 **Beyond Bubbles and Blocks**  

Tips for EI Home Visitors

**Did you Know?**

According to the Division of Early Childhood (DEC), interventions should occur within the context of child and family routines. This also aligns with our MA EI Mission as well as Key Principle 1 and 2. Toy bags brought in by EI Specialists are not part of the daily routine, and therefore, should not be used at home visits with children and families.

# **Tips and Techniques**

In March of 2020, all Early Intervention programs worked feverishly to pivot from face-to-face services to work in a virtual environment. This was a huge undertaking for agencies, programs and staff and it somehow all fell into place within a few weeks time. EI Specialists that were using toy bags on visits quickly had to learn other ways to support children and families. By not having toys bags in the home, it allowed families to be encouraged to use the resources they had in their natural environment. This also encouraged a family-centered approach as well opportunities to use the PIWI philosophy. Fast foward 15 months later and visits are returning to face-to-face. This is an important reminder that using a toy bag still does not support the MA EI Mission, Key Principles, or DEC recommended pratices.

Visits should support daily activities the family does (e.g. eating meals, bath time, watching the garbage truck, etc.). These strategies support participation in the child and family’s community using the resources they have. Together with families, EI Specialists recognize and identify times that are optimal to practice skill development.

**Questions to Consider**

* What kind of message does it send to families when the EI Specialist show up with a bag of toys?
* What happens if the EI Specialist bring toys into the home and leave them there? Are they culturally appropriate for the child and family? How will the family continue
* How is the family able to use the activities within their daily routines when there are toys brought in and then taken out of the home each week?

**Family Engagement Tips**

When a toy bag is used in a home visit, caregivers may not have the opportunity to practice the skills addressed in the visit because the EI Specialist often takes the toys with them at the end of the visit. Through the use of functional assessment, the EI Specialist can learn about the family and the everyday interactions and routines they have with their child. Using the PIWI philosophy and strategies, the EI Specialist can support families to use everyday routines, such as a bath or mealtime, and everyday materials, such as a cup or bowl, to increase their child’s skills and meet IFSP outcomes.

Guiding Principle #4 from *Strengthening Partnerships: A Framework,* tells us *Families are their child’s first and best advocate. This premier role puts families in a unique position to nurture their children’s growth and development and to help practitioners become knowledgeable about their child.*

For more information visit:[doe.mass.edu/sfs/family-engagement-framework.pdf](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/family-engagement-framework.pdf)