

Strengths- Based Transition Planning:

Honoring Differences, Reframing Deficits

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Ice Breaker



THINK OF A TIME WHERE YOUR CHILD WAS BEING VIEWED
FROM A DEFICIT-LENS AND HOW IT AFFECTED THEM?



Agenda

What to Expect:

**INTRO & MINDSET
SHIFT**

**UNDERSTANDING A
STRENGTH-BASED
FRAMEWORK**

**REFRAMING IN
PRACTICE**

ACTIVITY

BUILDING THE CULTURE

**QUESTIONS/
DISCUSSION**

Introduction & Mindset Shift

Moving from Fixed to Growth
Mindset

IT'S NOT WHAT
YOU LOOK AT THAT
MATTERS, IT'S
WHAT YOU SEE.

— Henry David Thoreau —

Deficit v. Strengths-Based Approach

BELIEF

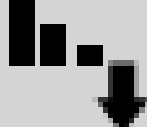


BEHAVIOR



Results

Deficit v. Strengths-Based Approach

 Strength-Based Thinking	vs.	 Deficit-Based Thinking
WHAT'S WORKING	VS.	WHAT'S WRONG
CELEBRATE SUCCESS	VS.	PUNISH NON-COMPLIANCE
EMPOWER	VS.	CONTROL
DISCOVER & ADAPT	VS.	PREDICT & CONTROL
EMPHASIZE POSSIBILITIES	VS.	OVERCOME WEAKNESSES
PROCESS-FOCUSED	VS.	BEHAVIOR-FOCUSED
DYNAMIC	VS.	STATIC
UNDERSTAND	VS.	DIAGNOSE

How Language Shapes Expectations & Outcomes

Calling the differences in communication, social skills, and capabilities

“deficits” creates a mindset that misses the truth

There isn't a lack of --- there's their own way.

“We connect in ways that make sense within their neurotype, just as other groups do” (Neff M.A., Seeing Autism as Difference, Not Deficit, 2025).



How Language Shapes Expectations & Outcomes

Appreciation Language	Collectivistic Cultures				Individualistic Cultures		
	Chinese	Thai	Portuguese	Turkish	French	Spanish	Danish
Words of Affirmation	55.3%	38.3%	62.1%	35.5%	36.7%	37.0%	36.0%
Quality Time	8.3%	14.9%	13.7%	23.6%	33.0%	35.0%	33.2%
Acts of Service	29.9%	44.7%	21.2%	38.2%	28.4%	22.6%	29.4%
Tangible Gifts	6.5%	2.1%	3.0%	2.7%	1.8%	5.4%	1.4%

Primary Appreciation Language Source: Paul White

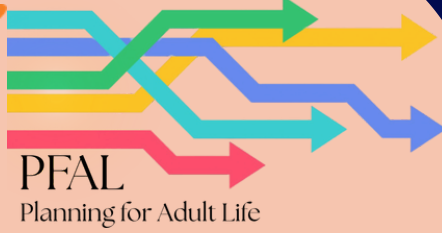


Surprising Ways Different Cultures Want to Be Appreciated

New research uncovers the cultural differences in how employees want to be appreciated. Discover the secrets to tailoring your recognition strategy for diverse populations.

 Psychology Today / Nov 25, 2024

Source



The Arc
of New Jersey

PFAL
Planning for Adult Life

UNDERSTANDING

Strength- Based Framework

Step 1

Core Principles of Universal
Design for Learning (UDL)

Step 2

Identify Strengths

Step 3

Linking Strengths to
Postsecondary Outcomes

What is Universal Design?

“Universal design broadly defines the user. It’s a consumer market driven issue. Its focus is not specifically on people with disabilities, but all people. It actually assumes the idea, that everybody has a disability and I feel strongly that that’s the case. We all become disabled as we age and lose ability, whether we want to admit it or not. It is negative in our society to say “I am disabled” or “I am old.” We tend to discount people who are less than what we popularly consider to be “normal.” To be “normal” is to be perfect, capable, competent, and independent.” –

Ronald Mace



Core Principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

1. **Representation:** Providing information in various formats (e.g., text, audio, visual) so learners can perceive and comprehend it in different ways.
2. **Action/Expression:** Allowing individuals to show what they know in multiple ways, such as through writing, speaking, or using multimedia.
3. **Engagement:** Offering choices and making learning relevant to motivate your kids and help them sustain their interest, for example, by gamifying skill-building.

