



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BUILDING INITIATIVE**

Initiative: Initiative is the child's ability to use independent thought and action to meet needs. There are many ways children show us they are developing initiative every day, such as asking a friend to play, making a choice for lunch, and trying a new game. When looking at a child's DECA-P2 rating, you may notice that a particular element of initiative needs to be strengthened. The strategies below are organized by common elements of initiative, to include:

- Ability to start play or to begin an activity
- Persistence and problem-solving
- Confidence and decision-making
- Interest in new activities or experiences

The strategies below are taken from [Promoting Resilience in Preschoolers: A Strategy Guide for Early Childhood Professionals, Second Edition](#), as well as the [Promoting Resilience For Now and Forever in Preschoolers Family Guide](#). Feel free to explore those books for more ideas, or, use your own planning resources and strategies guides!

Collaboration. Ask children to co-lead simple activities during transition times. For example, ask a child to sing songs, play guessing games, do a finger-play, or tell a story to friends.

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Helping Children with Transitions](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Prompting. Provide a verbal prompt or suggestion for children who have difficulty entering a group at play or an activity. "Omar, you could hold the pan while I sweep the floor."

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Prompting to Increase Social Interactions \(Brief\)](#)
- [Pyramid Model Resource: Prompting to Increase Social Interactions \(Handout\)](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Small Steps. Create a visual to go with each step of an activity or interaction, including words (in the language spoken in the classroom and at home) and photos. For example, to help a child learn how to ask a friend to play, break down the steps, "Joshua, first you stand by Sarah, then you could say, 'Sarah, may I play?'"

Additional Information

- [Asking a Friend to Play Visual](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



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[continued...]

Daily Helper. Ask a child to help with daily tasks such as setting the table, throwing out trash or putting away supplies.

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Feedback. Get down to the child's level and provide feedback on what you see and hear. "Kendra, I see that you stacked three blocks. I wonder if you are planning to stack another one?"

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Finding Solutions. Talk with children after they try something new and determine solutions if things do not go as planned. "Tanya you tried to balance on the beam and stumbled toward the end. Tell me how that felt. How might you try to do it the next time?"

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Solution Picture Cards](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Encouragement. Describe what a child says or does instead of saying "Good job," "Pretty picture," or "You're so smart!" For example, "Anna, you took Addie's hand and walked her to the swings. Then, you helped her climb up on the swing and gave her a gentle push. What a kind thing to do for a friend!"

Additional Information

- [Alternatives to Saying, "Good Job"](#)
- [Pyramid Model Resource: Suggestions for Giving Positive Feedback and Encouragement](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Expand on Interests. Offer play materials and activities to expand on children's interests. "Frank, you seem interested in the Happy Spider. I'll put the spider puppets in the library area so you can act out the story."

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



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[continued...]

Visual Cues. Create visual cues for actions children can take to manage strong emotions such as “When I get mad, I can stop, walk, and breathe.”

Additional Information

- [Visual Cues](#)
- [Pyramid Model Resource: Scripted Stories](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Choices. Ask children what they want to try next. “Deon, it looks like you can write your first name with all of the letters in order. What word would you like to try next?”

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Using Choices to Promote Positive Behavior \(Brief\)](#)
- [Pyramid Model Resource: Using Choices to Promote Positive Behavior \(Handout\)](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Partnering. Match children intentionally to do a task, routine, activity, or project together—typically so one child can learn from the skills of another and perhaps strengthen a relationship.

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Be the Learner. Let a child teach you how to do something. “Kellen, you are holding the brush and making swirls on your paper, can you help me to make the same kind of swirls?”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Reading Cues. Take time to observe children and how they respond to new activities and experiences throughout the day. Pay attention to obvious and subtle cues children give such as furrowed brows, turning away, or distancing themselves to show disengagement. Also look for smiles, close proximity, bright eyes, and gazing to indicate comfort and interest. Use these cues when planning intentional activities.

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



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[continued...]

Discussing Interests. Observe and talk with children regularly about their interests and abilities. Use this information to adjust and add to your daily schedule to support their continued growth. “The weather has been much warmer, and I notice everyone enjoys being outdoors. I have added another outdoor play time to our schedule. Let’s take a look.”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Offering Options. Offer individual options for certain activities such as providing a small basin with water and toys next to the larger water table. “Jason, you moved away from the water table and covered your ears. Is it too loud? You can play in the water bin over here if you like.”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Planning Together. Invite children to help you make a list of things to do to prepare for an upcoming event or field trip. They can brainstorm ideas and you can write the words down. Children can help draw pictures that demonstrate the steps, write words, or find pictures from a magazine that represent the items to remember.

