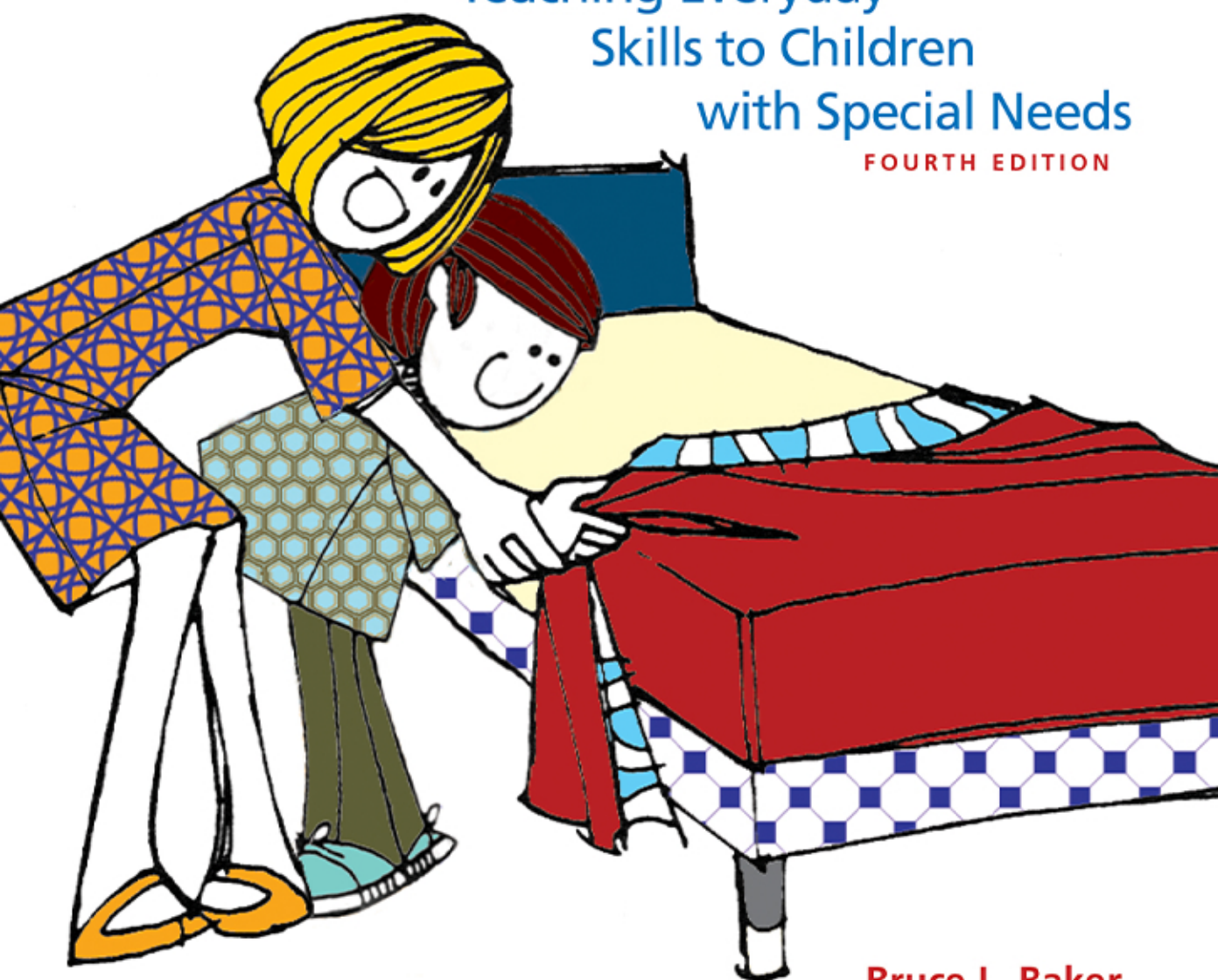


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Steps to Independence

Teaching Everyday
Skills to Children
with Special Needs
FOURTH EDITION



Bruce L. Baker
Alan J. Brightman

*Jan B. Blacher Stephen P. Hinshaw
Louis J. Heifetz Diane M. Murphy*

Steps to Independence

Teaching Everyday Skills to Children with Special Needs

Fourth Edition

by

Bruce L. Baker, Ph.D.

and

Alan J. Brightman, Ph.D.

with

Jan B. Blacher, Ph.D., Louis J. Heifetz, Ph.D.,
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Acknowledgments

