

The people behind ESCALATE

Robin McWilliam, Ph.D., and Amy Casey, Ph.D., of the Center for Child and Family Research at Siskin Children's Institute designed ESCALATE. They have more than 40 years of combined experience working with young children with special needs and their families. Their philosophy is children with different characteristics are more alike than different, so little attention to diagnosis is needed. They have designed and studied the Engagement Classroom Model, a teaching approach that is used in all Siskin classrooms, and they have designed specific enhancements for the ESCALATE classrooms.

Kelly DeJong, MRC, of the Center for Child and Family Research at Siskin Children's Institute is the Southeast Tennessee District Autism Consultant for the ESCALATE project. She has more than seven years of experience consulting with families and professionals on best teaching practices in early intervention for children with autism spectrum disorders and related disabilities. Her work crosses environments including home, school and community settings. Her focus has been on providing a service that addresses the needs of the whole family. She provides classroom support specifically to the ESCALATE classrooms, meets regularly with families whose children are in the program, and is a resource for early interventionists throughout the Southeast District of the Tennessee Early Intervention System.

For more information about ESCALATE:

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ESCALATE

Engagement, Social, Communication
And Learning Approaches
for Toddler Education

What is ESCALATE?

ESCALATE is an acronym for **E**ngagement, **S**ocial, **C**ommunication **A**nd **L**earning **A**pproaches for **T**oddler **E**ducation. It was created for children who have difficulties in three areas that impede learning: (1) engagement, or appropriate play and interactions; (2) social skills; and (3) language. Children with autism typically have deficits in these three areas. ESCALATE was developed when the State Department of Education determined that a special resource was needed for toddlers with autism in the Tennessee Early Intervention System Southeast District.

Although the ESCALATE program is specifically designed to meet the needs of children with autism, it is beneficial for other children as well. Some children without an autism diagnosis have needs in the three areas that impede learning. The program also is beneficial for children who might have an autism spectrum disorder but who have not yet had the disorder ruled out or confirmed.

ESCALATE provides services in three environments: the school, the home and the community.



Engagement Classroom Model at Siskin Children's Institute

- **Inclusion:** Children with delays and disabilities are in classrooms with children who are developing typically.
- **Routines-Based Interview (RBI):** This family-centered interview is designed to produce functional goals to improve the family's quality of life.
- **Integrated therapy:** Additional services such as physical, speech and occupational therapy are provided within the routines of the classroom. This provides learning opportunities for teachers while allowing children to participate in ongoing routines.
- **Incidental teaching:** This technique ensures skills are taught during child-directed activities. Unlike more traditional approaches, children are taught during natural routines, which increases engagement and generalization.
- **Zone Defense Schedule:** This component focuses on classroom arrangement, materials and staff responsibilities to promote engagement and learning during all activities, including transitions from one activity to another.
- **Data collection:** Data are taken to evaluate instructional practices and monitor a child's progress toward meeting functional goals.

Family Component

- **Support-based home visits:** The ESCALATE consultant conducts home visits with each family to provide additional support and help achieve functional goals chosen by the family during the Routines-Based Interview (RBI).

Community Support

- **TEIS Southeast Tennessee District Autism Consultant:** The ESCALATE consultant provides support and training to TEIS early interventionists in the Southeast District who are working with children with similar needs in the community.

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