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BUILDING ATTACHMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS**

Attachment/Relationships: Attachment/Relationships is the child's ability to promote and maintain mutual, positive connections with other children and significant adults. These emotional bonds that develop in early childhood can be observed as children ask familiar adults to read or play with them, ask for help to get a snack, laugh and joke with friends, and show affection and caring for others. When looking at a child's DECA-P2 rating, you may notice that a particular element of attachment/relationships needs to be strengthened. The strategies below are organized by common elements of attachment/relationships, to include:

- Building a sense of trust and security with familiar caregivers (adult-child)
- Strengthening peer (child-child) connections

The strategies below are taken from [Promoting Resilience in Preschoolers: A Strategy Guide for Early Childhood Professionals, Second Edition](#), as well as the [Promoting Resilience For Now and Forever in Preschoolers Family Guide](#). Feel free to explore those books for more ideas, or, use your own planning resources and strategies guides!

Affection. If children are open to touch, use it to relay children's success or offer encouragement. For example, pat a child gently on the back to thank him for helping another child, tap a child lightly on the shoulder to encourage her to continue through a transition, or hug a child who completes part of the routine.

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Expressing Warmth and Affection \(Brief\)](#)
- [Pyramid Model Resource: Expressing Warmth and Affection \(Handout\)](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Floor Play. Get down on the children's level and engage in play to learn more about their interests. "Ashton, I'm going to sit with you at the table for a few minutes. I see you are feeding your farm animals. What do they like to eat?"

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Checking In. Check in with children throughout the day and let them know you are paying attention. "Adam, you let me know you wanted to play on the computer, Kayla looks like she is finished."

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BUILDING ATTACHMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS**

[continued...]

Following Through. Let a child know that you mean what you say by following through. For example, “I said we were going to go outside in 5 minutes. Five minutes is up, time to go.”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Share a Laugh. Notice the funny things a child does, take turns talking about silly stories, or tell simple jokes with a child. “Kala, that joke made me laugh!”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Model Play Skills. While engaging in play with a child use the opportunity to practice positive play skills such as sharing, saying thank you and engaging in conversation. “Kara, thank you for sharing the scissors with me while I cut the red paper. Tell me about your project.”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Pairing. Match up children with a “transition buddy.” Buddies might help each other finish cleaning up an interest area, zip their coats before heading outside, find a mitten lost on the playground, or hold hands during the walk back to the classroom.

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Read and Role-play. Work with children in large and small groups using scripted stories or friendship books to give them ideas about how to make friends. “If George wants to play with his friend’s toy, he can say, ‘Lena, can I please have a turn with the airplane?’”

Additional Information

- [Scripted Stories](#)
- [Read and Role Play Book List](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BUILDING ATTACHMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS**

[continued...]

Notice Positive Interactions. Let a child know when you see them engaging in positive interactions with peers. “Micah, when you helped Arin pick up her hat and put it back on, she got a big smile on her face!”

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Positive Attention Data Sheet](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BUILDING SELF-REGULATION**

Self-Regulation: Self-Regulation is the child's ability to express emotions and manage behaviors in healthy ways. Children demonstrate developing self-regulation skills in a variety of ways as they take turns and laugh with friends, navigate the daily routine, cope with frustrating situations and modulate their energy levels. When looking at a child's DECA-P2 rating, you may notice that a particular element of self-regulation needs to be strengthened. The strategies below are organized by common elements of self-regulation, to include:

- Getting along with others
- Recognizing and expressing strong emotions in safe ways
- Coping with transition and change
- Managing energy level and behavior in positive ways

The strategies below are taken from [Promoting Resilience in Preschoolers: A Strategy Guide for Early Childhood Professionals, Second Edition](#), as well as the [Promoting Resilience For Now and Forever in Preschoolers Family Guide](#). Feel free to explore those books for more ideas, or, use your own planning resources and strategies guides!

Modeling. Use modeling to help a child learn new behaviors such as sharing or taking turns. "Thomas, you can take a turn with my car. Tyrone, did you see how I shared with Thomas?"

Additional Information

- [Modeling Turn Taking](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Picture Practice. Provide pictures from magazines or in stories that depict different problem scenarios and encourage children to come up with possible solutions. "This picture shows a girl crying. It looks like another child took her toy. Let's talk about ways to solve this problem."

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Books about Social Interactions](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Friendship Clues and Cues. Use simple visuals as cues to help children remember social rules such as asking to play with a friend, using gentle hands, keeping enough personal space, using a gentle voice, etc. Practice using the cues during playtime.

Additional Information

- [Friendship Cues](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BUILDING SELF-REGULATION**

[continued...]

