Tools of Autonomy in a Pre-K for All Classroom

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. **Tools of Autonomy** support children in developing independence, self-regulation and self-confidence. Tools of Autonomy are interactive visuals through which children can begin to develop autonomy in the pre-K classroom. 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.](#)

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:
- Center Time Tool
- Attendance Chart
- Job Chart
- Daily Schedule/Flow of the Day
- Weekly Calendar
- Community Expectations Tool
- Feelings Tool

Center Time Tool

A system should be in place to help children choose and navigate a variety of learning centers in the classroom. Children choose the center in which they will work, the peers with whom they want to work, and the materials they wish to use. The Center Time Tool shows how many children are able to work at each center and pictures of children working in each center. Many teachers use one centralized chart, while other teachers choose to use smaller charts for each center or other tools that address the needs of the children in their classroom.

Suggested Learning Centers

Blocks/Construction	Computer/Technology	Art
Dramatic Play	Toys and Games	Cooking and Mixing
Music and Movement	Library	Science/Discovery
Sand and Water	Writing	Relaxation and Comfort
Sensory	Math Manipulatives	Listening

Best Practices

Before Center Time
- Let children know what new materials or small group activities are happening in each center.
- Help children plan where they would like to begin working. Help them think about a back-up plan.
- Have a system in place for inviting children to participate in small group activities as appropriate.

During Center Time
- Each child chooses a center and places his/her name-card near the picture of the center.
- To switch to another center, children move their name to a center with availability.
- When a center is full, a child selects another center (teachers can create "waiting lists").

After Center Time
- Save time for children to clean up centers. Ensure that clean up expectations are clear.
- Invite children to reflect after centers to discuss what materials they worked with, with whom they played and how the play went. Teachers can reflect with children in small groups, as a turn and talk or during meal time.

Examples of Center Time Tools

PKFCC Alignment

PK.AL.4: Exhibits curiosity, interest, and willingness in learning new things and having new experiences.

PK.CKW.3 (Mathematics): Understand the relationship between numbers and quantities to 10, connect counting to cardinality.

PK.CKW.4 (Mathematics): Count to answer "how many?" questions about as many as 10 things arrange in a line, a rectangular array, or a circle, or as many as 5 things in a scattered configuration; given a number from 1 -10, count out that many objects.

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 provide 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 each of 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

- o Each day as children arrive, they place their name cards in the "present" area of the chart.
- o 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."*
- o Children use these charts to discuss how many and which children are present and/or absent each day.

Examples of Attendance Charts

PKFCC Alignment

PK.PDH.5: Demonstrates eye-hand coordination/dexterity needed to manipulate objects.

PK.CLL.3 (Phonics and Word Recognition): Demonstrate emergent phonics and word analysis skills.

PK.CKW.1 (Mathematics, Counting and Cardinality): Count to 20.

PK.CKW.3 (Mathematics, Counting and Cardinality): Understands the relationship between numbers and quantities to 10; connect counting to cardinality.

PK.CKW.1 (Social Studies): Develops a basic awareness of self as individual, self within the context of family, and self within the context of community.

Job Chart

Having children participate in classroom jobs teaches them responsibility, gives them pride in a job well done, and helps children contribute to caring for the classroom community. Jobs also teach children vocabulary and help them understand and carry out multi-step directions. For example, a teacher can promote language by asking the zookeeper how the animals are doing or ask the attendance taker to share the names of absent children. Teachers can set up the Job Chart so that names/pictures of children rotate or that the jobs rotate. Teachers may choose to have one job per child or have some jobs that more than one child are responsible for to add an element of collaboration.

Suggested Jobs

Attendance Taker	Botanist/Gardener	Caboose	Clean up Helper	Door Holder
Electrician	Zookeeper/ Veterinarian	Librarian	Line Leader	Meal Servers
Messenger	Peacemaker	Outdoor Helper	Substitute	Table Leader
Time Keeper	Teacher Helper	Trash Sanitation Monitor	Meteorologist	On vacation*

* Although children are typically excited about the opportunity to have a job sometimes children may decline to participate. Have a private conversation with these children to understand why they do not want to participate. Offer them the opportunity to be "on vacation" and not have a job for that rotation.

Best Practices
- In or near the beginning of the school year, discuss the routines of the classroom and how children can help with jobs/responsibilities.
- Children generate ideas for jobs and teachers add to a list. As jobs are created, explain and model the responsibilities of each job (children will likely need reminders throughout the year).
- Rotate jobs in a predictable/fair manner so children can see what job they have and what job they will have next. A weekly rotation gives children a chance to master or practice their job and try various roles throughout the year.
- Revisit periodically with the children to see if jobs need to be added or removed.

