

HOW TEACHERS CAN TEACH WITHOUT TAKING OVER:

SCAFFOLDING LEARNING IN PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS

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Imagine...

You are at work.

Your boss...

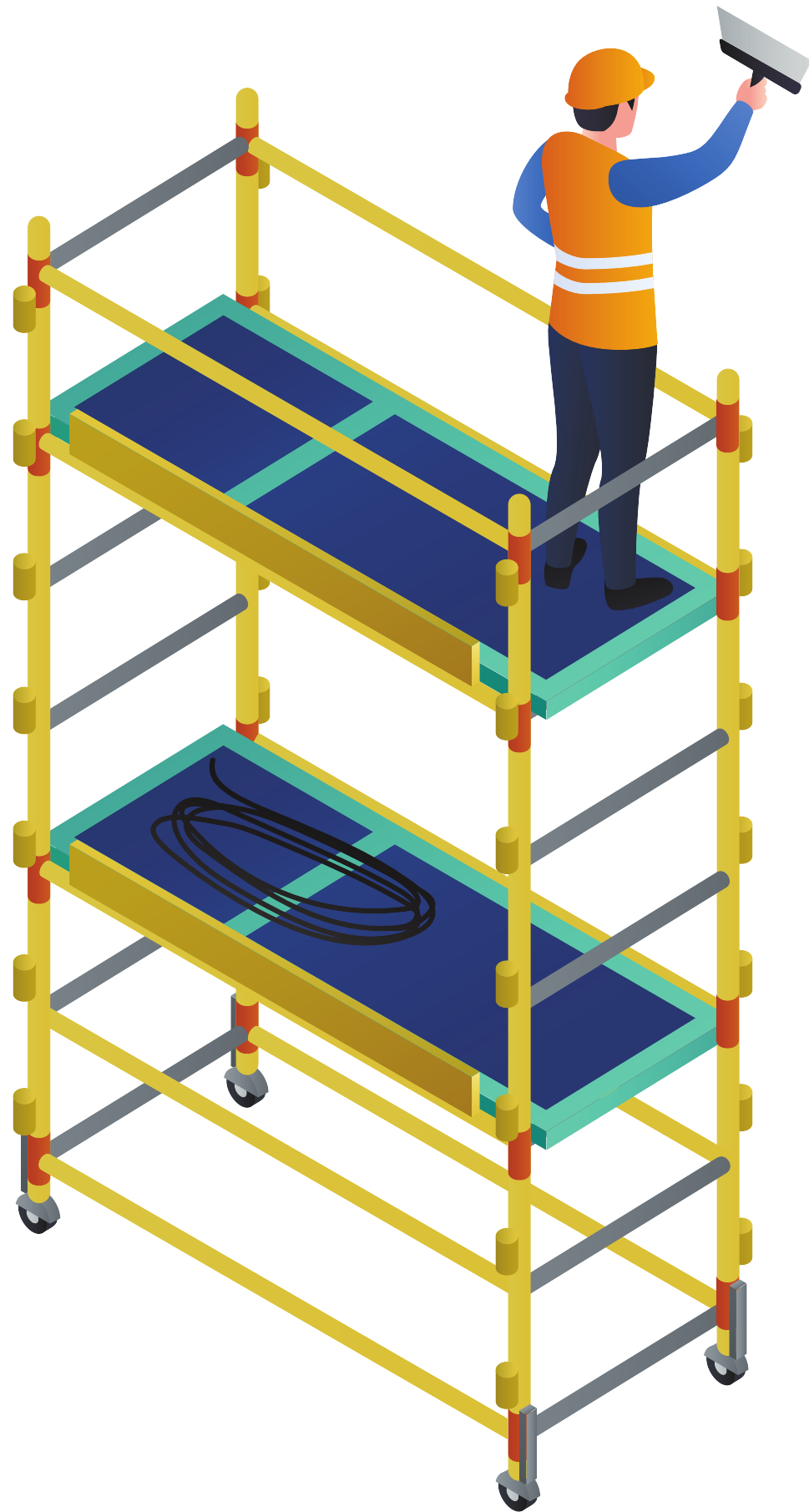
... hovers over your every move.

... keeps fixing what you did or telling you you're doing it wrong.

... tells you to hurry up on each task.

... takes over and does your job for you.



