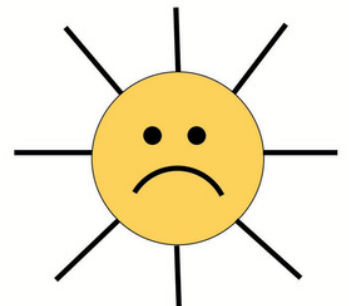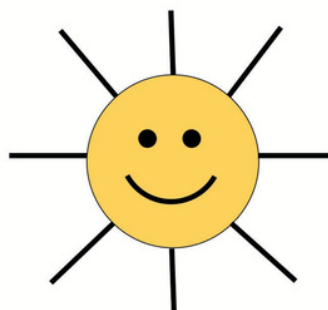
Regardless of type of visual support, and/or situation, Barbara reminds us to keep in mind that their use should be "simple, short, and straightforward".

Barbara also encourages use of what she calls, the Sun Diagram visual support strategy, to help children deal with strong emotions.

SUN DIAGRAM VISUAL SUPPORT STRATEGY

Situation: Child experiences a strong or somewhat overwhelming emotion (e.g., frustration, anxiety, excitement, or even boredom).

Grab a piece of paper, or your smart phone, and quickly draw a picture of a sun (circle in the middle with lines coming out from the circle).

Inside the circle, draw a face that represents how the child is feeling (e.g., bored, frustrated, excited). Then, on the "rays" include statements or even additional visuals that remind the child what they can do or say when they are experiencing a strong or overwhelming emotion. Invite the child to help provide solutions for each of the "rays."

During the situation, a teacher or caregiver can then say, "Remember when you get bored you can ask for me to play with you" or they can say, "You look frustrated, let's look to see what you can do, such as asking for help, taking a deep breath, or choosing to play with another toy."

WHAT TO AVOID WHEN USING VISUAL SUPPORTS

What we want to avoid when using visual supports (e.g., charts and cards), particularly when used in public ways, is instances that cause children to:

- experience shame or humiliation
- be confused by what caused a change in their status
- be unsure what to do differently next time
- be bullied by others or incited to act out
- be rejected by peers

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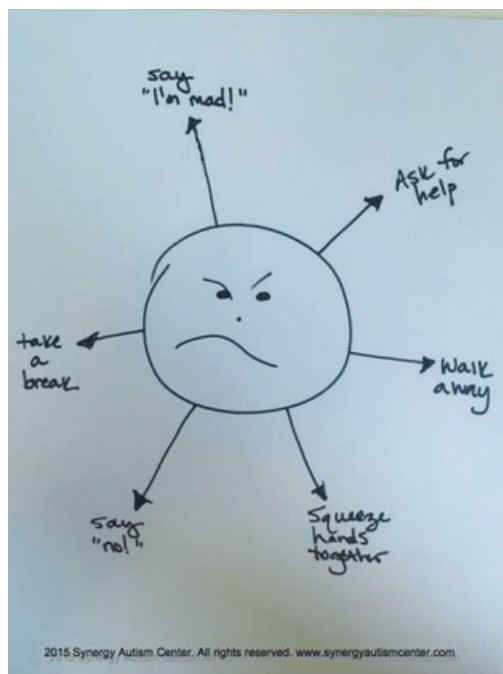
SUPPORT SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION

When supporting someone to communicate it is important to create supports that will lead to successful interactions. The following are support strategies designed to ensure that the person trying to communicate can get their message across.

START OPEN ENDED
If you are starting by asking the person questions such as:

- "Why do you think Fern wanted to protect Wilbur?"
- "What is the name for gold on the periodic table of elements?"
- "What electives do you want to take this semester?"
- "How was your weekend?"

and you are not getting a clear response (for example the person is typing parts of words, random letters, or nothing at all) then you can provide the following supports to ensure that they can communicate their message.

SUCCESSFUL SUPPORTS:

1. Suggest Sentence Starters:

Suggest sentences and ideas that will help the person to get started.
Say "start by typing..." or "you may want to start with..." and then give them a starter to the sentence.

You can provide further support with this strategy by saying, "Ok start by typing Fern. Now start with F, look at it and get it." If they are still stuck coach them to get there. Remember in this process you are teaching and coaching, not testing.

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If Asking...	Sentence Starting
"Why do you think Fern wanted to protect Wilbur?"	"Fern protected Wilbur because..."
"How was your weekend?"	"This weekend I..."
"What electives do you want to take this semester?"	"Next semester I am thinking..."