Examples of Job Charts
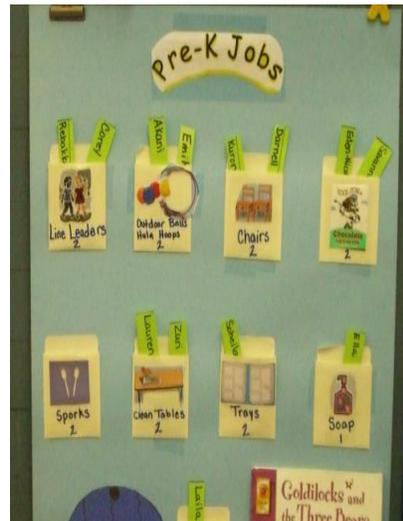
PKFCC Alignment

PK.SED.1: Recognizes himself/herself as a unique individual having his/her own abilities, characteristics, feelings and interests.

PK.CLL.5 (Approaches to Communication): Demonstrates a growing receptive vocabulary.

PK.CKW.5 (Social Studies): Demonstrates an understanding of rules, rights and responsibilities.

PK.CKW.8 (Social Studies): Demonstrates interest and awareness about a wide variety of careers and work environments.

Daily Schedule/Flow of the Day

Classrooms with consistent 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 secure 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
- o In the beginning of the year, create the Daily Schedule so that children know what to expect throughout the day.
- o 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).
- o Ensure flexibility (for example, on a rainy day you may have gross motor inside instead of outside).
- o Organize from left to right (horizontal) when possible to promote pre-reading skills.
- o Include interactive aspects, for example an arrow that children can move on the schedule as the day progresses (you may choose to include this as a job in the job chart).
- o Think about children's attention spans as you break down the day into steps.
- o Take into consideration children's home languages as appropriate.
- o The Daily Schedule can be referred to and discussed during arrival, large group activities, when an event changes, and throughout the day as necessary.
- o Post the chart at eye level so that children can independently refer to it.

Examples of Daily Schedule/Flow of the Day
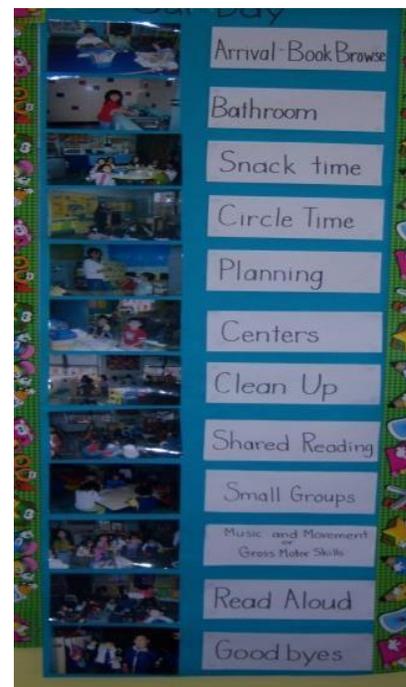
PKFCC Alignment:
PK.SED.2: Regulates his/her responses to needs, feelings and events.
PK.SED.7: Adapts to change.
PK.CLL.4 (Speaking and Listening Standards): Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.
PK.CKW.6 (Mathematics, Counting and Cardinality): Identify "first" & "last" related to order or position.
PK.CKW.1 (Science) Asks questions and makes predictions based on observations & manipulation of things & events in the environment.

Weekly Calendar

The Weekly Calendar helps children learn similar self-regulation and sequencing skills as the daily schedule over the course of a week. Pre-K children's sense of time, including concepts like *today*, *tomorrow* and *yesterday*, are still developing and the Weekly Calendar provides them the opportunity to understand and practice these concepts in a visual way. In addition, they are able to see what special activities may occur throughout the week.

Best Practices

- o In the beginning of the year, create the Weekly Calendar so that children know what to expect throughout the week.
- o Include pictures and words, highlighting major events that will happen during the week.
- o Include days that children are not at school to help them transition between days at school and days at home.
- o Ensure flexibility (for example, a planned birthday party may change from Thursday to Friday mid-week).
- o Organize from left to right (horizontal) when possible to promote pre-reading skills.
- o Include interactive aspects, for example an arrow that children can move on the calendar as the week progresses.

Example of Weekly Calendar

PKFCC Alignment

PK.SED.2: Regulates his/her responses to needs, feelings and events.
PK.SED.7: Adapts to change.
PK.CLL.1 (Reading Standards: Foundational Skills, Print Concepts): Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print.
PK.CKW.4 (Social Studies, History): Develops an understanding of how people and things change over time and how to relate past events to their present and future activities.

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. Use the Community Expectations Tool to highlight expected behaviors, including visuals. It is important that all adults also model the expectations and remind children of the expectations in a positive way.