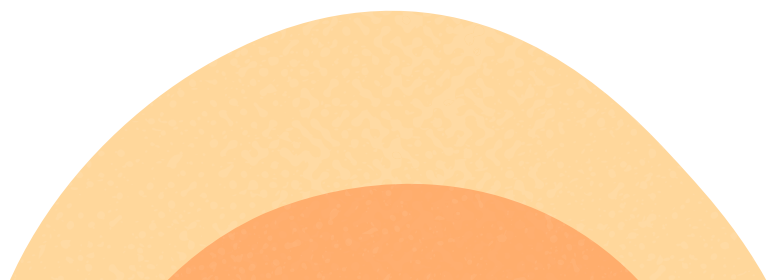
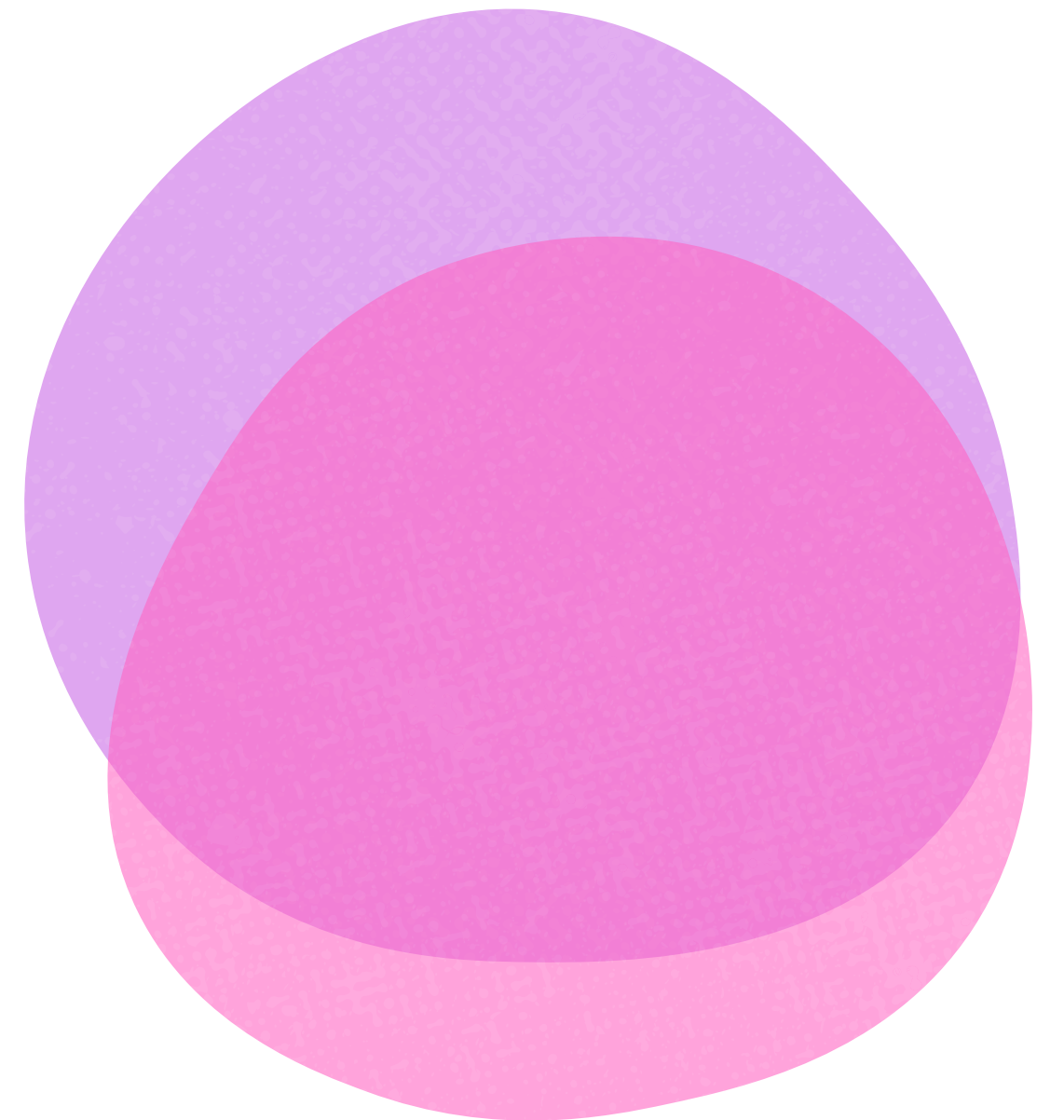


What is Scaffolding?

- Teaching strategy that offers “just enough” support
- Rooted in collaboration and viewing students as active participants
- Adults (or more experienced peers) bridge the gap between where the child is now and where they’re going next

What Scaffolding **Isn't**

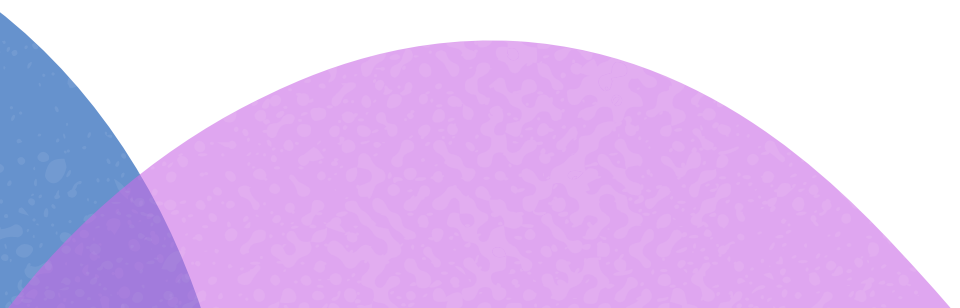
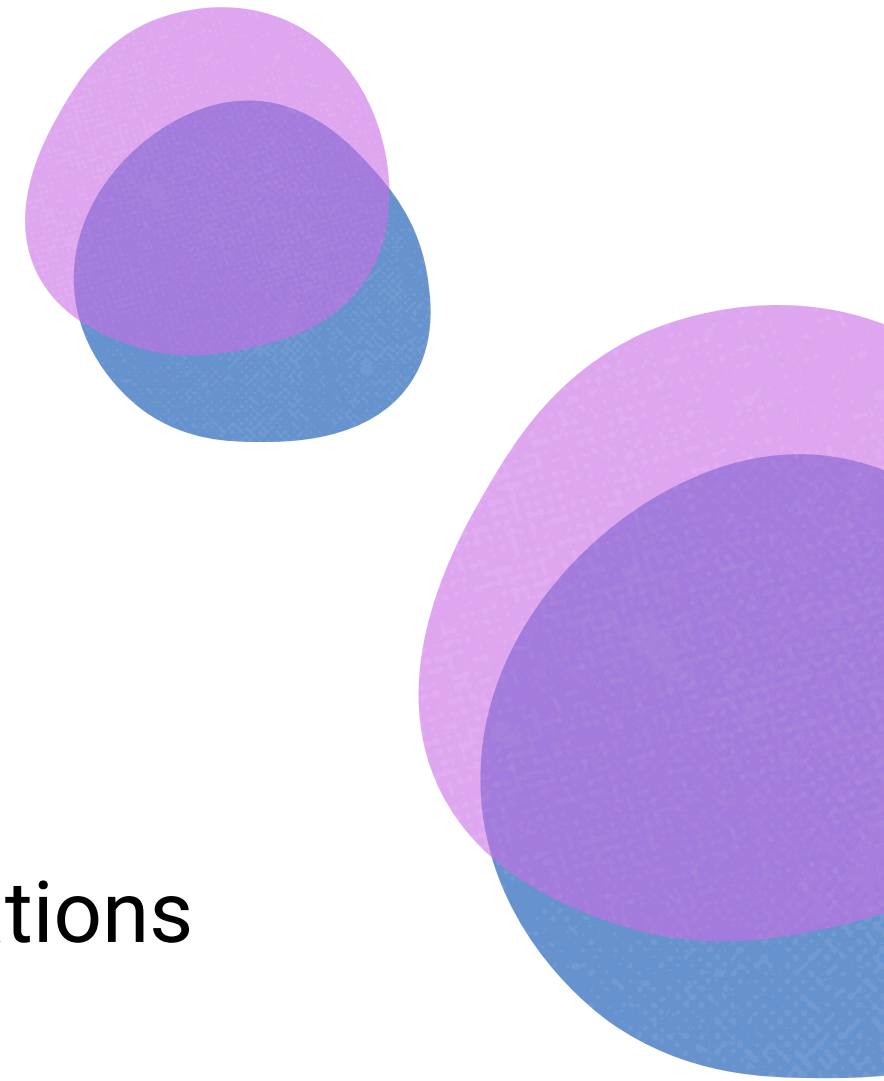
- Doing the task for the child
- Giving too many cues and corrections
- Offering praise that interrupts focus
- Rushing a child through a challenge



What **G**ets in the **W**ay of Scaffolding?