Universal Design for Learning

UDL shifts the question from ‘What’s wrong with the my child?’ to ‘How can the environment work better for my child?’



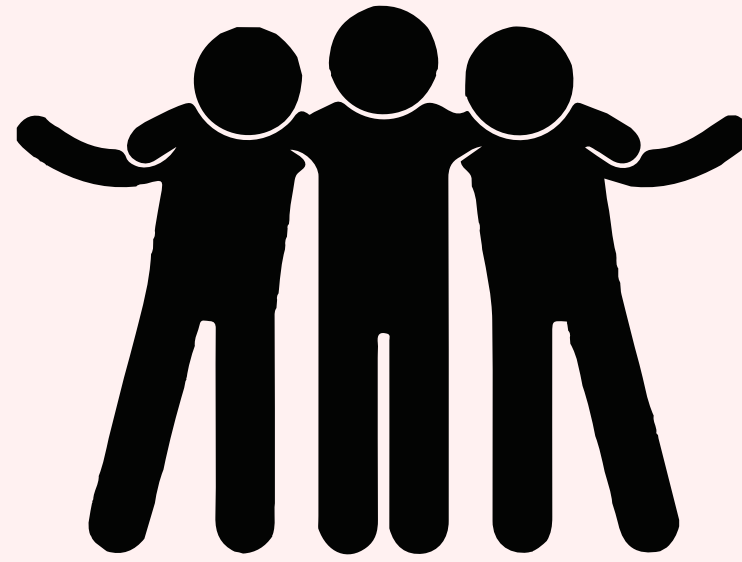
UDL can help your children prepare for adulthood.



Strengths

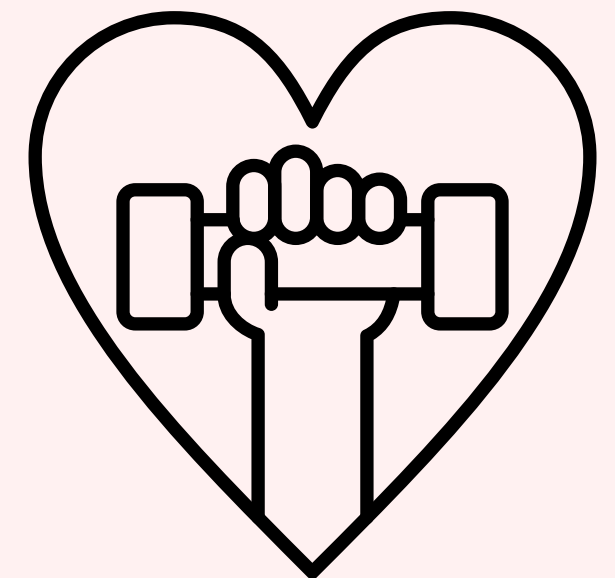
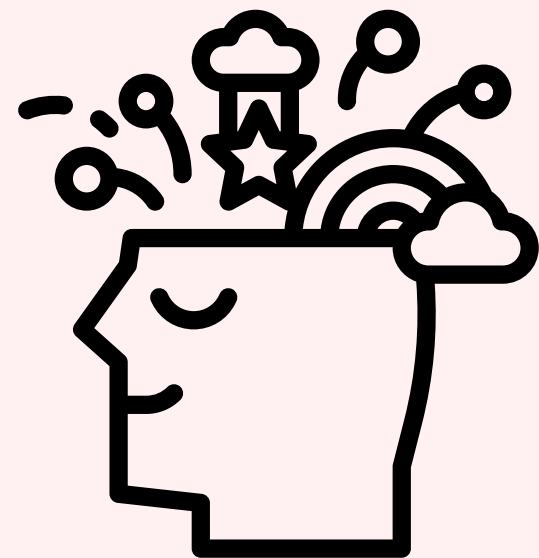
What are the strengths?

