# A Bagless Approach in Early Start

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# Why has the field has shifted focus from toy bags to everyday learning?

- Children learn best through meaningful experiences.
- Caregivers are their child's most important teachers.
- Everyday routines are full of developmental opportunities.
- Our role is to coach, model, and empower.



# What Does Bagless Really Mean?

**It's not about taking something away. It's about building something bigger!**

Less dependence on provider-supplied toys.

More focus on family routines and interests.

More caregiver participation and confidence.

More opportunities to practice skills throughout the day.

Our focus: The relationship, the interaction, and the learning—not the toy!

# Learning Happens Everywhere!

Everyday routines create natural learning opportunities:

- Mealtime: Communication, requesting, fine motor skills.
- Bath time: Sensory exploration, imitation, motor skills.
- Dressing: Problem-solving, independence, following directions.
- Playtime: Turn-taking, shared attention, social interaction.





# Empowering Parents and Caregivers

**We want caregivers to feel confident—not dependent on our toy bags!**

- Show caregivers how to use materials they already have in a novel way.
- Model strategies during familiar activities.
- Encourage caregivers to lead interactions.
- Celebrate their ideas and successes.

# It's About the Interaction, Not the Toy!

**The toy can attract attention and provide an activity.**

**The interaction builds communication, connection, and shared engagement.**

Our goal is to promote:

-Back-and-forth communication.

-Joint attention and eye contact when developmentally appropriate.

-Turn-taking and reciprocal play.

-Imitation and social engagement.

-Meaningful connections between caregivers and children.

**The magic is in the interaction!**

# Fewer Transitions, Less Stress

Have you ever experienced a child becoming upset when it's time to put away a toy from your bag?

A bagless approach can help:

- Reduce attachment to items that must leave at the end of a visit.
- Minimize difficult transitions.
- Keep preferred materials available to the child.
- Focus on practicing transitions within everyday family routines.

**Less time managing the toy bag.**
**More time supporting development!**

## Keeping Early Start Family-Centered

- Our home visits should reflect the family's real life.
- Follow the child's interests.
- Respect and support family priorities and routines.
- Use materials already available.
- Encourage caregiver leadership.

**We are guests in the family's home—our role is not to bring the classroom or clinic into their living room.**



# Supporting Evidence-Based Practices

The Bagless Approach reinforces important early intervention principles:

- **Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices:** Natural environments, family participation, and learning within everyday activities.
- **America Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA):** Routines-based intervention, caregiver involvement, communication opportunities, and generalization of skills.
- **Family-centered practice:** Strategies that are practical, meaningful, and sustainable.

# An Added Benefit: Infection Prevention

| **Fewer shared materials traveling between homes** |
| --- |
| Less routine transport of shared toys. |
| Fewer items requiring cleaning and disinfection. |
| Reduced need for storage and tracking. |

***Health and safety remain everyone's responsibility.***

# Does Bagless Mean NEVER Bringing Anything?

Absolutely not! The approach is about intentionality, not rigid rules.

**Bring a toy and leave it:** When it supports a specific developmental goal and is appropriate for the family.

**Bring a small item to give:** Bubbles, stickers, or other purposeful materials.

**Use materials intentionally:** Every item should have a reason for being there.

**The question we should ask ourselves is how will this item support the child's development AND help the caregiver continue learning between visits?"**

# What Does a Bagless Home Visit Look Like?

- Connect with the caregiver and learn about the family's week.
- Identify a routine or activity the family wants to work on.
- Observe the child's interests and abilities.
- Coach the caregiver using modeling, practice, and feedback.
- Reflect together and identify opportunities to practice between visits.
- **Coach. Model. Practice. Empower.**

# Let's Shift Our Thinking!

| Instead of asking... | Ask ourselves... |
| --- | --- |
| What toy should I bring? | What routine can we build on? |
| What activity should I lead? | What interests the child? |
| How can I entertain the child? | How can I support the parent/child interaction? |
| What can I teach today? | How can I build on what the child/ family is already doing? |

# The Takeaway

**The Best Learning Materials Are Often Already at Home!**

- Relationships matter more than resources.
- Everyday routines create meaningful learning through natural experiences.
- Caregivers are their child's primary teachers.

**Our job is to build confidence, capacity, and connection.**

# Thank You!

**Let's make every home visit count!**

Thank you for the meaningful work you do with children and families every day.