- Hard to watch children struggle
- Worry about losing control
- Rigid schedules / perceived lack of time and rushing
- Valuing 'perfection' over incremental progress
- Power struggles
- Lack of understanding about child development / Unrealistic expectations

Reflective Question: Which one is really hard for you?



The slide features several large, semi-transparent colored circles in the corners: a blue circle in the top-left, a yellow circle in the top-right, a green circle in the middle-left, a purple circle in the middle-right, and a red circle in the bottom-left.

Ask yourself...

Who is doing
most of the work?

Origins of **Scaffolding**

- **Lev Vygotsky**

- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) - The space in which a child can do with help what they cannot yet do alone, AKA the “learning edge”
- Learning is social and guided by someone more knowledgeable and experienced



Zone of Proximal Development

Child cannot do,
even with help

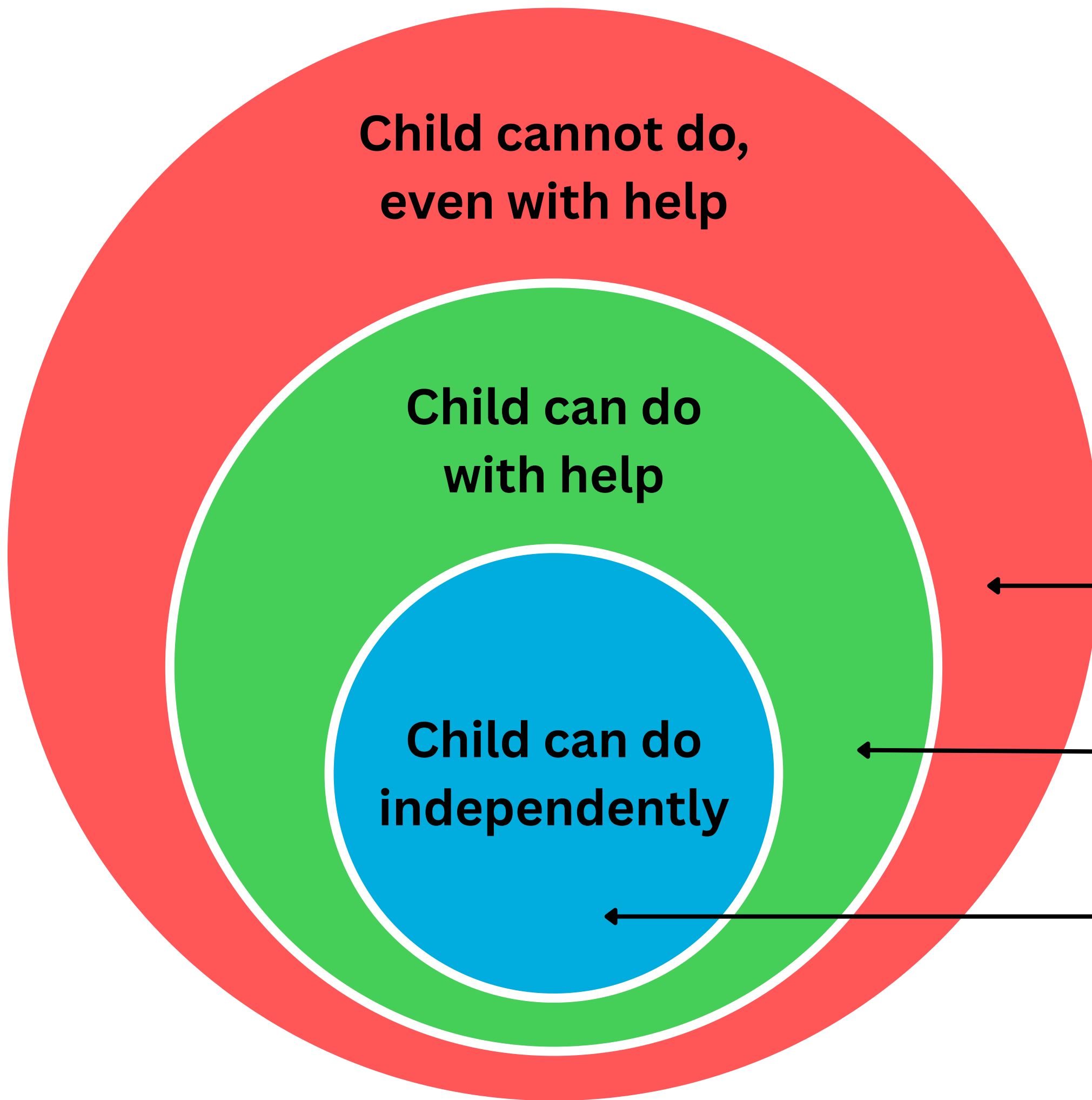
Child can do
with help

Child can do
independently

← Anxiety Zone

← Learning Zone: the “sweet spot”

