

early Intervention



Early Intervention and Autism: Common Sense Reasons to Participate

The overall goal of early intervention (EI) is to give very young children (birth to 36 months) a head start in closing developmental gaps that may have arisen because of a diagnosed disability or "at-risk" condition in their lives. EI enhances their overall development by teaching them skills that other kids their age acquire naturally. It was also created to teach the family effective ways to interact with the child and each other, and to provide targeted services that support this learning. With autism, in particular, it is vital that the family understand how to effectively deal with the child's behaviors and encourage the child to use his or her communication systems.

One might wonder why so much emphasis is placed on EI if services are only available for a few short years. It makes sense to treat a child with autism as early as possible. We do not even need research-based evidence to come to this conclusion, it is simple common

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sense. The younger the child, the better able we are to close developmental gaps. Individuals do not "stop" learning once they turn three, but brain research suggests that there exists a "window of opportunity" at the early ages where neurological brain paths are still growing and can be repaired, or new ones can be formed. This is known as neuroplasticity. By enlarging the learning capacity of the child in this way, it provides greater opportunities over the entire life of the child.

The younger the child, the less ingrained are habits that detract from, rather than enhance learning. Young children are naturally curious about their environments. We need to use that natural curiosity as early as possible.

Children can also be the focal point of the intervention in their early years. The opportunities are greater for one-on-one learning, rather than

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Diagnosis and Early Intervention in Autism

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Autism is a complex neuropsychological disorder with no known cure. While a formal diagnosis cannot be made until 3 years of age (DSM IV), experienced professionals can reliably diagnose children around 2 years of age. A diagnosis of autism involves 3 main areas of impairment: communication, socialization and restricted behavior patterns. Accurate assessment is critical, as children with autism display significant individual variation in their skills in each of these key areas. Each child will demonstrate a unique set of strengths and weaknesses in their developmental profile, which need to be addressed with suitable treatment approaches. Developmental areas that may require intervention include: Expressive and receptive language; early social communication skills (e.g. eye contact, joint attention); imitation; functional and imaginative play; social interactions skills; cognitive skills; and daily living skills.

Early intervention treatment in autism is essential to ensure that children develop their skills to their full potential and minimize secondary behavior problems. For that reason, early diagnosis will remain as the first critical step to receiving appropriate care.

Early Intervention and Autism

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trying to help children in group settings. Concentrated, focused teaching and learning opportunities are the hallmark of early intervention. Very young children also have few daily obligations. There is plenty of time for such concentrated learning to take place.

Children also learn better in familiar, comfortable environments, so the emphasis on "natural environments" in early intervention (such as the home or in the community) gives the child a leg up on learning generalization skills, right from the start.

How well early intervention therapy works depends on the child. As each child has his own profile, abilities and challenges, each child will have his own outcomes. But even a little progress is better than none, especially when that progress comes in the form of new communication skills that allow a child to express his/her desires and needs. Early intervention is clearly a good idea.

Editor's Note: This brief article is adapted from a chapter on "What Is Early Intervention?" in the book by James Ball, *Early Intervention & Autism: Real-Life Questions, Real-Life Answers*.

Popular Web Sites Devoted to Autism

Autism Speaks

<http://www.autismspeaks.org>

Autism Society of Illinois

<http://www.autismillinois.org>

Autism Education Network

<http://www.autismeducation.net/>

Autism Research Institute

<http://www.autism.com/>

The Autism Project of Illinois

<http://www.theautismprogram.org/>

Books and Videos on Autism

Books

Act Early Against Autism: Give Your Child a Fighting Chance from the Start. Jayne Lytel. New York: Perigee Books, 2008. (Call # WM 203.5 .L996 2008) – Based on a parent's personal experience, this is a guide for parents revealing the importance of early intervention. It includes information on recognizing the early warning signs, consulting experts, facing the emotional and financial challenges, tackling legal issues within school districts and finding the best therapies.

The Autism Answer Book: More than 300 of the Top Questions Parents Ask. William Stillman. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2007. (Call # WM 203.5 S584a 2007) – Written in a question-and-answer format, this book helps parents understand their child and develop a plan to help him or her succeed.

Autism Early Intervention: Fast Facts. Raun D. Melmed. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, 2007. (Call # WM 203.5 .M527 2007) – This brief and colorful guide explains the evaluations, diagnosis and treatment for children with autism spectrum disorders.

Early Intervention & Autism: Real-Life Questions, Real-Life Answers. James Ball. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, 2008. (Call # WM 203.5 .B187e 2008) – In an easy-to-read, question-answer format, Dr. Jim explains what makes a child with autism tick, how to get the most out of early intervention services, and how to choose the most effective treatment options.

Some Kids Have Autism. Martha E.H. Rustad. Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2008. (Call # WM 203.5 .R971s 2008) – This small picture book is aimed at informing very young children about autism and illustrates the special needs of children with this disorder. Very useful for sharing with other young children and siblings as well as young children with autism.