2. Share Full Ideas:

If you have tried step 1 and the person is not able to get started communicating their message you can give some suggestions of full ideas that can be communicated. Say these orally or write them and put the writing away when they go to type as the person should not copy the written ideas. Your ideas are meant to start their thinking and help support initiation.

When providing this support say, "If I was answering this question I would say...", "One thing that could be said about this is..." or "Some people might say..."

If Asking...	Idea Sharing
"Why do you think Fern wanted to protect Wilbur?"	"Some might say it was because she wanted to care for Wilbur."
"How was your weekend?"	"If I had your weekend I think I would say it was adventurous."
"What electives do you want to take this semester?"	"I've heard other kids say they would like to take theater and photography."

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3. Create a Word / Phrase Board:

If you have tried step 1&2 and the person is not having success in communicating their thoughts move to using a word board. This is easily done by writing word selections on a dry erase board or piece of paper. Using either of these materials divide the area into two, four, or six sections and write word or phrase options in each of the sections. Be sure to have a section that says, "none of these" or "something else."

For example, if asking "Why do you think Fern wanted to protect Wilbur?" you can create a board with the following options:

She wanted to raise Wilbur	**She loves animals**
She wanted to see how big Wilbur would get	**None of these**

Using this style of communication supports is the most limiting as far as the expressiveness the person with a disability utilizes when sharing their message. This is not the most ideal strategy for supporting communication and it should be used mainly for quick communication, when there is a stressful situation, or when no other communication technique is working. However, this communication strategy can be very valuable in ensuring that a message is communicated.

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4. Use Pictures, ABCD, or Yes/No

Another strategy that can be useful in supporting successful communication interactions is using pictures for the person to point to, yes/no answers, or ABCD choices.

When asking questions the person with a communication disability can be supported to make a selection from a group or pictures. These should be related to the curriculum or communicating ideas and thoughts that can lead to conversation or participation in the classroom.

A yes/no board or the words yes/no can be written on a piece of paper or a post it note can be used to support communication. The communication partner should frame question in a yes/no fashion being sure to only ask one question at a time.

In addition an ABCD board can also be used. The letter selection can be pre written on a board or a piece of paper and the communication partner would frame questions and present answers so that the person with a communication disability can select the answer that corresponds with the idea they wish to share. This works well with school work and also choices such as seating placement, classroom jobs, and/or materials to use in art.

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11 TIPS FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHO DO NOT USE VERBAL SPEECH

"Not being able to speak is not the same thing as not having anything to say" - Rosemary Crossley

A note on communication: *All students who struggle with communication deserve to have a generative communication system in place so they can express thoughts, feelings, ideas, critiques, and requests. This may include the use of sign language, an augmentative communication device, strategies to teach a person to type or point to communicate, and/or the use of eye gaze or blinking to indicate choices. While it is the right of all students to have a communication system, many students go without any way to share their thoughts.*

1.COMMUNICATION IS FOR EVERYONE.

All students who struggle with communication deserve to have a system in place that allows them to express anything they wish. This system may be sign language, an augmentative communication, or ways to help someone type, point, or direct their gaze to indicate choices.

2.PRESUME COMPETENCE.

All students can benefit from schooling, learn high levels of academics, and desire friendships and connection.

3.GIVE STUDENTS CHOICES ALL DAY LONG.

Allow them to learn that their choices have an impact in their life (i.e. do you want water or milk, is this going to be red or purple).

4.ALWAYS ACKNOWLEDGE THE PERSON'S PRESENCE.

Do not talk about someone as if they were not there; assume they are listening and always assume they understand.

5.INCLUDE STUDENTS IN CONVERSATION.

For example, when discussing the sinking and floating lab, the paraprofessional said, "Maya, you are going to love this book. It is all about swimming." The acknowledgement of Maya and her interests was a very inclusive connection to make.

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6.USE A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH.
Even though this person does not use verbal language, what do they use to communicate? What can they do? What are this person's gifts?

7.USE AN AGE-APPROPRIATE TONE AND DEMEANOR.
In other words, talk to this person like you would to anyone of their same age.

8.PROVIDE CHANCES FOR THEM TO ENCOUNTER AGE-APPROPRIATE EXPERIENCES.
Give them enough space and support so they can have similar experiences to their peers, (i.e. struggling, failing, goofing around, or even getting into trouble).

9.TEACH PEERS HOW TO TALK TO STUDENTS WITH COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES.