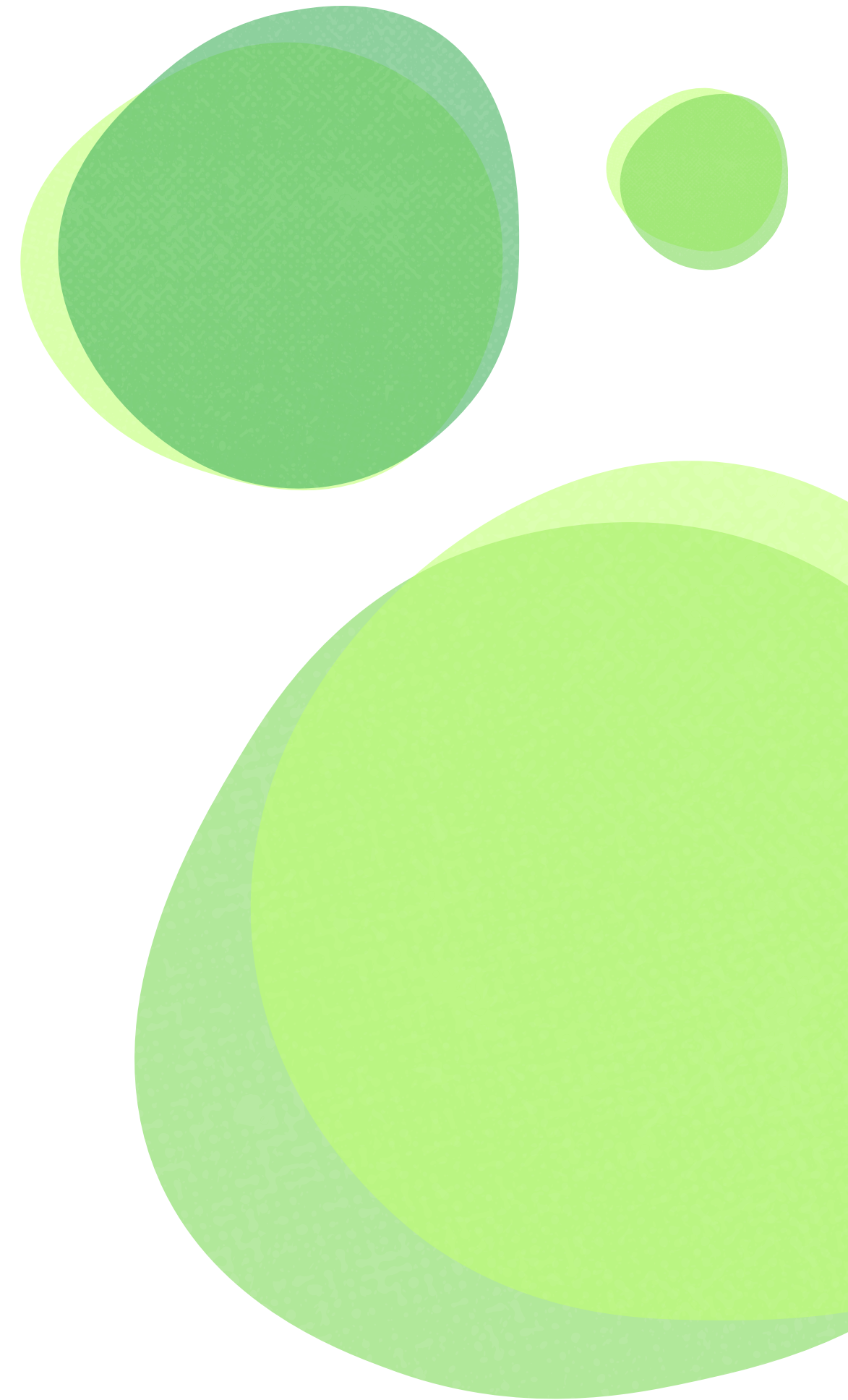
← Comfort Zone



Origins of **Scaffolding**

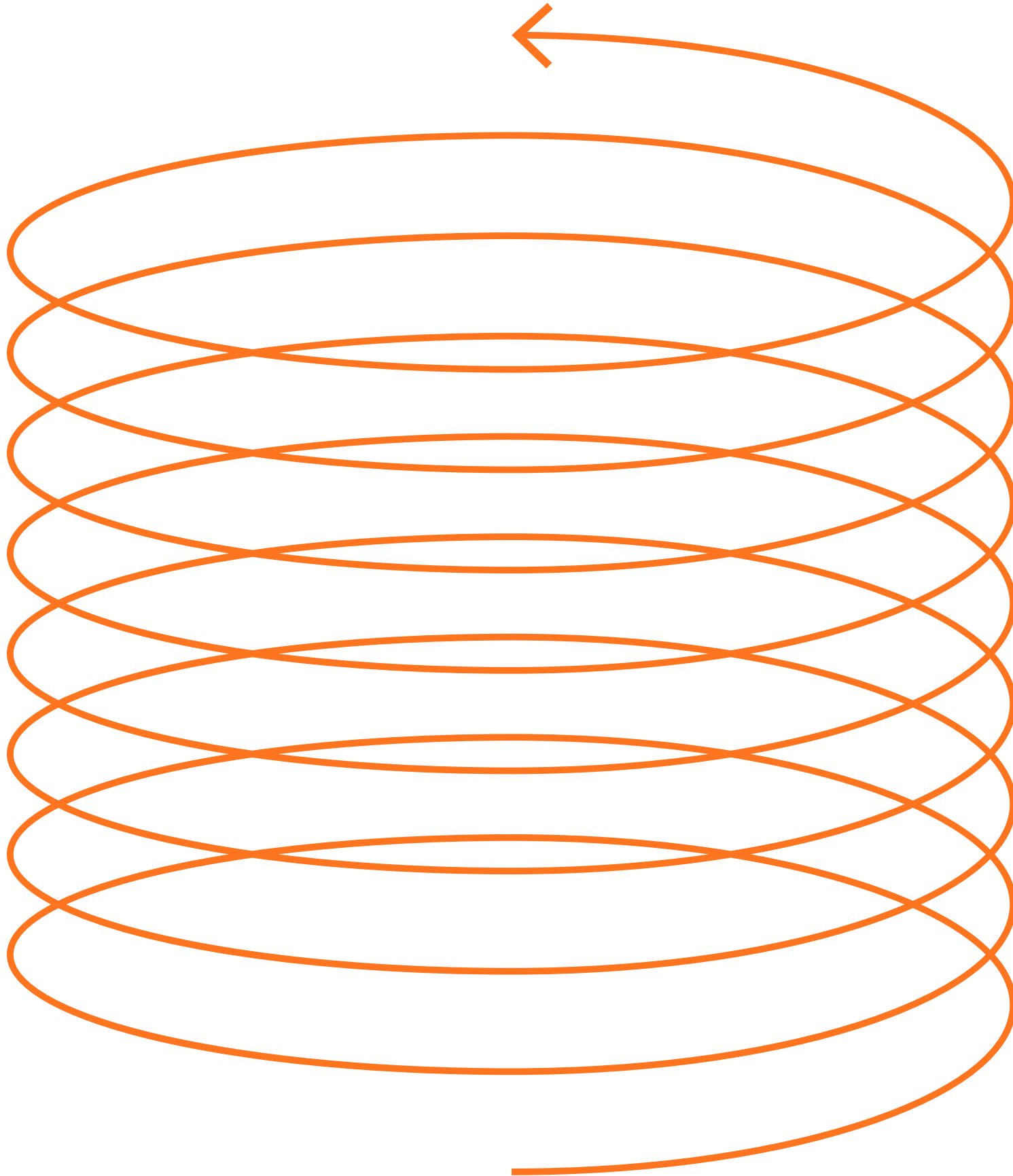
- **Jerome Bruner**

- Coined the term “scaffolding” - support that’s temporary, responsive, and designed to fade
- Spiral Curriculum - Revisiting learning over time, each time at a deeper level

