

Autism and Parent's Choices Fact Sheet

- Children with autism, while sharing some common symptoms, such as difficulties with social interaction and the social use of language, differ dramatically from one another. For example, some are under-reactive to sounds or touch while others are over-reactive to these sensations. Some have better visual memories, while others have better memories for sounds or words.
- The National Research Council of the National Academy of Science, in their 2001 landmark report, “Educating Children with Autism,”* called for tailoring the treatment approach to the unique features of the individual child.
- The National Academy of Science report also indicated that there was evidence for both developmental approaches (see accompanying list for examples of published evidence) and behavioral approaches, but no comparative studies and that neither approach had definitive evidence behind them.
- “Developmentally-based programs” are structured interventions that focus on each child’s individual differences and builds healthy foundations of emotional, social, and intellectual development by helping all caregivers and therapists tailor the approach to the child’s unique developmental profile. Developmentally-based interventions are characterized by contingent, reciprocal, fun interactions with children that address the core deficits in autism including engageability, love of people, problem solving, creativity, and emotional thinking.
- Developmental approaches tend to focus more on tailoring relationships to the child’s unique profile and using naturalistic situations to help a child learn, while behavioral approaches tend to be more structured and focus on discrete skills. There are a number of approaches that are hybrids of the two and many parents and schools use combinations of both developmental and behavioral approaches. In addition, many children are unable to tolerate approaches which are very structured.
- Therefore, it is essential that new state insurance regulations support both behavioral and developmental approaches to enable families and their doctors and clinical team members to determine how best to tailor the treatment approach to optimize progress for each child.

* Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism. *Educating Children with Autism*. Catherine Lord and James P. McGee (Editors). Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council. Washington, DC: National Academy Press (2001).

Scientific Evidence for Developmentally-based Interventions

There is growing empirical evidence that parents mediate their child's development by having enjoyable encounters that promote joint attention and contingent interactions. Developmental based program's research focuses on outcomes related to parent-child interaction and social-emotional development. Several of the following studies, published in peer-reviewed journals, used rigorous research.

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- Rogers, S. and D. Delalla. "A comparative study of the effects of a developmentally based instructional model on young children with autism and young children with other disorders of behavior and development." *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* 11(1991): 29-47.
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