10.PROGRAM DEVICES WITH CONTENT BEFORE EACH LESSON.
If a student uses a yes or no only, create yes or no type questions. "Do you think that 6x6 is 37?"

11. LOOK FOR EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING.
What you look for you are likely to find.

Source: Used with Permission - Causton & MacLeod (2021) The Paraprofessional's Handbook for Effective Support in Inclusive Classrooms. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

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# 110 WAYS PARAPROFESSIONALS CAN SUPPORT STUDENTS

10 WAYS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS BY "LEARNING WAYS" CHOICES

1. Standing desks
2. Walking on a treadmill or around the room/building
3. Graffiti style
4. Clipboards or music stands
5. Working nooks or learning pods
6. Seated: couch, stools, yoga balls, beanbags, recliner
7. Floor: carpet squares or floor mats
8. Michael Angelo style under a table or desk
9. Stadium seating or cafe seating
10. Balance boards

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10 WAYS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH PRE/FLIPPED LEARNING

1. Clarify **key terms and/or vocabulary** that will be used
2. Review **major concepts and the big ideas** of the lesson
3. Clarify any confusion from **last lesson**
4. **Review** the schedule or routine
5. Remind students of **what to expect**
6. Invite students to **pick a role or job ahead of time**
7. Communicate with the student about what they are **excited to do or learn**
8. Help students **identify questions they will ask**
9. Help students **identify information** they would like to share or comments they want to make
10. Help students **find a friend or partner** to work with during or after the lesson

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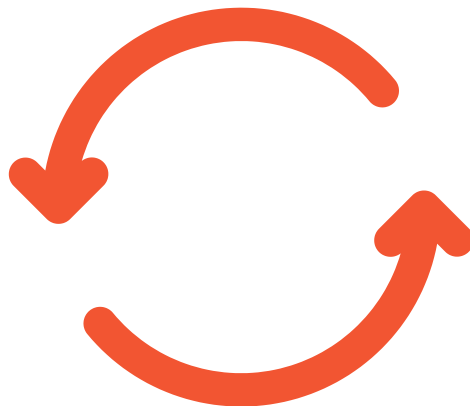
10 WAYS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS CLASS OR A LESSON

Before

1. Remind students of **how to join** a collaborative group
2. Do nothing and allow them to **interact** with other students
3. Encourage students to create a **comfortable learning space**
4. **Remind** students to bring water to class
5. Remind students to get required and desired materials **ready ahead of time**
6. Create a **checklist/visual reminder** of the things needed for each class or lesson
7. Create a **clear and predictable schedule** of activities that will occur for each class
8. Review what to do if they n**eed help or a break** during the lesson
9. **Set up the materials** in a way that they will not need prompting (e.g., color code, number, bulleted list)
10. Connect them to **other students** to encourage social interaction and peer support
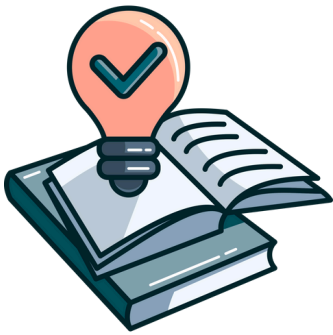
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10 WAYS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS DURING CLASS OR A LESSON

1. Encourage **peer support** for every student

2. Help students notice if they need a **break** and model asking for and/or taking a break

3. Type or illustrate the **big ideas** being stated verbally (e.g., make a concept map)

4. **Act out** the scene or story being read/discussed using puppets and props

5. Float around and **provide support to all students**

6. **Ask question**s to help with clarity, for example, say, "Mr --- can you review the 5 steps again?"

7. Lead a **small heterogeneous group** or station based upon students' interests

8. Set up a **self-monitoring system** with a student

9. Make sure the entire class perceives that you are there to **help all students**

10. **Watch before helping** - can students figure out things on their own?