FLIP IT. When a child is having trouble managing a strong feeling, such as frustration, help them by using the 4 Step FLIP IT © strategy: **FEELINGS, LIMITS, INQUIRIES, and PROMPTS.**

Additional Information

- [FLIP IT 4 Step Approach](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Sensory Play. Provide sensory items that help children express and manage their feelings. For example, play a variety of music, offer play dough to knead and pound, set up warm, soapy water with cups to dump and pour. “Thomas, I notice you are roaming and your brows are furrowed. I know it is hard to wait for the computer. Would you like to get your hands into the water bin or pound with some play dough while you wait?”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Adjusting Schedules. Be flexible and adjust the daily schedule if children need extra time to talk about a conflict or process feelings. “OK, class, it seems like several of you are feeling sad that Ms. Mahler is not here today. Let’s come together so we can talk about this before we go outside.”

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Routines and Schedules](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Feelings Stories and Helpful Hints. Write and illustrate (with drawings or photos) scripted stories or cue cards to help children express and cope with strong emotions. Review it with children as often as needed. “When I feel frustrated, I can stop, take a deep breath and relax.”

Additional Information

- [Scripted Stories](#)
- [Pyramid Model Resource: Emotional Literacy](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BUILDING SELF-REGULATION**

[continued...]

Emotion Visuals. Create an emotions chart using real pictures or symbols and post on the wall at children's eye level. Actively use the chart with children throughout the day to help them identify how they are feeling. "Good Morning Cameron, let's check the emotions board to see where you are today!"

Additional Information

- [Emotion Visuals](#)
- [Pyramid Model Resource: Helping Children Express Their Needs](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Small Steps. Break a transition into smaller steps to help children learn what to do. Add photos and make a poster near where the transition will take place. For example, to go outside, the steps might be:

1. Put on coat
2. Put on hat
3. Put on mittens
4. Wait near door on a footprints spot

Additional Information

- [Small Steps](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Reminders. Provide visual and auditory signals when children prepare for transitions. For example, use cue cards, give a gentle verbal reminder, and hold up a bin to remind a child where a toy belongs and so on.

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Helping Children with Transitions](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Problem-Solving Steps. Post both the problem-solving process and classroom rules where adults can easily access the information, as well as in a format in large print at children's eye level, with pictures or drawings if possible.

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Problem Solving Steps Visual](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BUILDING SELF-REGULATION**

[continued...]

Alternatives to Napping. Offer alternative activities for children who no longer nap. “Alex, you can do one of the table activities if you are done resting.”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Belly Breathing. Help children go from a high-energy state to more relaxed state while transitioning. For example:

- When standing, start counting backward together from 5 to 0, sitting down slowly as you count. When you are ready to say zero be sure everyone is sitting.
- Ask children to place their hand on their heart and try to feel it beating. Take 30 seconds and see if they can feel their heart beat slowing down.
- Have children lie on the floor and put a hand on their belly. As breathing slows down, ask the children to feel their bellies moving in and out slower and slower.

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Explanation and Alternatives. Explain why an activity is not allowed. “I can’t let you jump off the table because you might get hurt. You can jump on the mats or we can come up with other ideas for where to jump.”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BEHAVIORAL CONCERNS**



The Behavioral Concerns scale measures a wide variety of challenging behaviors to include aggression, withdrawal, lack of focus/attention, and controlling extreme emotions. These behaviors represent both externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Externalizing behaviors are actions that are outward expressions of emotion (such as hitting, biting, and kicking). Internalizing behaviors are actions that are directed inward, such as hiding, refusing to speak and appearing sad. Keep in mind, that some of these behaviors, for example, temper tantrums, may be developmentally appropriate for some children at certain developmental stages. The behaviors become challenging when they interfere with a child's development and learning or harm self or others. After gathering and interpreting multiple sources of information about the child's behavior, teachers and families can use the strategies below or others from their experiences, to help children find healthy ways to get their needs met- ensuring first, that the strategies are appropriate for the child's development, temperament and culture. The strategies are organized by:

- EXTERNALIZING behaviors
- INTERNALIZING behaviors

The strategies below are taken from [Promoting Resilience in Preschoolers: A Strategy Guide for Early Childhood Professionals, Second Edition](#), as well as the [Promoting Resilience For Now and Forever in Preschoolers Family Guide](#). Feel free to explore those books for more ideas, or, use your own planning resources and strategies guides!

Break a challenge into small pieces. Break a task into small steps; create a visual to go with each step, including words (in the language spoken in the classroom and at home) and photos.

Additional Information

- [Break Challenges into Small Pieces](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Regroup and reset. Provide a place and materials that will help a child regain control of emotions, words, and actions. When the child is calm, discuss feelings and how to handle such situations differently in the future.

Additional Information

- [Regroup and Reset](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BEHAVIORAL CONCERNS**

[continued...]

Amend Making. If an aggressive act occurs, make sure all parties calm down, which may or may not involve separating a child—not for a time-out—but to help him calm down.