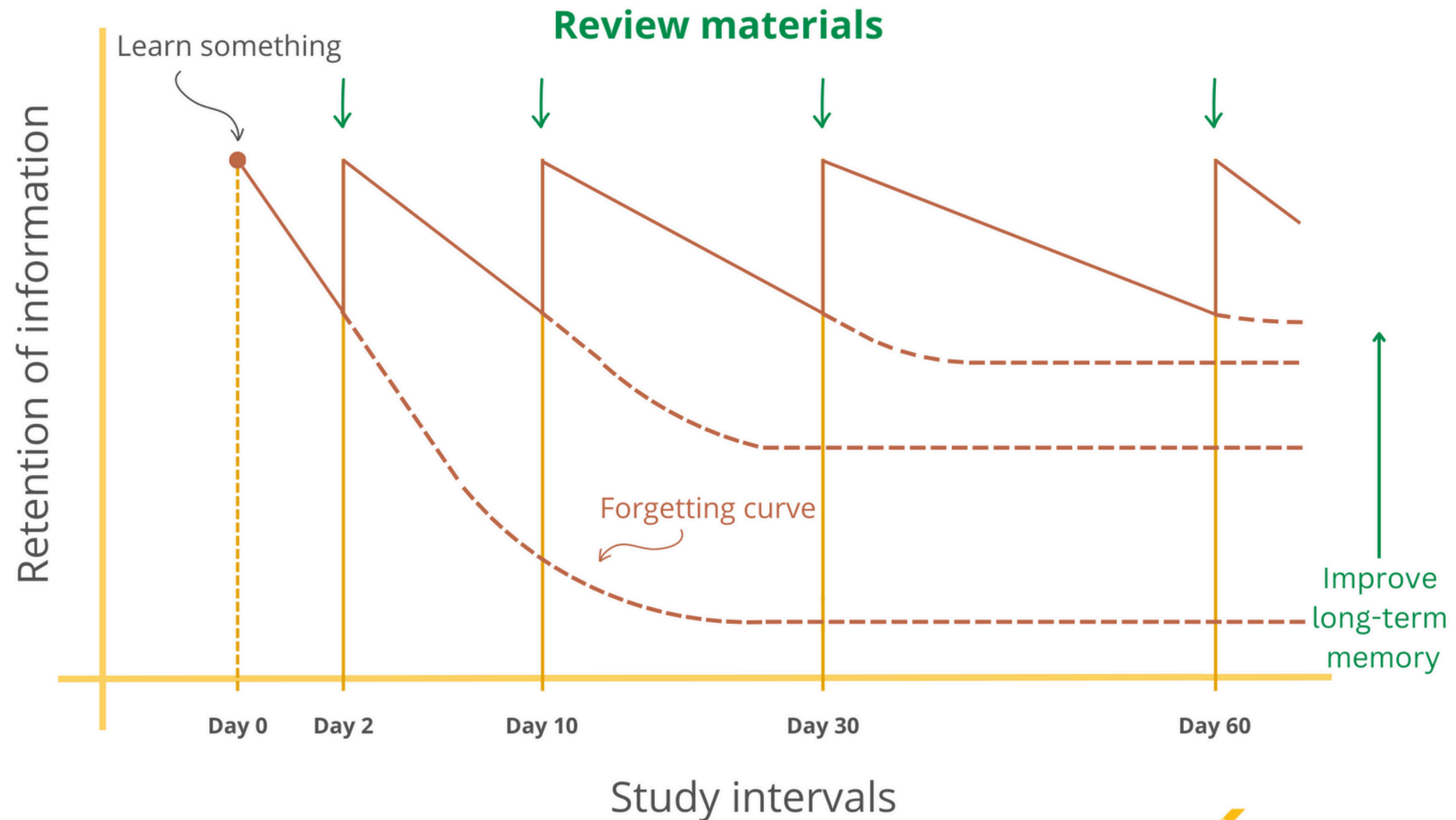


Spiral Curriculum

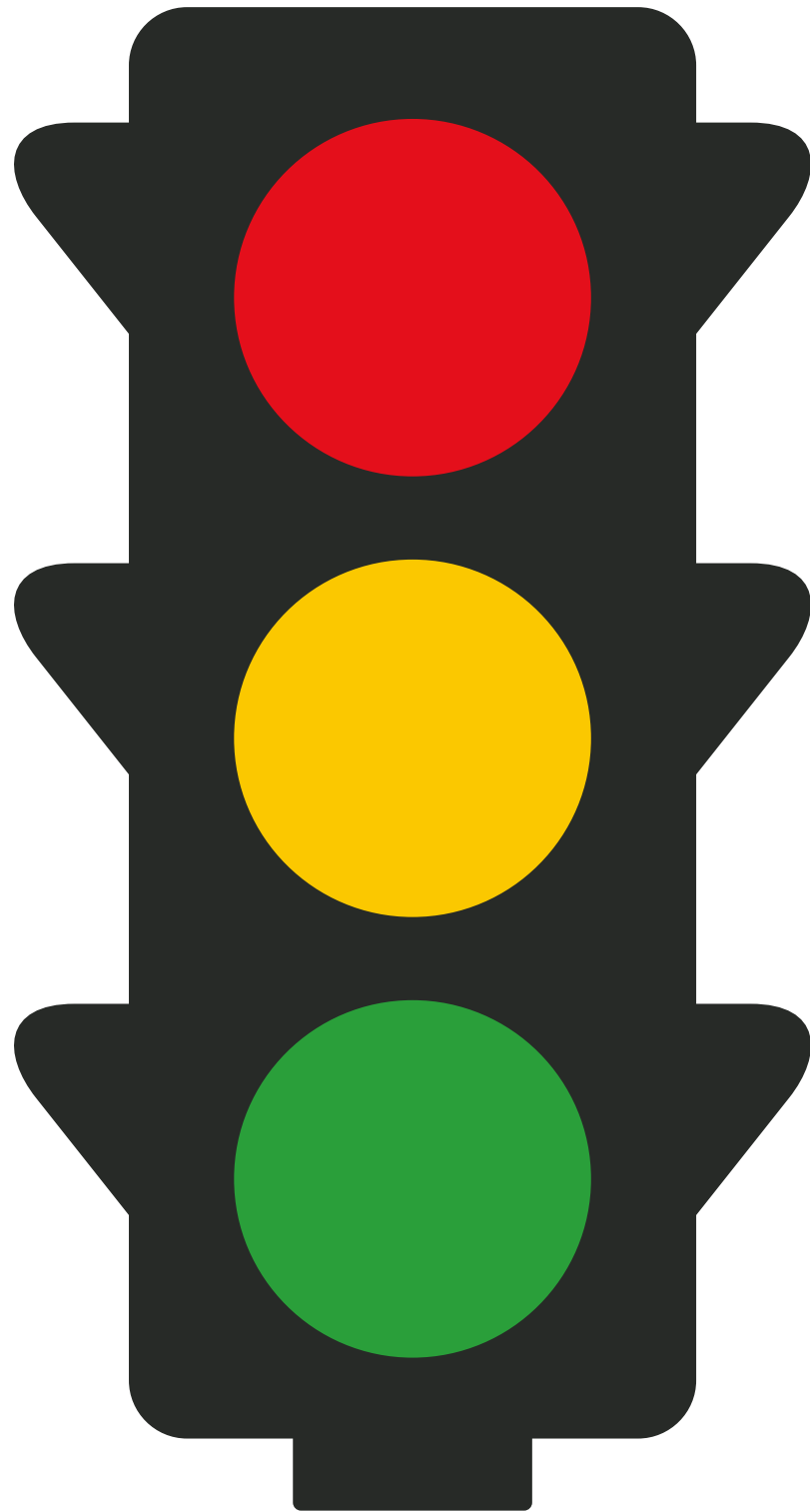
- Start with what child knows (prior knowledge)
- Introduce new learning
- Revisit learning over time
- Add complexity at each return
- Learning deepens as children gain experience and knowledge