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10 WAYS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AFTER CLASS/AFTER A LESSON

1. Do nothing to **allow for natural social interactions**
2. Debrief with a small group of students about how the information **relates to their interests and lives**
3. Visually **create a to do list** of homework tasks
4. **Write a note for families** about how to best support homework tasks
5. **Facilitate a homework group** for students to join if they need support
6. Create an **editor's room**- where students can come to edit each other's work
7. **Share a graphic record/representation** of the big ideas covered in a lesson and connect to other lessons or the next lesson
8. **Host an after school event** (e.g., jam session, poetry reading, workout)
9. **Write up a mini summary** of the lesson- for review
10. **Send fun reminders** for students to make time to rest, renew, and refuel

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10 WAYS TO TEACH STUDENTS HOW TO CREATE CONNECTIONS

1. **Match** students based on **things they like** for activities or discussions
2. Use **routines** like "turn and talk" or buddy reading to build connection
3. **Pre-teach social scripts** or sentence starters (e..g., "Can I join you?") and practice through role-play or visual cues
4. **Assign jobs** (e.g., line leader buddy, tech helper) that require collaboration and peer interaction
5. Include p**layful moments**—jokes, dances, or fun greetings
6. Offer **games, building tasks, or group art** to encourage cooperative interaction
7. Offer f**riendship prompts or connection cards** to spark easy peer conversations.
8. **Acknowledge** when students include others or show kindness to reinforce connection
9. Help students **see common interests** with "friendship webs" or shared interest boards
10. Facilitate **side-by-side activities** where students can connect without talking.

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10 WAYS TO KEEP STUDENTS MOVING

1. Create a **movement-based treasure hunt** around the classroom or school to review content or spark curiosity

2. "Stand up if you think" strategy to **encourage movement during discussions** or to express opinions and predictions

3. Incorporate academic content into the game (e.g., "Simon says jump if 4+4=8")

4. Let students **lead or choose the music/dance moves** to energize and reset the group.

5. Take **short walks** in pairs or small groups while discussing a question, idea, or reflection.

6. Guide students in **mini movement breaks** they can do at their desks or learning spots.

7. **Incorporate simple signs** for "yes," "no," or "I have an idea" to reduce talking and increase physical engagement

8. Do a jumping jack (or movement of choice) each time _____- **Pair movement with a repeating event** (e.g., each time someone shares, answers, or transitions)

9. **Play "That's Me!"** - Call out traits ("has a pet," "loves pizza," "walks to school") and have students respond with movement (jump, clap, spin, etc.)

10. Clap your hands if... A quick, low-prep way to **build in response and movement** during any subject or transition

*P**ro Tip for Including Everyone:***
Instead of saying things like "Stand up if..." or "Walk to the front," try saying, "Move your body," "Shift in your seat," or "Show us your answer with a motion that works for you." This helps all students feel included and able to participate in their own way.

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10 WAYS TO MAKE LEARNING MORE FUN

1. **Wear costumes** related to the topic

2. Use **props** that relate to the content

3. Use **themes** for each day (Trivia Tuesday, Wild hair Wednesday)

4. **Create a beautiful journal** of learning

5. Help students design their own **choice boards**

6. Invite students to **redesign their learning space**

7. Give students the **options** (e.g., to write a song, rap, or poem)

8. Use a **variety of materials** so students can sculpt, build, or code

9. Keep track of **inventions and ideas**

10. **Model exploring** in nature or with natural materials (rocks, dirt)

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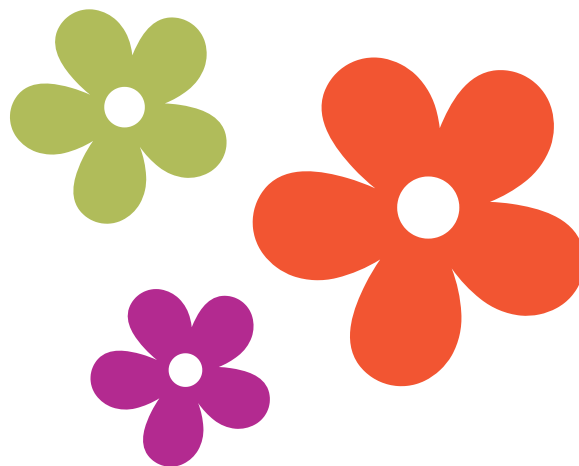
10 WAYS IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ALL LEARNERS

1. Overview of expectations verbally and visually

2. Repeat - Repeat - Repeat; Give clear instructions directions

3. Make sure everything is easy to find/well organized in ways that make sense to others

4. Be succinct in your instruction, pause often, check for understanding

5. Be organized in your delivery and the flow of a session

6. Be consistent, predictable, and create rituals

7. Coordinate with others who are delivering instruction to reduce conflicting directions, multiple things being due on the same day, etc.

8. Use the same web-based technologies/platforms and organizational strategies as everyone else on your team/in your district/organization

9. Prioritize consistency, clarity, and beauty - Think like "Starbucks"

10. Have a public calendar so people know where to go to get due dates

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