Additional Information

- [Making Amends](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Taming a Tantrum. Determine the underlying cause of the tantrum. Refer to our printable handouts in the e-DECA strategies system for steps to help tame a tantrum.

Additional Information

- [Taming a Tantrum](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Sensory Play. Provide sensory items that help children express and manage their feelings. For example, play a variety of music, offer play dough to knead and pound, set up warm, soapy water with cups to dump and pour. “Thomas, what kind of music would you like to listen to? There are lots of choices.”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Remind and Redirect. It can be difficult to stop yourself from reacting (such as saying “No!”) when you think a child is using or about to use an inappropriate behavior. As long as the behavior you think is about to happen will not harm another child, try redirecting the behavior instead.

Additional Information

- [Remind and Redirect](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Calm Down Kit. Create a classroom “calm-down kit” or individualize a kit for a child who needs help learning how to soothe herself. Ask children what they think should go in the kit.

Additional Information

- [Calm Down](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BEHAVIORAL CONCERNS**



[continued...]

Self-Talk. Children can learn to recognize and talk out loud about strong feelings (“I’m getting upset,” “I feel mad,” or “This is frustrating!”) followed by more self-talk to help calm themselves (“Stop,” “Settle down,” “It’s going to be OK,” “Be calm,” or “I can handle this problem.”) Teachers and families should model self-talk by working through their own strong feelings out loud: “This knot is tight. I am getting frustrated trying to untie it. I will stay calm. I will keep trying. I can do this!”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

FLIP IT. When a child is having trouble managing a strong feeling, such as frustration. Help them by using the 4 Step FLIP IT © strategy: **Feelings, Limits, Inquiries and Prompts.**

Additional Information

- [FLIP IT 4 Step Approach](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Scaffolding. Offer support at the level a child needs to make progress in mastering a skill. Reduce the level of support (or scaffold) as the child builds the skills needed to do the task or activity independently.

Additional Information

- [Scaffolding](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Social Stories. Write a story about a specific child that is focused on something the child is challenged by—such as loud noises. Write a script that describes the child’s positive thoughts, actions, and/or words—often in relation to the child’s strong feelings. Read the story with the child as often as needed and place it where the child can find it and look at it independently and learn steps to cope with the challenging situation in the future.

Additional Information

- [Social Stories](#)
- [Pyramid Model Resource: Scripted Stories](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BEHAVIORAL CONCERNS**

[continued...]

Visual Clues. Make visual cues accessible to the children, either at eye level or within easy reach. They are typically colorful and inviting, without providing unnecessary information that might overwhelm a child. For example, if the focus of a visual is to help a child show emotion or label emotions, have a chart that shows the typical range of emotions using pages from magazines, drawings by the children in the classroom or photos that you take together showing emotions. Use this visual throughout the day.

Additional Information

- [Pyramid Model Resource: Feelings and Problem Solving Visuals \(All\)](#)
- [Pyramid Model Resource: Feelings and Problem Solving Visuals \(Feelings Chart\)](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Co-construct and Learn Together. Engage a child in doing a job or project together with you. Take the child's lead, so you and the child can be both a learner and a teacher. Look for teachable moments—opportunities to jointly explore a child's question or interest or to do a job together. For example, if a child finds a spider on the playground but it runs away before she can count its legs, you can help her find an answer. You might look it up on a website together, draw a picture together, or find a book about spiders in the library.

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Encouragement. Take care to describe what a child says or does instead of making comments that are judgmental such as "Good job," "Pretty picture," or "You're so smart!" Try instead: "Anna, you took Addie's hand and walked her to the swings. Then, you helped her climb up on the swing and gave her a gentle push. What a kind thing to do for a friend!"

Additional Information

- [Encouragement](#)
- [Pyramid Model Resource: Suggestions for Giving Positive Feedback and Encouragement](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Floor Time. Get down on a child's level— usually by sitting on the floor— and participate in open-ended play and conversation. Follow the child's lead; join in the child's activity and respond to what the child wants to talk about.

Additional Information

- [Floor Time](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Classroom Strategies for Preschoolers: **BEHAVIORAL CONCERNS**

[continued...]

Modeling. Demonstrate the words and actions you want the children to adopt, for example, if you are trying to encourage “interest in what others are doing,” model what that looks like, “Karen, I see you holding the guinea pig that Sasha brought for show and tell. Come on friends, let’s go take a closer look!”

Additional Information

- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)

Perspective Taking. Talk with a child about what he is feeling and thinking. Put aside your own thoughts and feelings about the situation or how you might have handled things, and try to see it from the child’s point of view. Ask a child, “What are you thinking?” or “How are you feeling?”

Additional Information

- [Perspective Taking](#)
- [Head Start Learning Outcomes Alignment](#)