Hermann Ebbinghaus' Forgetting Curve



John Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory

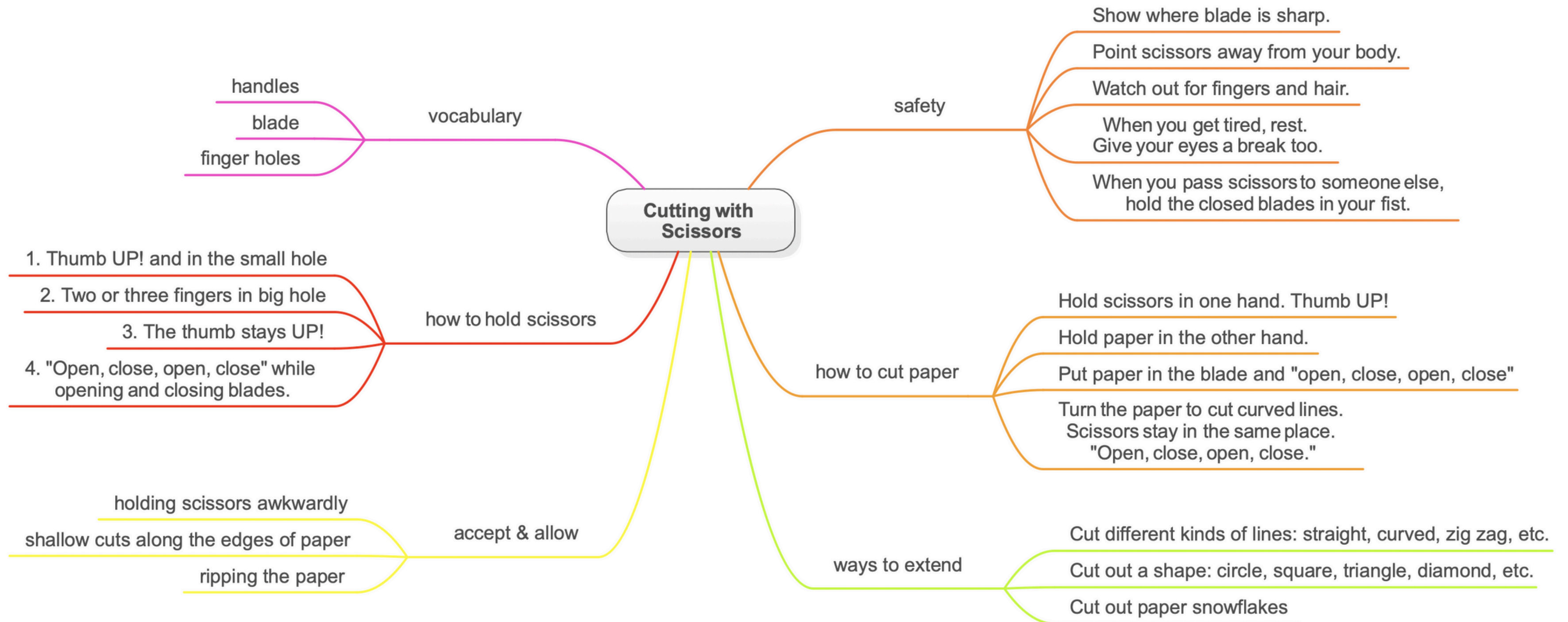


← Too Much At Once

← Getting Crowded

← Just Enough Info

Webbing for Scaffolding



The slide features four decorative circles of varying sizes in shades of purple and pink. One large circle is in the top-left corner, another large one is in the bottom-center, and two smaller circles are positioned in the top-center and bottom-left areas.

Provide **“Just Right”** Challenges

- A “just right” challenge stretches a child’s ability in an achievable way — enough to feel doable, but not so much that they become overwhelmed



How to Provide “Just Right” Challenges

- **Start by observing:** Notice what the child already knows and can already do independently, and where they’re getting **stuck** —————> the “**learning edge**”
- **Add a small nudge:** Introduce one step, tool, vocabulary or question that helps them move forward—but still lets them lead
- **Stay in the zone:** Keep the challenge just beyond current ability (Vygotsky’s ZPD), where effort and success can meet



How to Provide “Just Right” Challenges


- **Adjust in real time:** Step in before frustration escalates to overwhelm; step back if they’re gaining confidence and momentum
- **Celebrate progress, not perfection:** Acknowledge the effort and strategies used — not just the outcome — to build self-belief and effort

Reflective Practice: Let’s think of a scenario to scaffold and find a “just right” challenge!



You've Provided A "Just Right" Challenge... Now What?




