

Tools of Autonomy for Three-Year-Old Classes

Teachers promote children’s independence by providing meaningful roles for them within the classroom, encouraging them to talk, listening to their ideas, and allowing them to make decisions for themselves. Using **Tools of Autonomy** helps teachers establish a safe, nurturing and predictable environment in their classrooms which is foundational to young children's learning and development. Tools of Autonomy are interactive visuals through which children can begin to develop independence, self-regulation and self-confidence. This document provides general guidelines and best practices. Please reach out to your DECE field office to assist with specific questions around tailoring Tools of Autonomy for the needs of the children in your classroom. The tools in this document are aligned with the proactive measures, positive reinforcement strategies and responsive strategies outlined in the [Statement on Positive Behavior Guidance in Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC Programs NYC](#) which is also applicable to 3-K for All.

Criteria for Effective Tools of Autonomy:

- **Relevant:** They reflect and have impact on children’s experiences and learning in the classroom.
- **Strengths-based:** They build on children’s strengths, convey positive messages and are used in a respectful way.
- **Flexible:** They can change during the day (for example, if there is an unexpected shift in the daily schedule) or throughout the year. This supports children in coping with change in a concrete manner.
- **Visually well-organized:** They are uncluttered to support children in understanding expectations and interacting with the environment.
- **Accessible:** They are at children’s eye-level, within children’s reach and available daily for independent use. *Keep in mind that only a few children will be able to directly interact with a tool at a time. Have children interact with the tool in small groups to limit wait time.*
- **Labeled:** They are labeled with clear pictures and words (where appropriate). Words are printed or typed clearly. Proper names have an initial capital letter in a different color; other words are lowercase.
- **Durable:** They are in good working condition and will last throughout the year or be repaired as needed.

Recommended types of Tools of Autonomy:

- Attendance Chart
- Daily Schedule
- Community Expectations Tool
- Feelings Tool

Attendance Chart

Children monitor their attendance and the attendance of their peers with a chart showing if they are present or absent. The Attendance Chart provides an opportunity for teachers to build a positive classroom culture by modeling phrases such as, "I'm so glad you are here today," or, "I wonder why [name] is not here today. I hope we can see him/her soon." This supports children in knowing that they, and their peers, are important members of the classroom community. Attendance Charts with pictures also assist children in recognizing their printed names and those of their peers.

Best Practices

- Each day as children arrive, they place their name cards in the "present" area of the chart.
- At the end of each day children place their name in the "absent" area. Note that "home" and "school" are sometimes used instead of "present" and "absent."
- Children can use these charts to discuss who is present/absent and how many children are present and/or absent each day.

Attendance Chart Examples



ELOF Alignment

Goal P-ATL 2. Child follows classroom rules and routines with increasing independence.

Goal P-SE 11. Child has a sense of belonging to family, community and other groups.

Goal P-LIT 2. Child demonstrates an understanding of how print is used (functions of print) and the rules that govern how print works (conventions of print).

Daily Schedule

Classrooms with predictable schedules and routines facilitate children's understanding of the learning environment expectations. The Daily Schedule or Flow of the Day helps children learn classroom routines and concepts of time, predict a sequence of events and develop self-regulation skills, all in a developmentally appropriate manner. Children feel more safe and in control when they are able to predict what will happen next. Changes to the routine can be reflected in the schedule, which helps children understand and adapt to these changes.

Best Practices

- In the beginning of the year, create the Daily Schedule so that children know what to expect throughout the day.
- Include pictures and words, with events in the order that they will occur (an additional written schedule including times should be posted in the room for visitors to view).
- Ensure flexibility (for example, on a rainy day you may have gross motor inside instead of outside).
- Organize from left to right (horizontal) when possible to promote pre-reading skills.
- Include interactive aspects, for example an arrow that children can move on the schedule as the day progresses.
- Think about children's attention spans as you break down the day into steps.
- Take into consideration children's home languages as appropriate.
- The Daily Schedule should be reviewed and discussed daily. It could be reviewed during arrival, large group, when an event changes and throughout the day as necessary.
- Post the chart at eye level so that children can independently refer to it.

Daily Schedule Examples



ELOF Alignment:

Goal P-ATL 1. Child manages emotions with increasing independence.

Goal P-ATL 2. Child follows classroom rules and routines with increasing independence.

Goal P-LIT 2. Child demonstrates an understanding of how print is used (functions of print) and the rules that govern how print works (conventions of print).

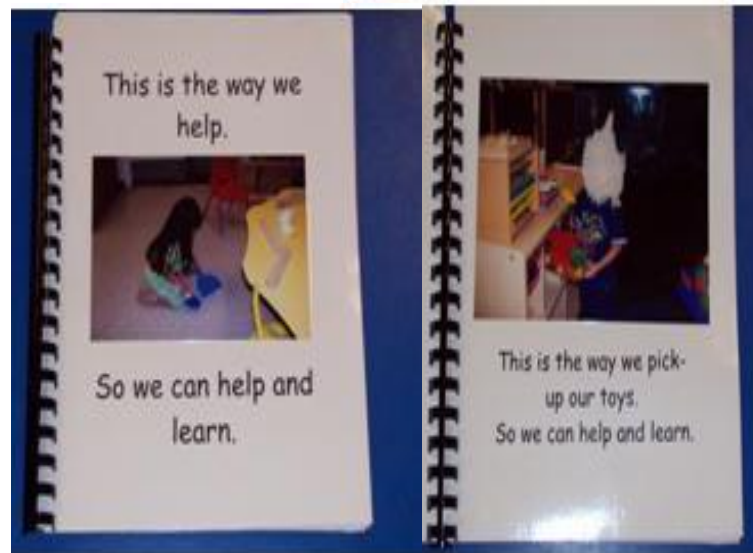
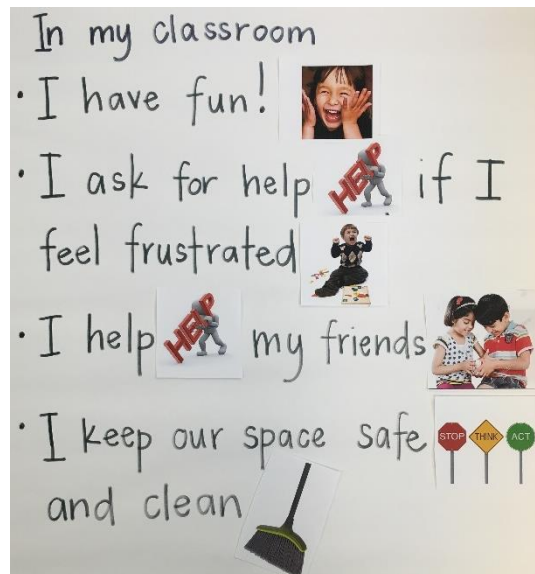
Community Expectations Tool

