From Barriers to Ramps: UDL 3.0 Planning Guides for Early Learning & Community Care
Noticing children's cues, exploring possible barriers, and planning for access, participation, and learning

Engagement
Supporting Connection, Interest, and Motivation

If you notice a child....	They may be experiencing these barriers (stairs)	This UDL "ramp" can help reduce the barrier (UDL 3.0, CAST, 2024)	What this "ramp" could look like in Early Childhood and Community Care Programs (building the ramp for everyone)
turning away, pushing materials away, reaching for alternatives, or saying "No," "Not that," or "I want to choose."	• Adults make most of the choices. • Choices do not include what interests the child. • The child's preferences or "no" are missed or ignored.	**Optimize choice and autonomy (7.1)**	Giving children meaningful choices about what they explore and how they participate. Recognizing preferences communicated through actions, sounds, gestures, communication tools, and words.
leaving an experience but returning to something familiar or personally interesting, or saying "I don't like this," "Can we do something else?" or "That's not how we do it at home."	• Activities do not connect to the child's interests. • The child's language, family, or culture is missing. • Experiences feel unfamiliar or disconnected from everyday life.	**Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity (7.2)**	Connecting experiences to children's interests, familiar people, family lives, cultures, communities, and meaningful discoveries.
stopping their exploration after being redirected, repeatedly returning to their own way of playing, or saying "Can I pretend?" "I want to try this," or "Do I have to do it that way?"	• There is only one "right" way to play. • Play is interrupted too often. • There is little room for imagination or trying new things.	**Nurture joy and play (7.3)**	Making room for delight, curiosity, imagination, and discovery through play. Valuing playful experiences that children help shape.
startling, stiffening, crying, covering their ears, moving away, or saying "Too loud," "I'm scared," "Stop," or "They're making fun of me."	• There is too much noise, clutter, or activity. • Hurtful comments, unfair treatment, or exclusion make participation feel unsafe for the child • Changes happen without enough warning or support.	**Address biases, threats, and distractions (7.4)**	Recognizing and reducing bias, exclusion, stress, and distractions. Creating environments where children feel safe, respected, and able to engage.
repeatedly looking between materials and another person, reaching without continuing, or asking "What do I do?" "What happens next?" or "Why are we doing this?"	• It is unclear what the child is working towards. • The purpose is explained in a way the child cannot access. • What the child is trying to do is overlooked or ignored	**Clarify the meaning and purpose of goals (8.1)**	Making the purpose of an experience understandable through shared actions, demonstrations, objects, images, and words. Recognizing what children are trying to accomplish.
making repeated attempts and then crying, pushing materials away, or saying "It's too hard" or "Help me"—or finishing quickly and saying, "This is too easy" or "What else can I do?"	• The activity is too hard or too easy. • Help or useful materials are missing. • There is not enough time to explore or practise.	**Optimize challenge and support (8.2)**	Offering meaningful challenges with the time, materials, encouragement, and assistance each child needs to participate and grow.
watching, reaching towards, vocalizing to, or approaching others without a response, or saying "Can you help me?" "Can we do it together?" or "Nobody listens to my ideas."	• There are few chances to do things together. • The child does not have a way to join or contribute. • Children need more support to communicate and help one another.	**Foster collaboration, interdependence, and collective learning (8.3)**	Creating opportunities for shared attention, play, exploration, and problem solving. Supporting children in giving and receiving help and contributing in different ways.
being left outside shared experiences, repeatedly approaching without being included, or saying "Can I play?" "They won't let me," or "Nobody wants me here."	• The child is left out of shared experiences. • There are few chances to build relationships. • The child's ideas and contributions are overlooked or ignored.	**Foster belonging and community (8.4)**	Building a community where every child is welcomed, recognized, and connected. Making space for each child to participate and contribute.