- Strengths are skills, talents, interests, and positive traits that help learners succeed.



Types of strengths

- Academic
- Social
- Emotional
- Creative
- Physical
- Personal interests



Strengths

How do we Identify Strengths?

- Observe Engagement and Energy
- Utilize Assessment Tool
- Document Observations
- Focus on Interests



Strengths & Learning Styles

Every person, regardless of ability, has their own set of strengths.

Lets review the **4 Traditional Styles of Learning**

Visual: information presented in graphic form (e.g. maps, graphic organizers, charts, etc.)

Aural/Auditory: material are accessed out loud (e.g. live lectures, podcasts, group discussions, etc.)

Read/Write: information in written form (e.g. reports, essays, books, websites, etc.)

Kinesthetic: learn with physical movement (e.g. lab experiments, experimental activities, etc)



Linking Strengths to Postsecondary Outcomes

How It Works in Practice

- Identify Strengths
- Explore Connections
- Set Goals
- Develop a Plan
- Foster Self-Advocacy



Linking Strengths to Postsecondary Outcomes

Key Components of Linking Strengths to Outcomes

- Transition Assessment
- Goal Setting
- Career Awareness & Exploration
- Skills Development
- Community Experiences



Reframing in Practice

CASE STUDIES

Let's dive into some examples of transition plans and employment goals that reframe strengths for your children!

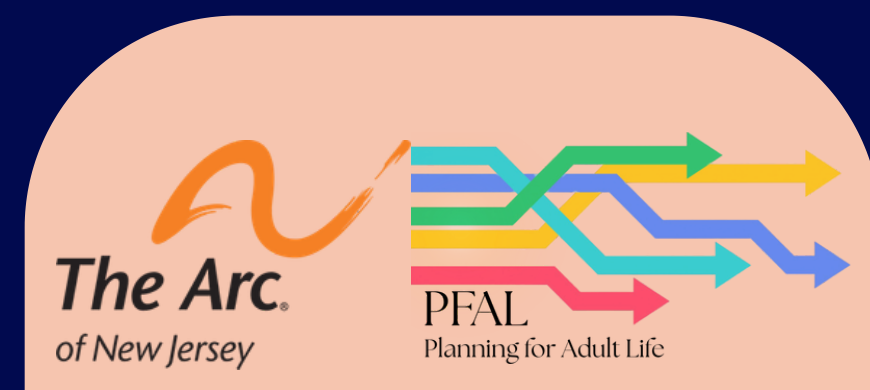
Parent Example #1-Comic Creator

Your child is gifted at creating comics, but has communication barriers when speaking in front of groups. For an upcoming school project, students are asked to present to the class.

You can advocate for an alternative format—your child could create a comic strip to demonstrate their learning instead of giving a verbal presentation with slides. This accommodation lets them showcase their strengths while still meeting the project requirements.

Teaching moment:

Help your child practice self-advocacy by role-playing how to ask their teacher: "I do my best work through drawing. Could I create a comic strip for this project instead of presenting slides?"



Parent Example #2–Auditory Learner

Your child is an auditory learner

Reading the physical book is challenging, but they learn best by listening.

You can advocate for accommodations like audiobooks or text-to-speech tools so your child can access the same content in a format that works for their learning style. For assessments, they could give oral responses instead of taking a standard written test.

