



EARLY DEVELOPMENT ESSENTIALS: STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

*A Sampling from RethinkEd's
Professional Development
Series on Behavior*



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The seeds of success are planted in early childhood. This critical period lays the foundation for future learning, behavior, social relationships and emotional wellness.

A primary focus of early elementary education is teaching, practicing and reinforcing student behaviors and skills that support learning and social development.

This journey begins with having an understanding of early childhood development-what should we expect and what instructional strategies work best for children in this developmental stage.

Next, we consider the social and wellness skills students need to be taught to successfully navigate school tasks, their emotions, and relationships. For example, the skill of self-regulation is essential for students to be able to think clearly, manage impulses, learn, connect with others, and manage challenging situations and emotions.

To support students' development and skill building, we must create a safe and positive learning environment and manage behavior from a proactive, prevention-based approach. Two examples of managing behavior and positive environment include intentionally setting up the physical classroom space to maximize interaction and instruction and minimize barriers to learning and engagement, and developing, teaching and practicing routines for efficient transitions from one activity or location to another.

This e-book provides a sampling of RethinkEd's Behavior Training Series for Early Childhood Education, including resources to support the learning and implementation.



Understanding Early Childhood Development

Gain practical insights into the developmental process that can guide how to interpret student behaviors during early childhood.

Further your understanding of how individual students may vary in their developmental paths and the typical range of abilities students demonstrate during

this intense period of development. Discover the facts about how emerging student competencies tend to show up and how to help them grow.



You'll Learn To:

- ✓ Identify how different areas of development might be influencing behavior.
- ✓ Recognize when and how students are demonstrating emerging skills or abilities.
- ✓ Support individual student development in ways that translate to learning and growth.



Understanding Child Development: Early Elementary

Fact Sheet

It is important to keep a few things in mind to help you be as effective as possible incorporating this knowledge into your daily interactions with students:

- Skill and abilities each develop at their own rate, for each individual student.
- When a student demonstrates a skill or ability for the first time, it is often still developing and likely to be inconsistent.
- Often, abilities initially show up only in certain situations, settings, or with certain people.
 - Sometimes students need to be explicitly taught how these skills or abilities might work in other settings or situations to help them use the skill more often.
 - A student's emotional and physical state may impact their use of all the skills and abilities they have developed.
 - It can even be hard for students to demonstrate skills and abilities that they've shown often or for long periods of time if they are upset, overwhelmed, or unsure of their physical or psychological safety.



The table on the following page summarizes some key areas of development. Please use the table as a reference to guide your learning.



Practice applying these insights to authentic classroom scenarios to identify the role of development in how students think, navigate relationships, make decisions, and behave. Operating from the student perspective, lifelong skills like decision-making will continue to develop into adulthood. Leveraging an understanding that many student behaviors in early childhood are rooted more in habit and the environment is an example of the type of developmental knowledge that can significantly shift the approach to supporting students to make healthy choices.

You'll Learn To:

- ✓ Analyze common behaviors from a developmental perspective.
- ✓ Better distinguish acts of impulse or habit, and more conscious decisions.
- ✓ Anticipate and support emerging decision-making abilities.

Early Elementary Students and *Decision-Making*

Each of the following examples of student behavior focus on the **decision-making** area of child development. Use what you learned in the interactive module (summarized in the table on the following page), your experience, and your general knowledge of child development to help you answer questions as you consider each example.



1.

A student exits their bus in line, enters the school, goes to their classroom, puts away their belongings, and follows the routine of sitting on the carpet to begin the day.

- Were they stopping to think and make a decision at each step?

- If yes, how do you know? What shows you they're making choices along the way?

- If no, what's guiding their behavior as they navigate entering the school in the morning and going to their class?



2.

A ball falls out of a box of supplies and a student immediately kicks it. It hits another student.

- Did this student think through their decision or act on an impulse?

- Did this student consider possible outcomes or consequences?

- How do you know?

Overarching themes of child development can be shared with the entire school community, making it more likely that student behaviors are understood and supported appropriately. Themes like understanding that students can differ in how quickly they can think and respond, can help set realistic expectations for adults interacting with these young students. Knowing the



importance of relationships and how students are continuing to learn how to join in play with others can set adults up to more effectively facilitate communication, collaboration, and teamwork.