Repeating an unsuccessful action after feedback, repeatedly looking or gesturing for assistance, or asking "Is this right?" "What should I try?" or "What do you mean?"	• Responses do not explain what worked. • Suggestions are hard for the child to understand. • The child is told to "try again" without help with what to try.	**Offer action-oriented feedback (8.5)**	Responding to children's efforts in ways they can understand. Helping them notice what happened and discover a possible next step.
pulling back from a familiar challenge, handing materials to someone else before trying, or saying "I can't," "I'm bad at this," "You do it," or "I always get it wrong."	• Adults or peers expect too little of the child. • Past experiences have left the child expecting things to go wrong. • There is pressure to succeed in the same way as others.	**Recognize expectations, beliefs, and motivations (9.1)**	Recognizing what draws children into an experience and what may make them hesitate. Supporting confidence and noticing how expectations and past experiences affect participation.
communicating discomfort through crying, movements, gestures, or words that are missed or misunderstood, including saying "I need a break," "I don't like that," or "I don't know how I feel."	• The child's signals about feelings and needs are missed. • Ways to communicate feelings and needs are missing. • There is little support for noticing and understanding their own feelings and other people's feelings or perspectives	**Develop awareness of self and others (9.2)**	Responding to children's signals and helping them gradually recognize feelings, needs, and responses in themselves and others.
trying to revisit an experience by reaching for familiar objects or photos, repeating actions, or saying "Again," "Remember when...?" or "Can I show you?" without an opportunity to share.	• Experiences move on without time to revisit them. • Photos, objects, or other reminders are missing. • Children are expected to explain their thinking only through speech.	**Promote individual and collective reflection (9.3)**	Making time to revisit experiences through familiar objects, photos, actions, sounds, gestures, and conversations. Creating opportunities to remember and make meaning together.
remaining upset or separated after a difficult interaction, turning away from attempts to reconnect, or saying "They hurt me," "It's not fair," "I'm still upset," or "I don't know how to fix it."	• Children do not get enough comfort after difficult interactions. • Adults focus on blame or making children say "sorry." • Children do not get help to repair harm and reconnect.	**Cultivate empathy and restorative practices (9.4)**	Responding with care and helping children reconnect after difficult interactions. Gradually supporting understanding of others' feelings, problem solving, and repairing harm.

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moving closer to pictures, turning materials, looking away from a crowded display, or saying "I can't see it," "Make it bigger," or "It's too quiet."	• Pictures, print, or details are too small or crowded. • Lighting, contrast, or sound levels make information hard to notice. • How information is presented cannot easily be adjusted.	**Support opportunities to customize the display of information (1.1)**	Making information adjustable so children can perceive it comfortably. Changing picture size, spacing, contrast, positioning, lighting, or sound levels to improve access.
reaching to touch something that is only being shown, watching others after a spoken cue, or saying "Can I feel it?" "Show me," or "I didn't hear." No observable response to spoken information, but a response when shown an object, picture, gesture, or sign.	• Information is available only through looking or listening. • Objects and materials cannot be explored in other ways. • Another way to access the information is missing.	**Support multiple ways to perceive information (1.2)**	Offering information through different senses and accessible formats. Pairing spoken information with objects, pictures, gestures, signs, descriptions, or tactile materials.
repeatedly searching for familiar people or experiences in materials, pointing out differences, or saying "Where's my family?" "Nobody looks like me," or "That's not what we do."	• Materials show only a narrow range of people and experiences. • Some identities are missing or shown through stereotypes. • Children rarely encounter their own lives represented accurately.	**Represent a diversity of perspectives and identities in authentic ways (1.3)**	Including accurate, respectful representations of different identities, families, cultures, abilities, and experiences. Making space for children and families to contribute their perspectives.
pausing after unfamiliar words or gestures, selecting a different object than intended, or saying "What does that mean?" "Which one?" or "I don't know" No observable response to an unfamiliar word, but a response when its meaning is demonstrated.	• Words, gestures, or symbols are unfamiliar. • Too much language is used at once. • Meanings are not connected to objects, actions, or examples.	**Clarify vocabulary, symbols, and language structures (2.1)**	Making words, gestures, signs, and symbols understandable. Connecting them with objects and actions, explaining unfamiliar language, and using clear phrases with time to process.