- **Assume they can**
 - Wait for a verbal/non-verbal cue before offering help
 - "I need help." or "I can't do this!"
 - A little frustration is okay, but avoid overwhelm
 - Offer verbal/non-verbal encouragement
 - "You got this!" or "I believe in you."
 - Offer a smile, a nod, or just your encouraging presence
- 



You've Provided A "Just Right" Challenge... Now What?



- **Let them try**
 - Continue observing and give space for practice
 - Allow for trial-and-error
 - Praise effort and persistence (can be non-verbal)
 - Name progress
 - Stay emotionally attuned
 - Reflect on the learning
- 

How to Provide “Just Enough” Help

- **Offer a gentle prompt:**
 - “What’s your plan?”
 - “I wonder what would happen if...”
 - “Do you want a hint or a tool?”
 - “What do you notice about how someone else is doing this? Let’s watch.”
- **Demonstrate, then let them try:**
 - Model how to do it while narrating the step
 - Break down multi-step tasks into single baby steps

How to Provide “Just Enough” Help

- **Start with the lightest support:**

- Help get one sock over their toes
- Hold and turn the paper as they practice cutting
- Ask a guiding question instead of giving an answer (“I wonder how...”)

- **Fade out intentionally:**

- As soon as the child shows readiness or confidence, step back. The goal is to make your help temporary... and their ownership lasting

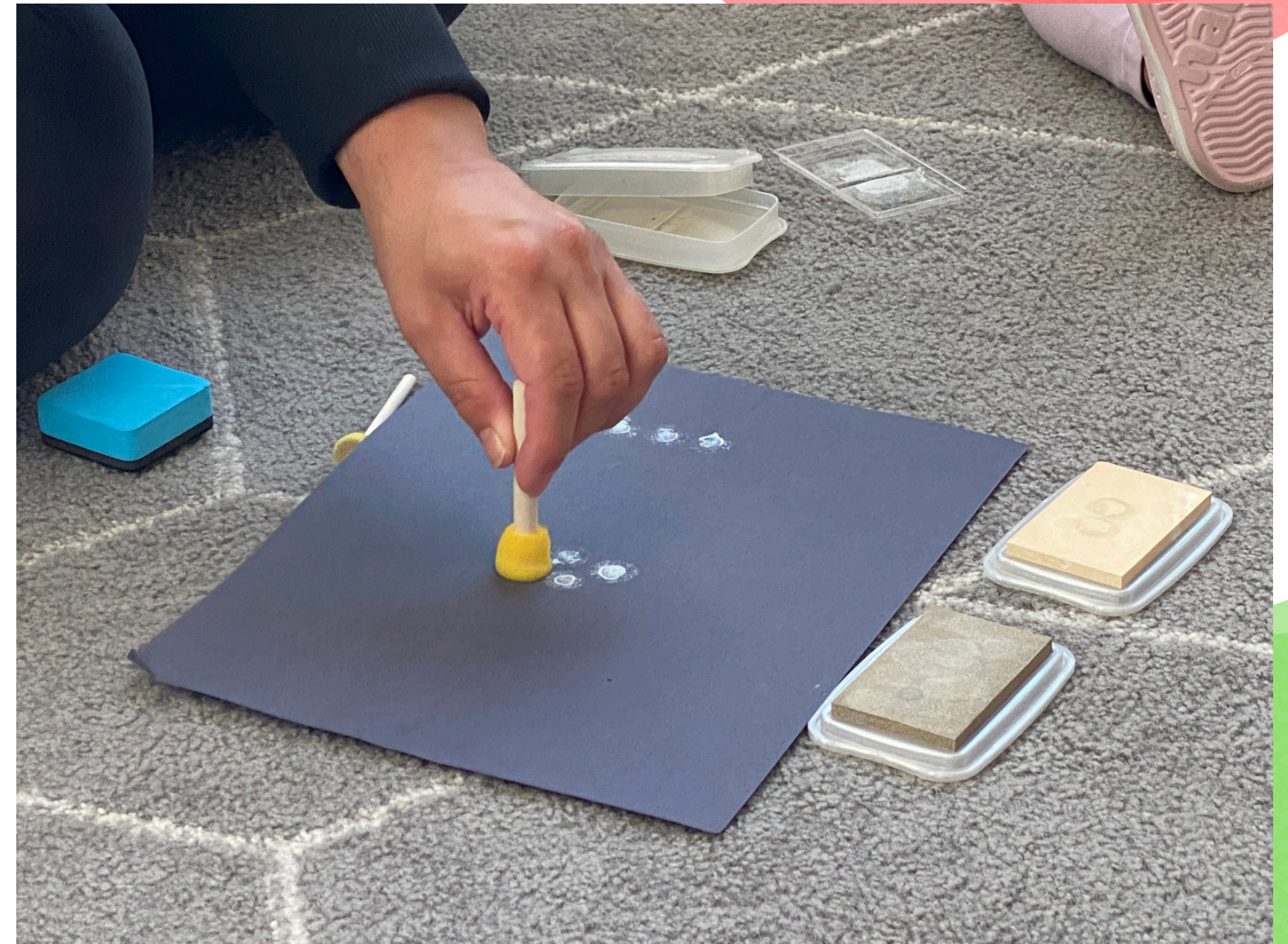
Tools for Scaffolding



How Teachers Can Scaffold



Step-by-Step Directions

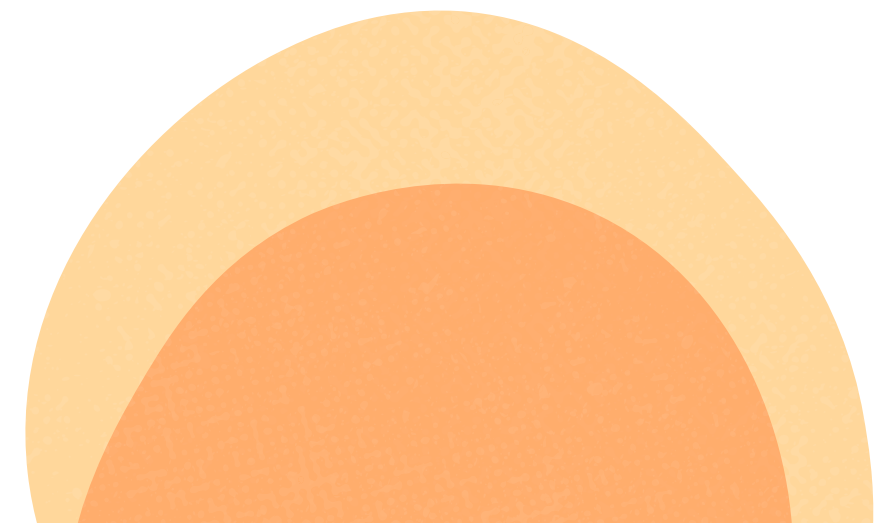


Set Children Up for **Success**

- **Expectations & non-negotiables**

- Front load necessary info:

- “We will look at the caterpillar but we will not pick her up.”
 - “We will learn how to take care of this tool. I’ll show you how.”
 - “It is hard, and you won’t get good at it overnight. I know you will practice and one day it will be easier.”