You'll Learn To:

- ✓ Be more aware of how pace and patience can impact communication.
- ✓ Recognize signs students may be limited in their ability to think from the perspective of others or in terms of cause and effect.
- ✓ Identify opportunities to support key skills, like those related to student interactions and transitions.

Understanding Child Development: Early Elementary

Beyond the Classroom

The ways students think, build relationships, make decisions, and behave can all be influenced by child development. Students each have their own unique path to developing. It is common that students might show certain skills or abilities in one setting or situation first and take time to apply them to others. Below are some strategies to help support student development outside the classroom.



Students think at different speeds.

- Do your best to be patient and clear.
- Try rephrasing.
- Check for understanding by asking the student to tell you the expectation.

This can impact how quickly they respond to what staff say to them and how they navigate situations. Even the same student in a different part of the day or situation might think at different speeds.



Students are building their vocabulary and ability to communicate using words, symbols, and gestures to represent people, places and things.

- Encourage students efforts to communicate.
- Help them understand if they are misusing a word.
- Understand they might not have the words to express what they want or need.



Students can only see situations from one perspective, theirs.

- Consider first how the student is likely thinking about the situation and this can help guide you on how to best understand and respond to their behavior.
- Invite the student to share their perspective early and often.
- Help them to think about what others might be thinking and feeling. This can set a foundation for perspective taking later on.

As they age they will get better at perspective taking.



Students are building an understanding of cause and effect.

- Routinely guiding students through their options around small decisions can help them start to connect choices to outcomes.
- Reinforcing and encouraging good habits and decisions can have a significant impact on how often students show these behaviors.

Often their decisions are made out of habit or based on how adults have responded in the past to similar behaviors rather than thinking through what they think will happen.



Students are learning how to initiate interactions with others and join in their play.

- Practice appropriate greetings with students.
- Demonstrate how to ask to join a game or conversation so the student can see it in practice.
- Understand that part of the learning process will mean that they might try to engage with others by doing inappropriate things, like interrupting. Provide alternative approaches.



Students will continue to develop the ability to transition appropriately into adulthood.

- Repeat clear expectations before and during transitions regularly.
- When a student enters your area, be clear about the expectations (e.g., if sitting in the office the expectation is that you will remain quiet in your seat and if you need something you can raise your hand).

Self-Regulation

Building self-regulation skills can be empowering for students. An early focus on self-regulation can give students the chance to develop healthy habits related to how they navigate their attention, emotions, and behaviors that can stick with them as they age. Being in a regulated state helps students be ready to learn and engage by supporting their memory, problem-solving, communication, and more. With checklists and tools to help seamlessly integrate self-regulation practices into each school day, students can have more opportunities to try out different strategies and practice strategies so they can be effective when they need them most.



You'll Learn To:

- ✓ Understand how self-regulation influences attention, emotions, thinking, and behavior.
- ✓ Guide students to the key components of effective self-regulation strategies.
- ✓ Incorporate self-regulation practices into daily routines.

Self-Regulation Checklist

Utilize this checklist as a reminder of the components of teaching, modeling, and practicing self-regulation skills.



Teach how to practice being present:

- Focus on the moment
- Notice breathing (inhale, exhale, rise and fall of stomach)
- Direct attention to each sense and observe the environment
- Acknowledge thoughts, feelings, and what you observe
- Resist the urge to judge or to follow certain thoughts and feelings
- Use your breath and senses to direct your attention to the present



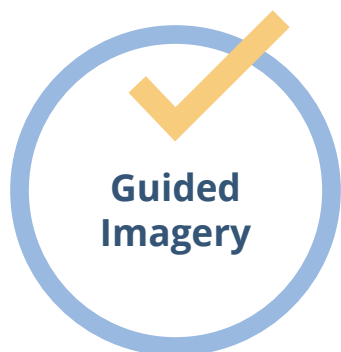
Teach cues and patterns of deep breathing:

- Inhale and inflate your stomach
- Exhale through your mouth
- Use rhythms and counts that work for you
- Example: Inhale for 4 seconds and exhale for 6 seconds when feeling stressed
- Example: Box Breathing involves using a count of 4 seconds to inhale, hold, exhale, and hold and then repeat