relying on another person to interpret labels or symbols, repeatedly choosing a different picture than the one intended, or saying "What does this say?" "Which number?" or "What does that sign mean?"	• Meaning depends on reading print, numbers, or symbols. • Connections between marks and meanings have not been made clear. • Accessible ways to interpret the information are missing.	**Support decoding of text, mathematical notation, and symbols (2.2)**	Supporting children in recognizing letters, written words, numbers, and symbols as these skills develop. Providing spoken, signed, pictured, or technological supports so understanding does not depend on independent reading.
responding to a familiar language but not the language being used, switching languages, or saying "I know it in another language," "That's what we call it," or "Can you say it another way?"	• Only one language or dialect is recognized. • Familiar words and language supports are missing. • Children have few opportunities to learn across languages.	**Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects (2.3)**	Welcoming and valuing children's languages and dialects. Building connections across languages through family knowledge, familiar words, multilingual materials, signs, and gestures.
stopping their contribution after their name, words, accent, or signs are corrected or mocked, or saying "That's my name," "That's how we say it," or "Don't call me that."	• Names or ways of communicating are treated as wrong. • Labels, images, or expressions carry stereotypes or hurtful messages. • Only one way of speaking or signing is valued.	**Address biases in the use of language and symbols (2.4)**	Using respectful names, words, images, and symbols. Examining messages for stereotypes and valuing different languages, dialects, accents, and ways of communicating.
looking between an explanation and the materials without continuing, attempting an action after seeing a demonstration, or saying "Can you show me?" "Do you have a picture?" or "What does it look like?" No observable response during an explanation, but participation begins after a demonstration.	• Ideas are explained in only one format. • Descriptions are not supported by examples or demonstrations. • Children cannot connect the explanation with something concrete.	**Illustrate through multiple media (2.5)**	Showing ideas in different ways through real objects, photographs, drawings, models, demonstrations, audio, and video. Connecting these formats so they support understanding.
returning to a familiar action or object when something new is introduced, bringing over something related, or saying "Is it like...?" "We did that at home," or "I haven't seen this before."	• New experiences are introduced without familiar connections. • What the child already knows is overlooked. • Adults assume all children have had the same experiences.	**Connect prior knowledge to new learning (3.1)**	Finding out what children already know through their actions, play, communication, and family experiences. Connecting new learning with familiar people, objects, routines, and discoveries.
repeatedly exploring details without noticing the feature being discussed, switching between many materials, or asking "Which part?" "What's the same?" or "What am I looking for?"	• Too many details are presented at once. • Important features or connections are hard to notice. • Patterns and relationships are not made clear.	**Highlight and explore patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships (3.2)**	Drawing attention to important features and connections. Exploring what is similar, different, repeated, or related through play, comparisons, gestures, and demonstrations.
trying to understand through movement, storytelling, building, or observation but being redirected to one required approach, or saying "Can I show you?" "I do it another way," or "My family taught me this."	• Only one way of understanding is accepted. • Family and cultural knowledge is overlooked. • Children have few ways to explore and make sense of ideas.	**Cultivate multiple ways of knowing and making meaning (3.3)**	Valuing different ways of understanding through relationships, play, observation, movement, storytelling, cultural knowledge, and investigation. Welcoming children's and families' contributions to meaning making.
using an action successfully in one setting but pausing when the materials, people, or location change, or saying "I only know how with this one," "Is this the same?" or "Can you help me here?"	• Learning happens with only one set of materials or in one place. • Connections between experiences are not made clear. • Support disappears when the situation changes.	**Maximize transfer and generalization (3.4)**	Helping children use learning across different materials, people, places, and routines. Revisiting familiar ideas in new situations and keeping helpful supports available.

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reaching without making contact, trying to activate something repeatedly, showing no observable response when only one response method is offered, or saying "I can't reach" or "Can I do it another way?"	• Only one way to move, respond, or use materials is offered. • Positioning or layout makes participation difficult. • The pace does not allow enough time for the child to respond	**Vary and honor the methods for response, navigation, and movement (4.1)**	Offering different ways to move through spaces, explore materials, and respond. Allowing children to participate through movements, gestures, sounds, signs, communication tools, and words, with enough time.