This book has a very long and rich history, with many people who deserve our gratitude. We won't try to revisit our efforts to write instructional materials for parents, which began in the early 1970s, except to say "thanks" once again to Michael Begab, Ann Wendall, and Melissa Behm for being there when it mattered. This is now the fourth edition of *Steps to Independence*. In each edition we have tried not only to keep the basic principles that have worked for thousands of parents but also have tried to update the content to reflect the changing philosophies and practices in the professional world. We have been gratified to receive such positive and useful feedback from hundreds of parents and teachers and from anonymous reviewers. For this edition, we especially appreciate the feedback we received from Jan Blacher, Bonnie Kramer, Rita Gardner, and Frank Bird. As before, our friends at Brookes have heartened us with their enthusiasm for the book and their unflagging commitment to excellence in publishing; in particular, we thank Rebecca Lazo, our acquisitions editor, and Mackenzie Cross, our production editor.

Bruce L. Baker

Alan J. Brightman

Introduction

Maybe more than anything else, this is a book about *expectations*. Both for you and for your child. Not many years ago, children with special needs were almost automatically associated with failure and frustration. Kids with labels were viewed as kids who *couldn't*. Despite the frequently heroic efforts of parents and special education teachers to demonstrate how much these children could, in fact, learn, the prevailing “wisdom” all too often counseled not to expect too much. How many parents had to listen to some version of the phrase, “He’ll only go *so far*”?

Parents, too, had a label that caused others to view them with different expectations. They were *parents*. Which meant that they weren’t professionals. Which meant that what they knew about their child—never mind what they were capable of *doing* with their child—was of little value in making sound educational decisions for that child. They were simply parents, people who “took care” of their children while others made decisions about their children’s educational futures.

Great Expectations

Times, thankfully, have changed. Since the 1970s, we have witnessed not only the passage of historic legislation but also, as a result, a dramatic adjustment in expectations for children with special needs and their parents. Children with disabilities in the 21st century are seen as children who *can*. They can learn. They can interact productively with their peers who do not have disabilities. They can participate more fully in all aspects of society. And parents of children with disabilities are now seen as partners in ensuring that many options—educational, recreational, and vocational—are available to their children.

Who Is this Book Intended For?

Steps to Independence: Teaching Everyday Skills to Children with Special Needs is written primarily for parents of children with some degree of developmental delay. Indeed, many parents contributed to what these pages have to offer. Real parents of real kids guided us during the writing process. They questioned us. They challenged us. And they provided countless examples of how learning to teach their

children everyday skills paid off, not just for the child but for the entire family as well.

Although we speak mainly to parents, teachers and many other professionals (e.g., special educators, clinical and school psychologists, social workers, counselors) tell us how helpful they find the book. These professionals work with children whose intellectual and/or emotional disabilities have given them labels such as exceptional, delayed, mentally retarded, intellectually disabled, learning disabled, pervasive developmental disorder, or autistic. To us, the labels matter little. We're working on behavior. And because our focus is on children's behavior, we've been encouraged by the number of readers who tell us that they learned a lot in these pages that applied just as well to teaching children without disabilities.

Our focus is on children from about age 3 through preadolescence, and we draw most of our examples from children within this age range. We also include several chapters that address considerations for adolescents and young adults so that readers can glimpse what lies ahead.

What Is the Aim?

Steps to Independence is based on a simple, perhaps even obvious, assumption: Parents are their children's first and most influential teachers. Our aim in writing this book was to help parents continue teaching their children in ways that have proven to be effective over the years. We present a well-established approach and specific guidelines for teaching your child skills that will help him or her progress toward living as independently and happily as possible in the community.

Although "independence" is a worthy life goal—though there is room for much philosophical discussion about just what the word means—we know a few things for sure: Independence doesn't come overnight, and it doesn't come by wishing for it. And independence most definitely doesn't come as the result of a new miracle drug or a dramatically hyped new approach to teaching. Independence is instead the product of patience and constant encouragement. It is built over years, step by step, skill by skill, opportunity by opportunity.

What Will I Be Teaching?

Steps to Independence covers teaching basic skills of paying attention and following directions; self-help skills of eating, dressing, and grooming; toilet training; play skills; advanced self-care skills; home-care skills; and functional academic skills. You've already taught many of these skills, and as you read the book you can select your

next steps for teaching from among a wide array of suggestions. We also give guidelines for reducing problem behaviors. These behaviors not only limit your child's learning opportunities but also are likely to add a stress and tension to your day.