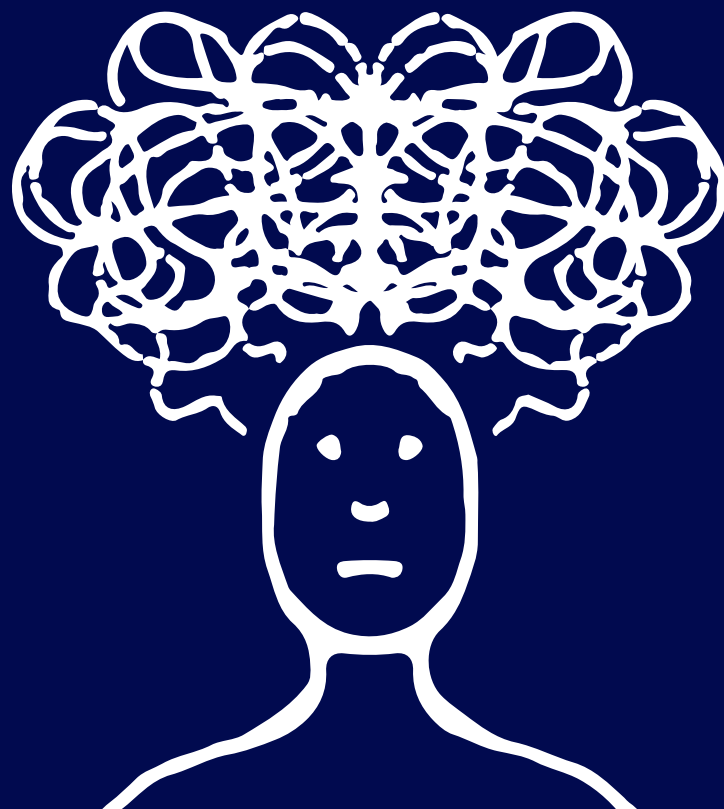
Teaching moment: Help your child understand their learning profile by saying: "You learn best by hearing information."



Parent Example #3–Anxious Learner

Your child experiences anxiety during timed tests but demonstrates strong problem-solving skills when given more flexibility. In math class, traditional timed exams cause stress that doesn't reflect what they actually know.

You can advocate for alternative assessment options, such as a take-home problem set or the opportunity to explain how they solved problems verbally. Your child still meets the same academic standards. They're just showing their knowledge in a way that highlights their reasoning and explanation skills.



Aligning Interests & Strengths-What Research Shows

- Inclusive learning requires alignment between goals, instruction, and engagement
- Your kids must have a real opportunity to learn the curriculum in ways that fit their strengths
- Research shows that alignment + opportunity + engagement improves access and achievement for all learners

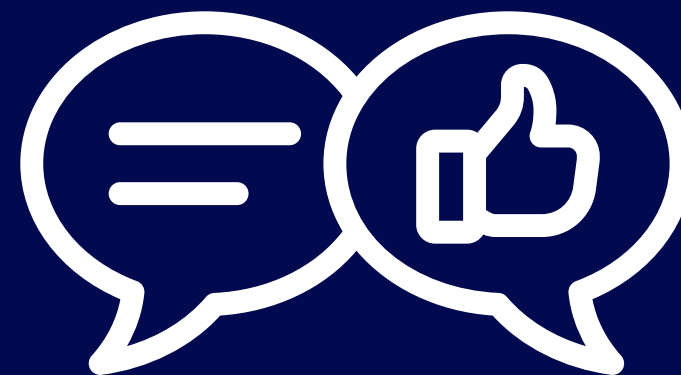


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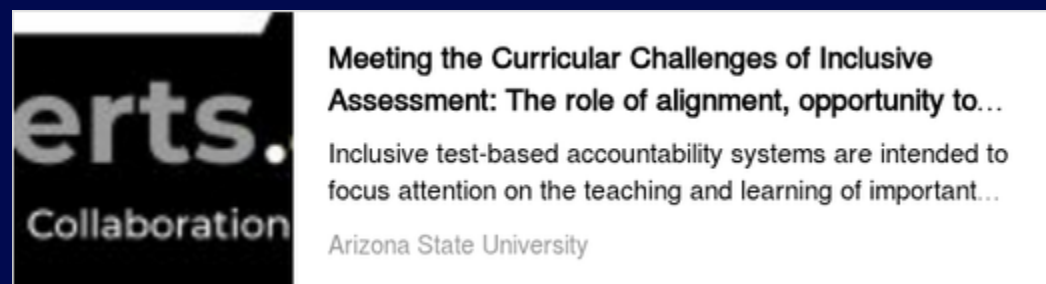
What Research Shows: Alignment + Access + Engagement

- Alignment means connecting goals, instruction, and supports so learners truly access the curriculum.
- Opportunity to learn must be real and measurable, not assumed.
- Gaining data on your child's interests can help your engagement numbers and get your children's school participation up.