Teach students how to tense and relax muscle groups:

- Pick the muscles to focus on (fists, arms, face, shoulders, core, legs)
- Squeeze or flex tightly for at least 10 seconds
- Release and focus on letting the muscles fall open and loose
- Repeat for a certain number of reps or a for a certain amount of time



Teach students how to visualize:

- Imagine a place that is _____ (safe, calm, happy, etc)
- Use the five senses; what can be seen, heard, felt, smelt, and tasted in this place
- Consider if anyone else might be there
- Imagine what to do and how to spend time there
- Access this space when needing a break, a shift in mindset or emotions, to reconnect with a goal, to prepare or manage stress before a situation, task, or performance



Fact Sheet

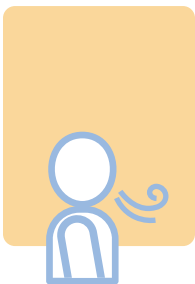
Evidence-based strategies for self-regulation support students' ability to manage their attention, emotions, physical feelings in their body, processing and their behavior. Incorporating self-regulation into the school day provides critical opportunities to practice these skills and supports student engagement and stress reduction.

Mindfulness



- **Increased awareness of the present moment**
 - Breathing
 - 5 Senses
 - Noticing thoughts, feelings, body, and environment
- **Observe and notice nonjudgmentally**
 - Acknowledge how thoughts, reactions, and judgments might quickly come up
 - Gently guide your attention back to your breathing and your five senses instead of engaging with the thought or focusing on your reaction or judgment

Relaxation Strategies



- **Deep Breathing:**
 - Breathe into belly
 - Box Breathing: Inhale, hold, exhale, and hold each for 4 seconds
 - Exhale more than you inhale to help calm down
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:**
 - Tense and relax different muscle groups to channel energy and connect with the feeling of releasing tension
- **Guided Imagery:**
 - Imagine a space that helps you feel safe and regulated
 - Use your 5 sense to create what the space would look like, what you might hear, and what you would feel, smell, and taste

Incorporate and Support Regulation



- **Use Movement**
 - Brain breaks, cooperative learning activities, mindfulness activities
- **Post and Provide Visual Aids**
 - Strategy reminders, schedules, expectations, emotional vocabulary, available supports
- **Create a Calm Corner**
 - Designated area to regulate that can include comfortable seating, calming activities, sensory tools (e.g., fidgets, weighted blankets, glitter jar).

Designated areas to support student regulation can motivate and invite students to use self-regulation skills. Calm corners are one way to think about these types of spaces. Customizable and highly adaptable, with the guidance of a few staple practices, like having strategy reminders and items that support regulation available, many areas throughout the school can become impactful areas dedicated to regulation. Students can practice how to access calm corners appropriately and become increasingly independent in their approach to self-regulation.



You'll Learn To:

- ✓ Identify key items that can be included in a calming area that support regulation.
- ✓ Set and teach expectations for how students might access a calm corner appropriately.
- ✓ Encourage norms around student regulation that support healthy habit-building.

Creating a Calm Corner



A **Calm Corner** is a designated space in your classroom where students can go when they need to calm themselves or take a brain break.

Suggestions for your Calm Corner

- Set the space apart from the rest of the classroom using a rug, a curtain, or shelves. Although the space should be set apart, be sure that students can be seen and can see the class.
- Make the space comfy and inviting with cushions, pillows, or bean bag chair.
- Create and post a 'Calm Corner' sign.
- Copy and post the Calm Corner Rules Signs.
- Include a timer that students can easily use.
- Copy the Calming Strategies Cards and display or place on a binder ring.
- Include a tub or basket of sensory and calming items such as a stress ball, fidget spinner, stuffed animal, puppet, picture book, headphones, and/or snow globe.



Calm Corners are designed to provide an opportunity for students to advocate for themselves and independently choose to self-regulate. A few things to keep in mind:

- Don't call attention to a student or deny a student from using the Calming Corner in front of other students. If a student is using the Calming Corner inappropriately, talk with the student privately to resolve the issue.
- Don't tell a student to go to the Calm Corner. Instead, ask the student if he or she would like some time in the Calm Corner, allowing the student to make the choice.
- When a Calm Corner is first introduced, it may be a popular place to visit. Don't worry. The novelty will wear off and it will become a safe place for students who need it.