The Role of **Time** and **Patience**

- **Delaying gratification isn't only for children:**
 - Change is slow — be patient with how progress unfolds
 - Rushing and unrealistic expectations create stress, for them and for us
 - Document the **process of learning** to see change over time
 - In learning, **go deeper**, not wider
 - Stay empathetic! - Try learning how to do something with your non-dominant hand
- **Repetition is key:**
 - Learning is never one-and-done
 - One child may need 5 repetitions, and another child may need 20

Other Ways to Scaffold

- **Peer-to-peer learning — a “win-win” strategy:**
 - More experienced children become the mentor
 - Less experienced children become the apprentice
 - BOTH gain confidence and benefit from collaboration, teaching and learning
- **Environments:**
 - “The third teacher”: overall feel, traffic patterns, activity levels, “readability”
 - Nature can be a scaffold — take your learning outdoors!
- **Keep curriculum open-ended:**
 - Allow children to participate at their level of development and understanding

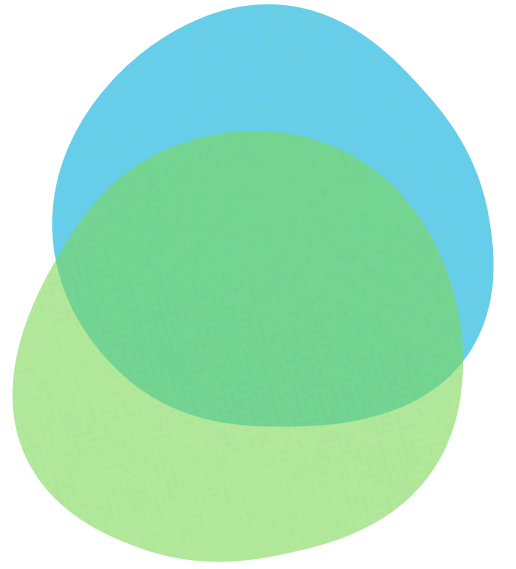
Peer-to-Peer Learning

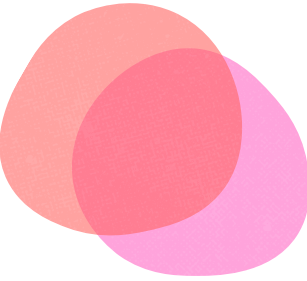


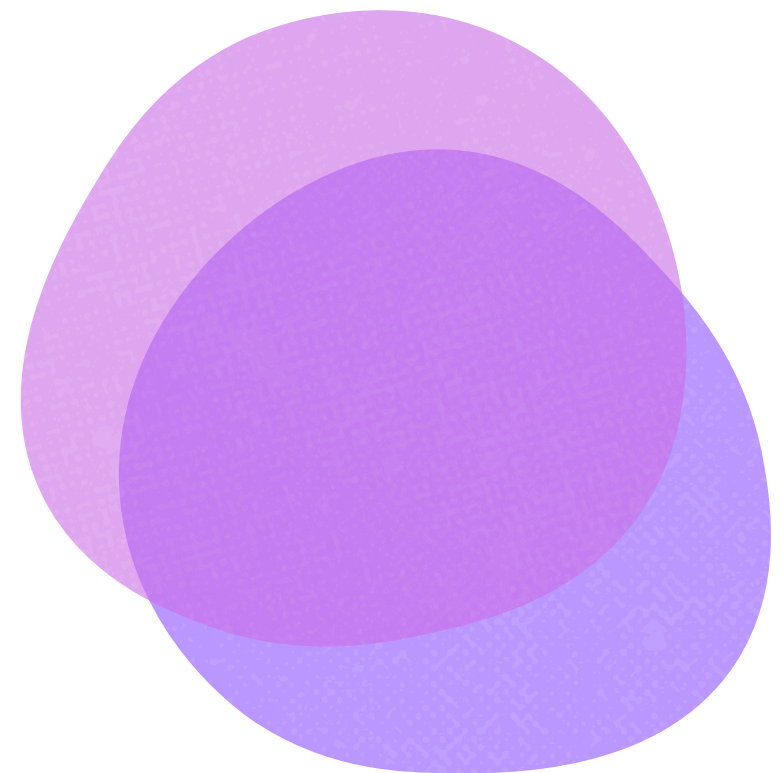
Scaffolding Isn't About Doing Less — It's About Doing **"Just Enough"**

- **Trust the child's capability:** Growth happens at the edge of ability, not at the center of comfort. Find the "sweet spot" of learning, the "learning edge"
- **Start small:** Offer support based on what the child shows, not what we assume.
- **Pull back with intention:** The goal is to be thoughtful about how we help so children take ownership of the learning process
- **Slow down:** Time is an excellent teacher — give children the space to struggle a bit, reflect, and rise

What is **one thing** you will try next week?

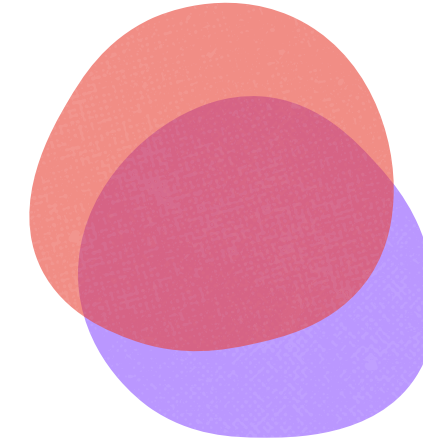


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1. Find a child's "learning edge" – Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
 2. Spiral Curriculum – spaced repetition
 3. Webbing for scaffolding
 4. Front load info on expectations and non-negotiables
 5. Peer-to-peer learning
 6. Other: Tell us in the chat



"Have no fear
of perfection,
you'll never
reach it."
-**Salvador Dali**





THANK YOU!



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