Clearly communicated developmentally appropriate expectations for children help them develop independence and self-regulation skills and engage in respectful interactions with peers and adults. Children can contribute to creating, re-visiting or re-wording expectations. Include visuals on the Community Expectations Tool and use it to highlight expected behaviors. It is important that all adults also model the expectations and remind children of the expectations in a positive way.

Best Practices

- At the beginning of the year, encourage children to participate in creating a set of expectations for behavior in the classroom.
- Briefly highlight why each expectation is important. This helps children learn about being part of the classroom community.
- Expectations should be strengths-based: use positive language to clearly define the desired behavior so that children are learning what to do with their bodies instead of what they should not do.
- Children will need positive reminders throughout the day and year in order to follow the expectations. Use positive feedback to point out when children are following the expectations and why it is important. For example, "I see children keeping their hands to themselves. This helps keep everyone safe when we are playing."

Community Expectations Tool Examples



ELOF Alignment

Goal P-ATL 3. Child appropriately handles and takes care of classroom materials.

Goal P-ATL 4. Child manages actions, words and behaviors with increasing independence.

Goal P-SE 11. Child has a sense of belonging to family, community and other groups.

Feelings Tools

At three, children are learning how to identify, label and express their feelings as well as respond to the feelings and actions of others. With adult guidance and support, Feelings Tools support children in building the skills to manage their own feelings and recognize the feelings of others. Feelings Tools include labeled pictures of a wide variety of feelings that children might experience. They allow children to practice identifying and expressing their feelings.

Best Practices

- Children can use this tool to help identify feelings in their mind and body at arrival and throughout the day.
- Teachers can start the year with a smaller number of feelings pictures and add throughout the year.
- Teachers use this tool to support children to label their feelings as they experience emotions throughout the day. For example, “Helen, I notice that you made a face when you saw all the seats at the art table were full. Let’s look at the feelings chart- how did that make you feel?”
- Feelings Tools can be placed in the cozy area for children to reference and use to communicate feelings with teachers and peers as they seek emotional comfort.
- Keep in mind that as children are still learning to identify and express their feelings, they may not always accurately label their feelings and the feelings of others. Feelings tools help children build these skills.
- Pictures of a variety of actions children can take to express their feelings, calm down or feel better can be placed in the cozy area. With adult guidance children can begin to practice these skills as the year progresses.

Feelings Tool Example



ELOF Alignment:

Goal P-ATL 1. Child manages own emotions with increasing independence.

Goal P-ATL 4. Child manages actions, words and behaviors with increasing independence.

Goal P-SE 6. Child expresses a broad range of emotions and recognizes these emotions in self and others.

Goal P-SE 9. Child recognizes self as a unique individual having own abilities, characteristics, emotions and interests.

Center Time

Most three-year-olds are egocentric and impulsive, they are learning to understand their place in space and have very short attention spans. It is important to respect these characteristics when setting your own expectations for Center Time. It is also important to remember that for most children, this will be their first introduction to center-based learning environments. Children need the opportunity to explore and move freely between centers and learn to negotiate the classroom space as well as the position of their own bodies in relation to others. For these reasons, as well as the fact that they will likely not have the required math skills, the use of a centralized Center Time tool is not recommended for three-year-old classrooms.

Best Practices

- Prior to the start of the year, think carefully about how children will learn to use centers successfully.
- During the first weeks of school, offer basic center supplies and allow children to acquaint themselves with the materials. Guide them as they explore and model how to clean up when finished.
- Support children in understanding when there are too many children in a center for the play to be successful. Help them find a different center to try while they wait for other children to leave the area.
- Keep centers well supplied and well organized. When all centers are appealing, children are more likely to engage a wide variety rather than clustering in the one or two that are most familiar or easy to use.
- Introduce centers to the children prior to the start of Center Time. Highlight one or two of the hands-on materials available for exploration in each center.
- Consider various ways to display materials in each center so the center is visually appealing, inviting and easy for children to use.
- Consider the developmental characteristics of three year olds and remember that they should not be expected to share materials. Provide multiples of items that will likely be very interesting to children: enough for several children to play in the center and each have their own.
- Rotate materials as children lose interest and according to topic.
- Consider using concrete strategies to help children understand how many children can safely fit in a center such as teaching children there is space to play at a table if there is a chair available.
- Be strategic about where you will be when Center Time begins. Consider starting in a Center that children choose less often and preview new or unfamiliar materials. Invite children to join you in this Center.
- Label containers and shelves to assist children in the clean-up process and encourage all clean up attempts.