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Sources:



Activity

EXAMPLE

Go over an example and change from the deficit-lens to incorporate their strengths when making a plan for their stated goal

PUT IT IN THE CHAT

Share your ideas with the group

Transition Goals Child #1

Employment Goal: Obtain part-time employment with ongoing adult support (supported employment)

Present Levels of Performance (through deficit-lens) :

- Significant difficulty with organization and independent task completion
- Struggle to follow multi-step directions and require repeated prompting to stay on task
- Social skills deficits interfere with appropriate behavior for the workplace
- Demonstrates low motivation when tasks are challenging

Strengths:

- Decision-making when given options
- Enjoys hands-on activities (e.g. woodworking and art)
- Accepts and implements constructive feedback



Building a Strength- Based Culture



Strategies

Tools

**Group
Discussion**

Strategies

THE FOCUS SHOULD BE:

- BECOMING A COMMITTED LISTENER
- GOAL SETTING ALIGNED WITH ASSETS
- FOSTERING AN EMPOWERING ENVIRONMENT
- PRACTICING OUT IN THE COMMUNITY
- CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK



Strength-Based Resources For Parents

FREE Online Tools:

- VIA Youth Character Strengths Survey (Ages 8-17) – 10-minute FREE assessment to identify your child's top strengths
- www.viacharacter.org

Strength-Based IEP Guides:

- Understood.org – Parent guide to strength-based IEPs with practical examples
- www.understood.org/en/articles/strengths-based-ieps-what-you-need-to-know

NEW JERSEY Resources:

SPAN Parent Advocacy Network – Statewide support & developmental resources:

- www.spanadvocacy.org

NJ Parent Link – State resource portal for all family services

- www.nj.gov/njparentlink



Resources For Parents from The Arc of New Jersey

- In-person and online workshops
- Archived “boot camps” (bite-sized lessons about specific information and skill building)
- Community circles
- “Meet Us in the Middle (of the Month)” webinars
- Newsletter
- Information & referrals

Whole Group Discussion

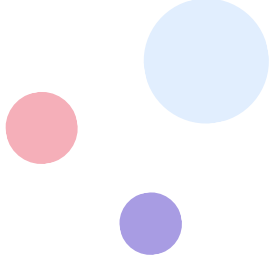
How can we reframe a current “behavioral issue” as a strength in a different context?
(e.g. easily distracted becomes observant)



Whole Group Discussion

What is your child passionate about/ what energizes them and how can that be turned into a post-secondary goal?