At times, the most overwhelming or overstimulating parts of the school day occur outside the classroom, like noisy hallways, busy cafeterias, and transition-filled arrival and dismissal routines. Supporting self-regulation as a school-wide skillset means students are encouraged across settings and situations to use these tools, helping them to be more flexible and resilient over time. The goal is to embed realistic, useful strategies that can be assets to student growth in the classroom, around the school campus, and in their future.

You'll Learn To:

- ✓ Recognize what strategies might work best in which locations.
- ✓ Think flexibly about how to adapt strategies in the moment.
- ✓ Equip locations throughout the school with tools and visual aids that can set students up to have more success when self-regulating.



Beyond the Classroom



School staff can help students notice signs of regulation and implement strategies to help them be regulated and able to engage. Student regulation impacts their body, thinking, emotions, and behavior.

In each setting, identify two regulation strategies and how they might be helpful in that area specifically. Consider both strategies that might be incorporated into a routine and those that could be used as a go-to for students. The goal is to identify strategies that are realistic and accessible in that setting and to customize them based on your knowledge of those areas in your school.

Hallways

EXAMPLE: A go-to strategy for students in the hallways could be to treat the time they spend gathering in the hallways or moving to the next space mindfully.

They could observe what they pass on their walk to class, including what they see and hear, or attempt to name all the colors and shapes they see as they wait for the class to line up.

STRATEGY:

STRATEGY:

EXPLANATION:

Cafeteria

EXAMPLE: Having a designated area just outside of the cafeteria or nearby that is quieter and calmer might provide an option for students to take a moment to regulate and then rejoin their peers.

Knowing this environment can be somewhat overwhelming, giving students this option can help them recognize and respond to their need to regulate.

STRATEGY:

STRATEGY:

EXPLANATION:

Bus

EXAMPLE: Provide visual reminders and cues for mindfulness and observation games that can be changed or rotated.

("Spot 4 red cars. What is the tallest thing you pass on your ride home from school? How many colors are on this bus?")

STRATEGY:

STRATEGY:

EXPLANATION:

Gym/Auditorium

EXAMPLE: Establishing a routine of students engaging in stretching and breathing as they arrive in the gym before class begins.

Using some visual reminders to provide options for what they might choose or having a sequence of stretches for them to move through.

STRATEGY:

STRATEGY:

EXPLANATION:

Playground/Outdoor Areas

EXAMPLE: Creating multiple opportunities for students to access shade, water to drink, and other ways to cool down before returning to class.

STRATEGY:

STRATEGY:

EXPLANATION:

Physical Classroom Arrangement

Educators can enhance the effectiveness of their teaching by thoughtfully organizing the physical classroom setting. This includes strategically positioning desks to ensure students have a clear view of the instructor, as well as proactively minimizing potential distractions through meticulous planning of seating arrangements and traffic flow. It is advisable for educators to establish distinct, well-defined spaces for group collaboration and individual work. In sum, the overarching goal for teachers should be the creation of a structured environment that fosters student learning and active participation.



Additional Factors to Consider:

Minimize clutter by rotating materials as needed.

Label workspaces like reading corner, math center, etc.

Display cultural and linguistical representative materials of students.

PHYSICAL CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT



Creating an orderly physical classroom arrangement may require some practice and planning ahead. Below is a checklist that can be used as a reminder when preparing to create the physical arrangement of your classroom.



Set up the Environment

- Arrange the desks and furniture so students can see you, and you can see them at all times
- Desks will be arranged in a circular, cluster, horseshoe, or pod arrangement
- Post classroom agreements and expectations so that all students can see
- The teacher's desk will be located in an area where they can see students at all times
- Establish work areas for students to participate in small group work and independent activities
- Create clearly defined traffic patterns
- Allow for movement throughout the classroom
- Minimize opportunities for students to distract other students
 - **Example: Limit students' need to be near the doorways, the pencil sharpener, or the bathroom**



Set up Materials

- Clearly label materials
- Organize materials so they are easily accessible to students
- Keep materials for reading centers located near the reading center, etc.
- Minimize clutter by using only the materials required for that unit or learning objective
- Rotate out materials as students progress in a unit or change learning objectives
- Display materials are culturally and linguistically representative of the students in your class



Display Visuals on the Wall

- Post classroom rules, agreements, and expectations
- Label workspaces
 - **Examples: Reading Corner, Calm Corner, Math Center, etc**
- Post visuals students need for learning at their eye level
- Display student work that does not depict a score or grade
 - **Examples: artwork, poems, writing samples**



Transition Routines

Effective transition routines help maximize instructional time by establishing predictable schedules and teaching students' clear expectations for moving between activities.