We include many specific teaching programs, especially for self-help skills, which most children perform in the same order. In other domains, we expect that you'll adapt the basic *Steps to Independence* teaching principles to skills that we do not specifically address. In play skills, for example, we don't spell out how to teach riding a two-wheeler, downhill skiing, or dancing. But once you learn the basic approach to teaching, you'll find that it applies to just about anything you might want your child to learn.

We have intentionally tried to pare teaching programs down to the essentials, as this has proven to be the best way to convey the basics of teaching. However, we expect that you will view these skills within the context of your own child's world. So, for example, although we show you how to teach bed-making skills, we leave it to you to add the stuffed animals, the pillows, the cat.

But Isn't Teaching the School's Responsibility?

Yes, certainly—and yours too. Since the 1970s, progressive legislation has mandated free appropriate public schooling for children with special needs, and the resources available to parents have increased considerably. But, as you well know, along with increased responsibilities for schools have come increases in responsibilities for parents too. We don't just mean the countless meetings—individualized education program (IEP) meetings, parent conferences, fundraisers, and the like—but also the responsibility to play a critical role in your child's education.

Parents of children with special needs have special responsibilities. It's clear if your child has a disorder such as diabetes that you have certain responsibilities that are essential even for his or her survival. This is stressful, but parents rise to the challenge. When a child has special learning needs, the specific responsibilities are not usually as clear cut, but they are no less important if the child is to achieve maximal independence. Of course working along with your child's teachers at school is essential, as we discuss in Chapter 20.

Using This Book

We intend for this book to be used actively—to be written in, thought about, shared, and discussed. The content ranges from broad teaching principles to highly specific teaching suggestions. You will likely

skip around, using the parts of the book that suit your needs and your child's needs best. The chapters in Section I cover the basics of teaching though, so you should read them first.

When you have finished Section I, turn to any chapter in Section II that is of interest. These chapters address teaching skills in specific areas. The first four chapters in Section II examine basic skills for the young child: Get-Ready Skills (Chapter 8), Self-Help Skills (Chapter 9), Toilet Training (Chapter 10), and Play Skills (Chapter 11). The next three chapters cover more advanced skills that lead the child to greater independence and apply to a wider age range: Self-Care Skills (Chapter 12), Home-Care Skills (Chapter 13), and Functional Academic Skills (Chapter 14).

Section III addresses managing child behavior problems. It is best to read this section after you have begun to teach a skill in Section II, and you should read the chapters in this section in order. These will take you through Identifying Behavior Problems (Chapter 15), Examining Behavior (Chapter 16), Beginning a Behavior Management Program—Part One: Consequences (Chapter 17), and Beginning a Behavior Management Program—Part Two: Antecedents and Alternative Behaviors (Chapter 18).

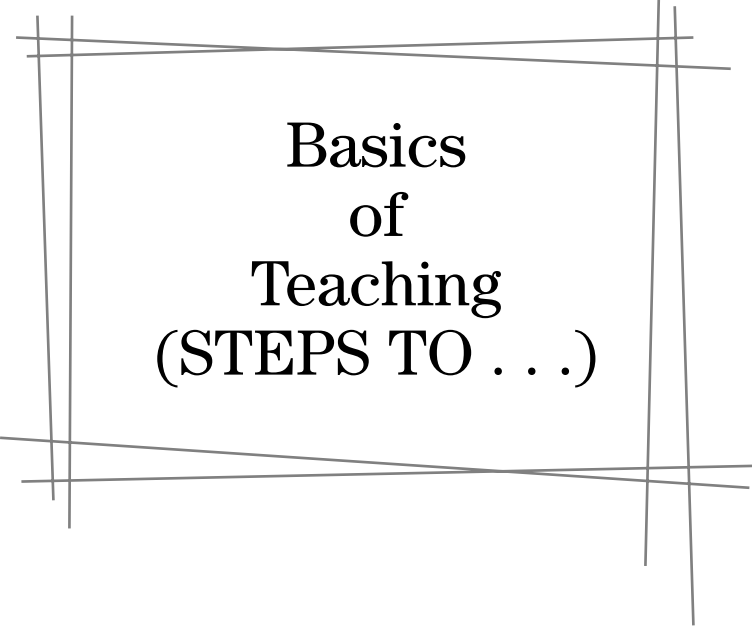
Section IV, a new section with this edition, addresses issues of supporting your child's independence. We include a completely rewritten chapter on the computer revolution (Computing—Now It's Personal, Chapter 19) that looks briefly at exciting new opportunities for you and your child, possibilities that none of us could have imagined in the not-too-distant past. We also introduce a new chapter on the critical topic of Partnership with Your Child's Other Teachers (Chapter 20).