Triumphs in Early Autism Treatment. Ennio Cipani, ed. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2008. (Call # WM 203.5 .C577 2008) – This book documents the latest research that shows that children who receive applied behavioral analysis (ABA) treatment consistently progress in skill development. It includes firsthand accounts of the progress of seven children with autism, written in a narrative style by the ABA professionals who conducted the consultations and also includes an overview and analysis of ABA as a treatment method.

What You Can Do Right Now to Help Your Child with Autism. Jonathan Levy. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2007. (Call # WM 203.5 .L668w 2007) – The essence of autism is that it is a disorder about interaction. This book aims at giving parents things they can do immediately to work with their children and draw them back into our interactive world.

Videos

Breakthrough Strategies for Autism Spectrum Disorders. 26 minute DVD videodisc. Sheffield, MA: The Option Institute, 2007. (Call # WM 203.5 .B828 2007) – This is the recording of a lecture by Raun Kaufman, founder of the Option Institute and the Autism Treatment Center of America, on the Son-Rise Program, originated by his parents to treat his severe autism.

Healing Autism: A Breakthrough Approach with Kenneth Cook. 35 minute DVD videodisc. [Providence, RI]: Healing Autism Project, 2007. (Call # WM 203.5 H434d 2007) – This film presents the challenges five families face, showcasing the successes they

experience after being introduced to Dr. Brock's biomedical healing program. The film chronicles their stories from initial diagnosis and follows their progress over the course of a year.

Understanding Brothers and Sisters on the Autism Spectrum. 94 minute DVD videodisc. [Winston-Salem, NC]: Coulter Video, 2007. (Call # WM 203.5 U55c 2007) – This video contains four programs for siblings of children on the autism spectrum and their parents. Parents can show their children the programs that best suit their age and developmental levels, from age 4 years through adult.



"Red Flags" of Autism Spectrum Disorders

The following "red flags" may indicate a child is at risk for an autism spectrum disorder, and is in need of an immediate evaluation. This list is brought to use by First Signs, a program devoted to the early diagnosis and treatment of autism.

In clinical terms, there are a few "absolute indicators," often referred to as "red flags" that indicate that a child should be evaluated. For a parent, these are the "red flags" that your child should be screening to ensure that he/she is on the right developmental path.

If your baby shows one or more of these signs, please ask your pediatric/health care provider for an immediate evaluation.

Impairment in Social Interaction:

- Lack of appropriate eye gaze
- Lack of warm, joyful expressions
- Lack of sharing interest or enjoyment
- Lack of response to name

Impairment in Communication:

- Lack of showing gestures
- Lack of coordination of nonverbal communication
- Unusual prosody (little variation in pitch, odd intonation, irregular rhythm, unusual voice quality)

Repetitive Behaviors & Restricted Interests:

- Repetitive movements with objects
- Repetitive movements or posturing of body, arms, hands, or fingers

For more information, visit the First Signs website at www.firstsigns.org.

Illinois Public Health Association

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Calendar Ahead

October 31, 2008

*The Child Behind the Numbers: A Conference on Early Childhood
Evaluation and Assessment*

Chicago, Illinois

CONTACT: Erikson Institute, www.erikson.edu/professionaldevelopment

November 6-8, 2008

Illinois Council for Exceptional Children Fall Convention • Itasca, Illinois

CONTACT: ICEC, www.illinoisceec.org

November 15, 2008

4th Annual South of Eighty Parent Conference • Jacksonville, Illinois

CONTACT: HEAR/ISD, http://morgan.k12.il.us/isd/reach_events.html

December 4-5, 2008

PECS Basic Training • Chicago, Illinois

CONTACT: Pyramid Educational Consultants, www.pecs.com

March 14, 2009

4th Annual North of Eighty Conference • Rock Falls, Illinois

CONTACT: HEAR/ISD, http://morgan.k12.il.us/isd/reach_events.html

How can I get materials from the library?

There are several ways to check out materials from the library or learn more about what resources are available to you:

PHONE: 1-800-852-4302 (toll free)
E-MAIL: clearinghouse@eiclearinghouse.org
FAX: 217-522-4670
WEBSITE: www.eiclearinghouse.org

- There is no charge to borrow materials from the library (except for postal costs to return materials).
- You can have library materials sent directly to your home.
- You can use your local library to receive and send materials back to the library at little or no charge.



Early Childhood Intervention Clearinghouse

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Editorial Policy

Early Intervention accepts original articles, but reserves the right to edit or refuse publication at the discretion of the newsletter committee. Opinions expressed are the responsibility of the author and are not necessarily those of the Clearinghouse staff or the Illinois Public Health Association, unless so indicated.

Early Intervention (ISSN 1058-8396) is published quarterly. Subscriptions are free. Subscription requests, change of address, and article submissions should be sent to 830 South Spring Street, Springfield, Illinois 62704.

Printed on recycled paper