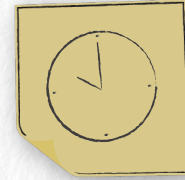
The Key Steps for Implementing Smooth Transition Routines Include:

- ✓ Identifying key transition times throughout the day.
- ✓ Develop a routine that includes clear steps and cues like music or visual signals.
- ✓ Teach and model the routine.



Transition Routines: Fact Sheet

Planning a predictable schedule and teaching expectations for transitions will increase instructional time.



Components of Transition Routines

- Simple
- Consistent
- Predictable
- Positively stated
- Efficient

How-to establish Effective Transitions

1. Identify transition times:

- Arrival & Dismissal
- Lunch
- Change in classes
- Change in activities

3. Teach the routine:

- Teach each step
- Model the routine
- Provide opportunities for students to practice

2. Develop a routine for the transition:

- List the steps needed to meet the outcome.
- Determine if visual or verbal cues need to be included.

4. Maintain the routine:

- Provide prompts and reminders as needed.
- Reinforce transition routines with behavior specific feedback.

Implementation Tips

- Use cues or prompts such as: music, visuals, timers, and gestures.
- Be Consistent: Follow through on transition expectations to make them routine.

Examples of Transition Routines

Transition into the classroom

"When we come into class at the start of the day, we walk to our assigned seats using noise level zero and have a seat. Take out your materials and begin the work on the board. If you finish early, begin your math drills using voice level zero".

Pre-lunch

"When I call your name, use noise level zero, walk to the sink to wash your hands. Then form a line near the door."

Transition from classroom to lunchroom

"We will walk down the hallway using noise level one. Stay with the group and be sure to keep your hands and feet to yourself. "



It's helpful to show and explain how to smoothly change from one activity to another. This means having set routines for things like arriving in the morning, lunchtime, moving from group work to independent work, and walking in the hallways. Consistent instruction, visual cues, and reinforcement helps students to easily follow transition routines. Establishing consistent routines minimizes disruptions and fosters a productive classroom environment.



You'll Learn To:

- ✓ Establish clear expectations.
- ✓ Develop specific routines for regular transitions.
- ✓ Model and demonstrate desired behaviors.

Examples and Considerations

Transitions are when a student moves from one activity to another or from one location to another. By creating and practicing transition routines, you **increase predictability, responsible student behaviors, and improve teacher-student interactions** by reducing the number of corrections required during and after transitions. Be sure to provide visual reminders for transitions.

You will want to consider the items below when developing transition routines.

Talking

Are students allowed to talk to each other during the transitions, or should they use a specific noise/voice level?

Movement

Are students allowed to move about the classroom, or should they be seated?

Help

How can students get your attention if they need help? Do they shout your name, raise a hand or hold up a card?

Demonstrate

What should it look and sound like if students are appropriately transitioning? For example, are they walking quietly in the hallway in a single file line?

End Result

What is the expected outcome of an effective transition routine? For example, *"When I see everyone in a single file line using voice level zero I will know we are ready to walk to the lunch room."*

EXAMPLES OF TRANSITION ROUTINES

Group work to Independent Work:

- When you hear the chime, wrap up your group conversations
- Put materials where they belong
- Straighten up the area
- Go back to your own seat and wait quietly for instructions

Arrival:

- Enter the classroom with walking feet and conversation voices
- Turn in your homework to the green bin
- Sit in your seat
- Begin the work on the board
- If you need help, raise your hand

Walking in the hall:

- Walk in a single file line
- Use voice level 1
- Keep your hands, feet and objects to yourself

Lunch:

- When I call your table, push in your chairs and line up
 - Packers, get your lunch and then line up
- Walk quietly to the lunch room
- Go to your assigned lunch table or through the lunch line
- Follow Cafeteria rules



Recognizing that students have various needs, teachers must utilize clear communication to adjust their expectations and provide additional support to help students transition smoothly. Consistent practice and periodic reviews of these routines should be integrated throughout the academic year.