repeatedly dropping or repositioning a tool, reaching for an unavailable support, or saying "I can't hold it," "Where's my device?" or "This doesn't work."	• Materials or tools are difficult to use. • Helpful equipment or technology is unavailable. • Tools are not set up or supported for use.	**Optimize access to accessible materials and assistive and accessible technologies and tools (4.2)**	Making accessible materials and helpful tools available during everyday experiences. Supporting children in using adapted handles, switches, communication systems, positioning equipment, and other tools they need.
pointing, moving, making sounds, signing, or using a communication tool without receiving a response, or saying "Let me show you" or "I can't say it."	• Only spoken answers are accepted. • The child's communication is missed or misunderstood or ignored. • Other ways to communicate are unavailable.	**Use multiple media for communication (5.1)**	Recognizing and responding to communication in many forms. Offering opportunities to share through objects, pictures, movement, sounds, signs, communication tools, drawing, and words.
pushing a particular tool away, attempting to build or create using different materials, or saying "Can I use blocks?" "I want to draw it" or "Do I have to write?"	• Only one tool or material is offered. • Available tools are difficult to use. • Children must create in one prescribed way.	**Use multiple tools for construction, composition, and creativity (5.2)**	Offering different tools and materials for creating and sharing ideas. Making room for building, arranging, drawing, making marks, recording, and using digital or adapted tools.
stopping at the same point during repeated attempts, handing materials to someone else, or saying "Help me start," "Show me again" or "Can we do it together?"	• There are too few opportunities to practise. • Demonstrations or shared practice are missing. • Help is removed too quickly or does not change as needed.	**Build fluencies with graduated support for practice and performance (5.3)**	Providing repeated opportunities to explore and practise with demonstrations, shared participation, and helpful prompts. Adjusting support as children develop confidence and skill.
having gestures, signs, drawings, or device messages passed over while spoken answers are accepted, or saying "I already told you" or "Why do I have to say it?"	• Some ways of communicating are treated as less valuable. • Adults assume speech shows more understanding. • Children are required to express ideas in only one way.	**Address biases related to modes of expression and communication (5.4)**	Valuing different ways of communicating and showing understanding. Recognizing that speech, movement, signs, images, creations, and communication tools can all carry meaningful ideas.
reaching towards something they want to make or do without a response from others or saying, "I don't know what to do" or "I want to make this."	• Adults overlook what the child is trying to accomplish. • Goals are chosen without the child's involvement. • The next achievable step is unclear.	**Set meaningful goals (6.1)**	Recognizing children's intentions and helping them choose meaningful next steps. Supporting goals communicated through actions, interests, gestures, communication tools, and words.
stopping when a familiar difficulty occurs, making repeated attempts without the needed help, or saying "What if it falls?" "What will I need?" or "What do I do if it doesn't work?"	• Likely difficulties have not been considered. • Helpful materials or supports are not ready. • There is no clear alternative when a plan does not work.	**Anticipate and plan for challenges (6.2)**	Preparing for possible difficulties with children. Making helpful tools, people, reminders, and alternative approaches available before they are needed.
searching through materials, repeatedly leaving to find something, or saying "Where is it?" "What do I need?" or "I lost my place."	• Materials are hard to find or poorly organized. • Too many items or steps are presented together. • Reminders and places to keep work are missing.	**Organize information and resources (6.3)**	Arranging materials and information so children can find and use them. Offering consistent locations, accessible labels, simple sequences, and places to keep unfinished creations.
returning to an adult after each step, repeatedly starting over, or asking "Am I done?" "Did it work?" or "What's next?"	• Progress is difficult to notice. • Steps or signs of completion are unclear. • There are few opportunities to pause and review.	**Enhance capacity for monitoring progress (6.4)**	Helping children notice what they have tried, what has changed, and what comes next. Using shared observation, photos, objects, simple checklists, and conversations to make progress visible.
being assigned only a watching role despite reaching, gesturing, or asking to join while others participate, being moved away because materials are inaccessible, or saying "Why can't I?" "They won't let me" or "I want a turn too."	• Rules allow only one way to participate. • Activities are offered without accessible roles or materials. • Assumptions about ability limit opportunities.	**Challenge exclusionary practices (6.5)**	Examining and changing rules, routines, expectations, and arrangements that leave children out. Working with children and families to create meaningful ways for everyone to participate and contribute.

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