The appendices serve as reference guides when you begin to teach specific skills. They include specific suggestions for teaching get-ready skills (Appendix A); an inventory for assessing a child's self-help skills (Appendix B); and specific, detailed programs for teaching a number of self-help skills (Appendix C), play skills (Appendix D), and functional academic skills (Appendix E).

Visit Us on the Web

In this book we present a number of skill assessments and record-keeping forms that readers in the past have photocopied for their use. Now you don't have to do that. Visit the *Steps to Independence* web site at <http://www.brookespublishing.com/steps> where you'll find copies of all of the *Steps to Independence* forms in a larger format that you can easily download, print out, and use at home.

SECTION I



Basics
of
Teaching
(STEPS TO . . .)

CHAPTER 1



Setting Out

The 21st century is truly a new era for children with special needs, a time when parents and professionals together determine the educational course of each child. It is an era, too, in which the roles of parents and professionals require them to reconsider their individual responsibilities. Who decides what a child will learn? And who takes action to see that the learning happens? Simply stated, this new era for children with special needs requires parents to reexamine what it means to be a parent and requires teachers to reexamine what it means to be a teacher.

PARENT ROLES

There is no one “correct” approach to reexamining roles. Teaching is a natural part of being a parent. Virtually every time you interact with your child, you are teaching him or her something—whether you realize it or not. Many parents of children with special needs have decided to become more *intentional* teachers; some parents are conducting daily teaching sessions in their home. Other parents, after considering their full range of responsibilities at work and/or at home, have realistically decided that an everyday teaching role would be impractical. Their teaching will have to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves throughout the day or on the weekend. In either case, the child gains, particularly when the parents have participated actively with their child’s teachers in shaping an individualized education program (IEP). We talk more about working with your child’s school in Chapter 20.

4 *Steps to Independence*

GOOD TEACHING

One of our basic assumptions in writing this book was that no matter what decisions you may have made about your role as a teacher, you will be better able to fulfill that role if you understand firsthand what good teaching is all about. Put another way, once you know how to teach your child a skill systematically—from beginning to end—and once you know how to manage behavior problems, then you will be a much better collaborator with others in your child's educational world.

A related assumption is that the only way to learn about good skills teaching is to do good skills teaching. Of course, you have already taught your child many skills. (Take a minute and think about all of the things your child has learned to do with your help.) For most readers, this book primarily will strengthen teaching skills they already have and suggest new ways to use them. But whether or not you have been teaching already in the systematic way we suggest, while you read this book we urge you to find some time, somehow, during which you will teach your child another new skill. We're not suggesting that you find additional teaching time to spend with your child. We're simply suggesting that you take some of the time you already spend and direct it toward what we believe will be a rewarding and long-lasting experience for you both. Like most parents, you'll probably be delighted at how good you are at teaching. But, just as important, you'll be much better prepared to be a partner on your child's educational team.

PHILOSOPHIES AND FADS

"Okay," you might say. "Teaching certainly makes sense. But there seem to be a lot of ways to go about this. What's the approach in this book, and how do I know whether it will work?" Good questions. The disability field has more than its share of different approaches, each with very vocal cheerleaders. It is very difficult to be an informed consumer, to separate the various philosophies about education for people with developmental disabilities from sound evidence about what works.

Because we want to help children with intellectual and related disabilities, we are particularly aware of new fads and philosophies. Some of these will be found to have merit and will survive to become the common practices of tomorrow. Others will fade, to be replaced by whatever next new trend is rounding the corner. For example, a philosophy that is guiding educators' thinking today is *full inclusion*—the proposition that all children with special needs should be educated entirely within the general education environment. This is an extreme outgrowth of earlier philosophies, such as *integration*, *mainstreaming*, and *normalization*, which argued that opportunities for children with special needs should be as close as possible to those for typically developing children. These earlier ideas turned out not to be passing fads but perspectives that have become widely accepted, not so much because they were demonstrated to "work," but because they seemed to many of us to be the right thing to do.

Other philosophies and fads have not fared so well. Have you heard of patterning? Megavitamin therapy? Additive-free diets? Facilitated communication? Each of these offered new hope to parents and absorbed immeasurable amounts of time and money, only to finally be discarded from the weight of professional opinion and scientific studies that failed to document success.

Be assured that the teaching techniques in this book are based on principles of behavior change, primarily those of *applied behavior analysis*, which educators have known and practiced for decades. They have been derived from thousands of published studies of effective teaching, as well as from the shared experiences of countless parents and teachers. These behavioral teaching principles have become an integral part of effective school programs.