Best Practices
- o At the beginning of the year, encourage children to participate in creating a set of expectations for behavior in the classroom.
- o It is important to discuss why each of the expectations is important as children are learning about being part of the classroom community.
- o Expectations should be strengths-based: use positive language to clearly define the desired behavior.
- o 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."

Examples of Community Expectations Tools
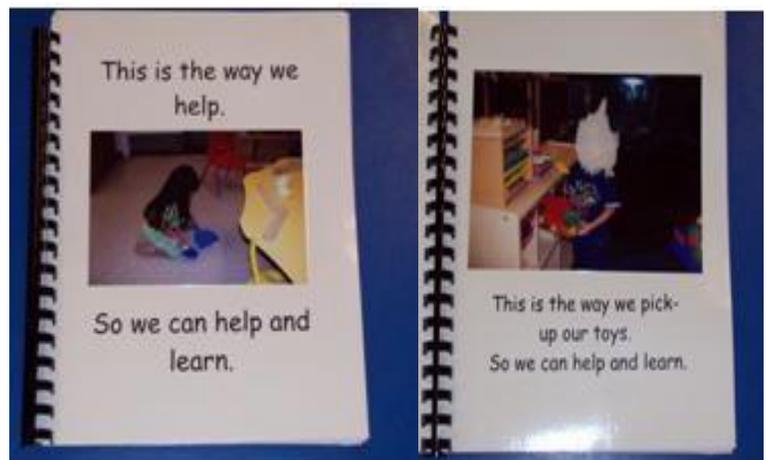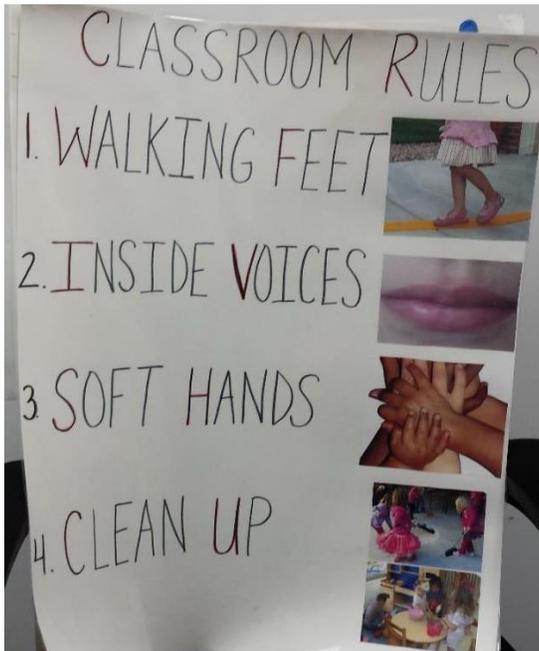
PKFCC Alignment

PK.AL.5: Demonstrates persistence.
PK.PDH.9: Demonstrate awareness and understanding of safety rules.
PK.SED.6: Understands and follows routines and rules.
PK.CKW.5 (Social Studies): Demonstrates an understanding of roles, rights, and responsibilities.
PK.CKW.6 (Social Studies): Begins to learn the basic civic and democratic principles.

Feelings Tool

Children in pre-K are learning how to identify, label and explain their feelings as well as respond to the feelings and actions of others. With adult guidance and support, Feelings Tools support children in understanding and managing feelings in themselves and others. Feelings Tools provide pictures and label of a wide variety of feelings that children experience each day. They allow children to practice identifying and expressing their feelings.

Best Practices
- o Children use this tool to help identify the feelings they are experiencing as part of the arrival routine and throughout the day.
- o Teachers use the Feelings Tool to discuss how children can react to the different emotions they are experiencing. For example, "Helen, I notice that you made a face when you noticed that there wasn't room in the block area for you to play. Let's look at the feelings chart- how did that make you feel?"
- o Feelings Tools can be placed in the cozy area for children to refer to as they seek emotional comfort.
- o Pictures of what children can do if they are experiencing a challenging feeling can also be placed in the cozy area.
- o Keep in mind that as children are still learning about their feelings, they may not always accurately label their and others' feelings.

Example of Feelings Tool

PKFCC Alignment:

PK.SED.1: Recognizes himself/herself as a unique individual having his/her own abilities, characteristics, feelings & interests.
PK.SED.2: Regulates his/her responses to needs, feelings and events.
PK.SED.3: Demonstrates & continues to develop positive relationships with significant adults (primary caregivers, teachers & other familiar adults).
PK.SED.4: Develops positive relationships with their peers.
PK.CLL.6 (Approaches to Communication): Demonstrates a growing expressive vocabulary.
PK.CLL.6 (Speaking and Listening Standards): Demonstrate an emergent ability to express thoughts, feelings & ideas.