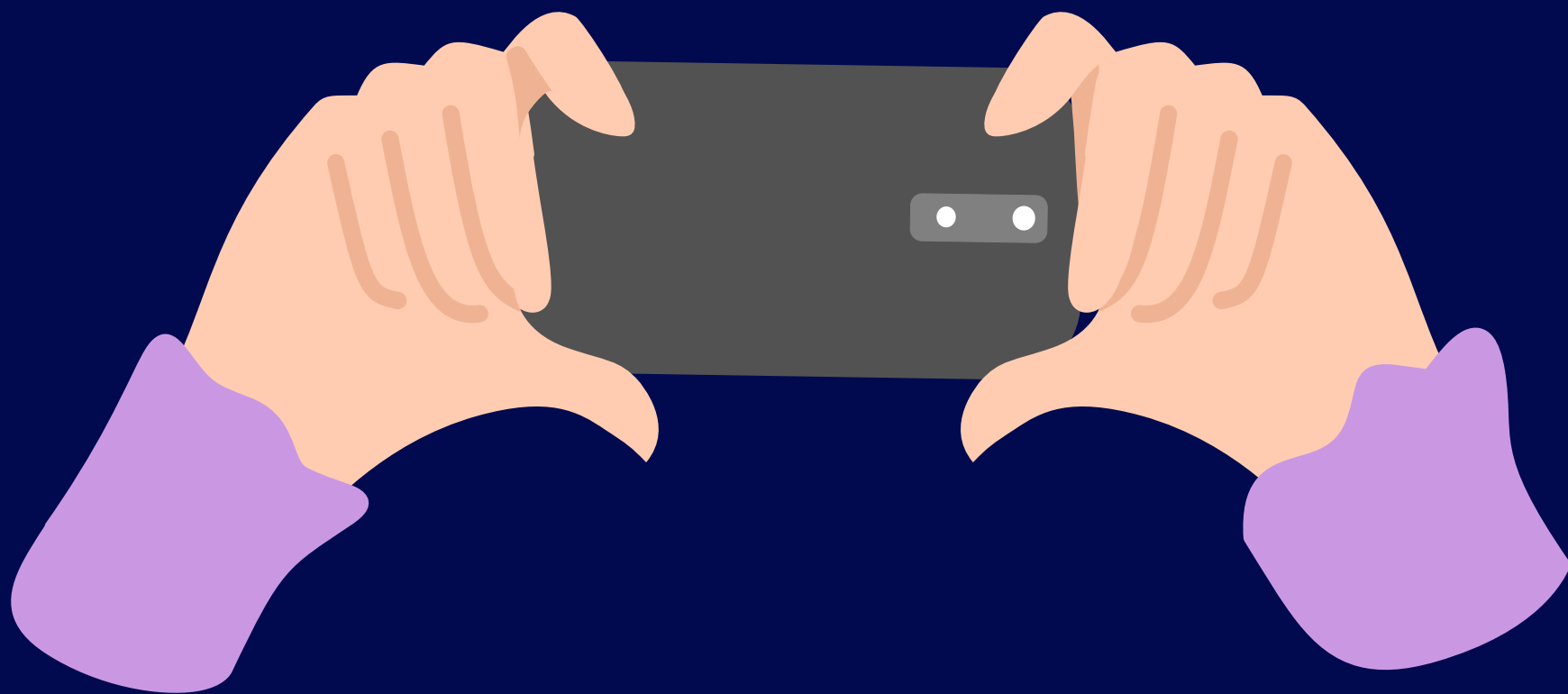


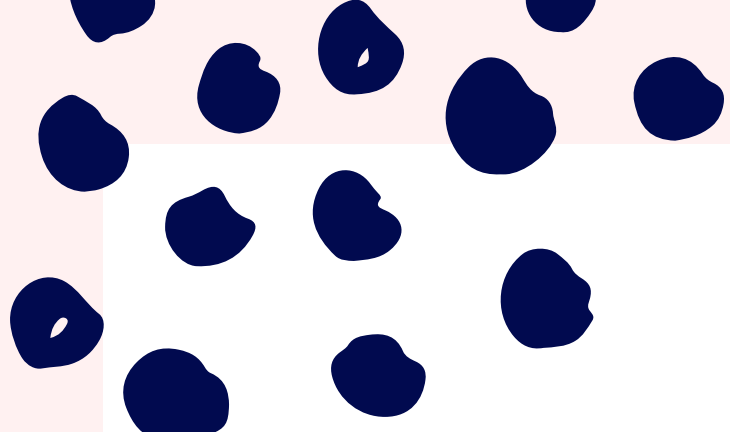
QUESTIONS

Any Follow
up
Questions
?

Additional Resources:

In need of
additional
resources?
Check out our
Website!





Contact Info:

For more information
about PFAL/ The Arc

PHONE

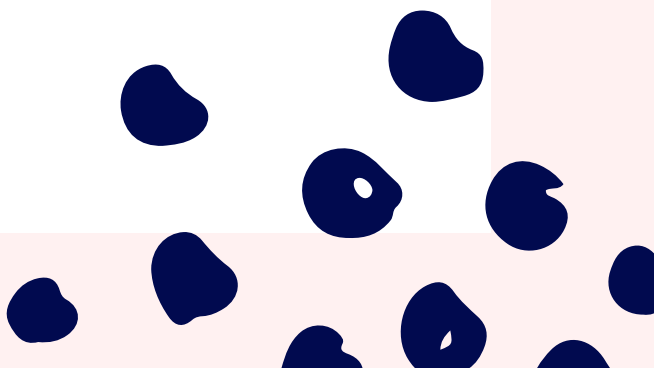
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Thank
you!