Although most educators would generally agree with the broad teaching principles we employ, there is one point with which some will disagree. Some educators argue that teaching should always be done informally, in the child's natural environment and within ongoing play and living activities. Other educators point out the benefits of separate designated teaching sessions in which the teacher repeatedly practices a skill with the child. Our opinion is . . . well, it depends. There is good evidence that both approaches are successful, and a blend of the two approaches is likely best for most children. You will decide how closely to follow the specific teaching programs that we suggest and how much to adapt them to provide teaching moments throughout your child's day.

YOU'RE THE EXPERT

A final point before we—and you—get started. It's an obvious point, perhaps, but one that hundreds of parents reminded us could not be made too often. Though you may be the parent or teacher of a child with special needs, you are unlike any other parent or teacher of such children. You are uniquely you. You have your own dreams and visions, your own wants and needs. And in one essential way, you have a kind of information that no one else could possibly have: You know your child more intimately than anyone else.

We ask you, therefore, as you begin this book, not to think at all about trying to change who you are. Rather, add to what is uniquely you a new set of skills and, perhaps, a new way of looking at your child, to become an even more substantial partner in building his educational future. Much of what we say here may not seem all that new to you; perhaps you've already used a version of the techniques we describe. It is our hope, though, that this book will help you to build on these experiences so that you can do what you are doing even better. Remember: Keep your expectations high—for both you and your child.


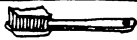
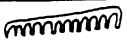
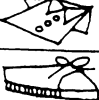

Chapter 2 gets you started on the road to becoming a successful skills teacher. But before jumping in, let's take a moment to look at one parent who's already been traveling that road for some time. The teaching program you're about to glimpse will, on the surface, seem fairly simple. But the strategies behind it were carefully developed and practiced in ways that you'll learn about in the following chapters.

6 Steps to Independence

Billy's Bed

On Wednesday morning, Billy woke up to find that something new had been added to the list on the wall. There, at the bottom, was a picture of a bed neatly made. And he knew right away what this meant.

The list was, in fact, Billy's list. He and his mom (Mrs. Jackson) had put it together a while ago. It had begun with just two pictures; now it had grown to look like this:

| | Billy | | | | | | |
|---|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | Sun. | Mon. | Tue. | Wed. | Thu. | Fri. | Sat. |
|  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
|  | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | |
|  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
|  | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
|  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |

And now, bed making. He had never done this before, but last night he and Mom agreed that he would try.

“How are you doing, Billy? Breakfast is almost ready.”

Billy looked up at the list again. Washing hands and face and brushing teeth were no longer a problem—they were, by now, an easy way to get checks. Getting dressed, though, still depended on what Mom laid out for him the night before. Sweatshirts and sweaters, for example, were easy. But shirts with small buttons were still hard, and sometimes he needed help with them.

As Billy continued to work his way down the list, Mrs. Jackson went to his room and began straightening out the bed. By the time Billy returned from the bathroom, the bed was almost completely made; all that remained was to pull the bedspread up from where she had left it folded about halfway down.

Dressed now and ready to go, Billy asked Mom for the morning check marks.

“Looks like you got them all today, didn’t you?” Billy’s mom began to check off each accomplishment with exaggerated inspection. “Now what about the shoes? Oh yes.” . . . Another red check on the list. “Five more checks this morning, Billy. How many did we agree on for you to go bowling this Friday?”

“Twenty, right?” he asked.

“Twenty it is. But look at this. There’s no check yet next to the new bed picture on the list. Shall we try that before breakfast, too?”



Billy suddenly became less cheerful—his usual and predictable withdrawal from something new. “Aw, I’m hungry.”

Billy’s mom had learned to be gently insistent and to remind Billy of the reward. “Come on, Billy, it’ll just take a minute and you’ll get another check. Billy, watch what I do.”

Because the bed was practically all made anyway—Mrs. Jackson had made sure of that—it required only *one simple motion* to get the bedspread up over the pillow. “Billy, watch what I do.” After demonstrating this motion slowly, she brought the bedspread back to where it had been and encouraged Billy to try the same.

“It did look pretty easy,” he thought to himself.

“Okay, Billy, you try. Pull it over the pillow. Good. See, you get another check. Tomorrow we’ll do a little more bed making, okay?”

“Okay.”

Billy had indeed finished making his own bed, and for that he deserved his check. He earned it as he earned them all!