You'll Learn To:

- ✓ Create predictability and enhance learning with routines.
- ✓ Provide additional support to struggling students.
- ✓ Be aware of expectations and how to communicate them effectively.

Frequently Asked Questions

As you engaged with the interactive module, reflect and connect, and practice activities, you may have thought about some “*what if...*” or “*what about when...*” situations. Provided below are answers to some common questions educators have asked about using transition routines.



Shouldn't students already know what to do?

Every student comes to your class with different educational experiences. Additionally, expectations, rules and routines often vary across staff. **We should not assume students know what we expect them to do in our classroom.**

Why are transition routines important for the classroom?

Routines help create predictability and safety in the classroom that increases meaningful instructional times and enhances learning. **When transition agreements become routines, the classroom runs more smoothly.**

What if a routine is not working in my classroom?

Consider what might be challenging for students, such as is the routine too long, too short, not engaging enough?

Consider **breaking down the transition into smaller steps and providing additional support** to students who are struggling to effectively complete the transition.

How can I make transitions go more smoothly?

Provide prompts and visual reminders of the transition routines. Incorporating a thorough review that involves role play as well as examples and non-examples can also help students learn the transition .

Remember, students will need reminders of the routines throughout the year.

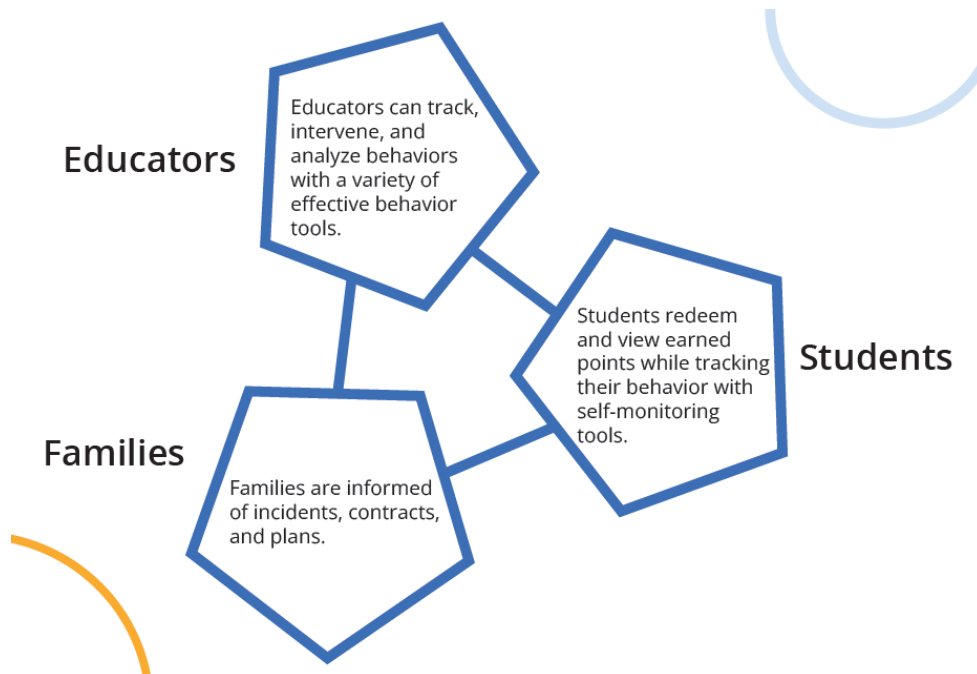
What if students are absorbed in the current activity and have difficulty beginning a transition?

First, take a second to appreciate how engaged they are!

Provide countdown prompts to let students know how much time they have left before they will transition so they can prepare. For example, you can announce when 10 minutes are left and to begin wrapping up the activity. Then announce again at 5 minutes and at 1 minute.

Sometimes it's difficult to plan the exact time it will take to complete an activity. **Practice some flexibility and make note of how long an activity takes for future planning.**

RethinkEd's **Behavior Suite** Helps You Maximize Student Learning And Minimize Classroom Disruption



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The Well-Designed Classroom eBook



Behavior Suite

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