

Relationship Development Intervention® (RDI®) as Evidence Based Practice for Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Relationship Development Intervention® (RDI®) is a cost effective, research guided, intervention approach for remediating Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The purpose of RDI® is to develop intersubjectivity, the agreed upon core of autism's social and communicative deficits (Baron-Cohen, 2000). Intersubjectivity subsumes joint attention, social referencing, theory of mind, social reciprocity, and communication for experience sharing purposes. RDI® has a foundation of research and theoretical support, and a growing body of empirical evidence for its practices.

Based on comprehensive reviews of ASD treatment research, expert consensus is that no evidence exists that any one approach is better than any other approach (National Research Council, 2001; Rogers, 2006; Prizant, 2009). Further, the field of study of ASD is still very early in the process of determining what kinds of interventions are most efficacious for whom, for what, and when (Rogers & Vismara, 2008). Consequently, applying an evidence-based practice (EBP) approach, espousing a combination of the best available research, clinical expertise, and patient characteristics and preferences (APA 2006) for decision making becomes ever more critical for treatment decision making for ASD (Twachtman-Cullen, 2009). The RDI® program has peer-reviewed evidence to support its efficacy for children with ASD (Gutstein, 2005; Gutstein, Burgess & Montfort, 2007; Hobson, Hobson, Gustein, Ballarani, & Bargiota, 2008) and further studies are in progress. A broader examination of the literature demonstrates a growing body of empirical research evidence and best practices recommendations supporting the practices embedded in RDI®. Specifically, RDI® is a family-centered, intensive, objective driven, individualized intervention targeting the developmental components and processes of joint attention and communication in the context of the parent-child relationship. The summary below outlines the evidence supporting core components of RDI®, reflecting why it is a viable and desirable EBP for treating ASD.¹

SUPPORT FOR RDI® in remediating the core deficits of autism in a developmental progression (e.g. joint attention, social communication, and theory of mind)

Aldred C, Green J, and Adams C. (2004). A new social communication intervention for children with autism: pilot randomized controlled treatment study suggesting effectiveness. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*; 1420-30.

Mahoney, G., and F. Perales (2004). Relationship-focused early intervention with children with pervasive developmental disorders and other disabilities: a comparative study. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* 26, 77-85.

Jones EA, Carr EG, Feeley KM (2006). Multiple effects of joint attention intervention for

¹ Because the evidence for RDI is expected to grow over time, this document is dated and will be updated periodically. Please contact the authors to request the most current version.

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children with autism. Behavior Modification. Nov 30 (6):782-834.

Schertz, H.H., Odom, S.L. (2007). Promoting joint attention in toddlers with autism: a parent-mediated developmental model. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders. Sep; 37(8) pp. 1562-75.

Solomon, R., Necheles, J., Ferch, C. & Bruckman, D. (2007). Pilot study of a parent training program for young children with autism: The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consultation program. Autism 11, no. 3 (2007) 205-224.

Howlin, P. (2008). Can children with autism spectrum disorders be helped to acquire a “theory of mind”? Revista de Logopediay Audiologia, Vol 28, 7, 74-89.

Whalen, C. and Schreibman, L. (2003). Joint attention training for children with autism using behavior modification procedures. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 44 (3) 456-468.

Kasari C, Freeman S, Paparella T. (2006). Joint attention and symbolic play in young children with autism: a randomized controlled intervention study Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry. 47(6) 611-20.

Siller, M. & Sigman, M. (2005). Modeling longitudinal change in the language abilities of children with autism: parent behaviors and child characteristics as predictors of change. Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics. 26(2)77-85.

Keen D, Rodger S, Doussin K, Braithwaite M. (2007) Pilot study of the effects of a social-pragmatic intervention on the communication and symbolic play of children with autism.” Autism, 11 (1), 63-71.

Tannock, R., Girolametto, L. & Siegal, L. (1992) Language intervention with children who have developmental delays: Effects of an interactive approach.” American Journal on Mental Retardation 97, 145-160.

Hobson, J. A., Hobson, P., Gutstein, S., Ballarani, A., Bargiota, K. (2008, April) Caregiver-child relatedness in autism, what changes with intervention? Poster presented at the meeting of the International Meeting for Autism Research.

SUPPORT FOR RDI® for improving overall functioning related to ASD (outcome research: ADOS diagnostic category, special education placement, flexibility, joint attention)

Gutstein, S, (2005) Relationship Development Intervention: Developing a Treatment Program to

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Address the Unique Social and Emotional Deficits in Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Autism Spectrum Quarterly*, Winter, 8-12.

Gutstein, S., Burgess, A. & Montfort, K. (2007). Evaluation of the Relationship Development Intervention Program. *Autism*, 11, 397-411.

Hobson, J. A., Hobson, P., Gutstein, S., Ballarani, A., Bargiota, K. (2008) Caregiver-child relatedness in autism, what changes with intervention? Poster presented at the meeting of the International Meeting for Autism Research.

SUPPORT FOR RDI® for systematically training parents with ongoing consultation and using the parent-child relationship as a natural context for child learning and growth

Drew, A., G. Baird, S. Baron-Cohen, A. Cox, V. Slonim, S. Wheelwright, J. Swettenham, B. Berry, and T. Charman. "A pilot randomized control trial of parent training intervention for pre-school children with autism." *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 11, (2002): 266-272.

Aldred C, Green J, and Adams C. (2004). "A new social communication intervention for children with autism: pilot randomized controlled treatment study suggesting effectiveness." *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*; 1420-30.

Jones EA, Carr EG, Feeley KM (2006). Multiple effects of joint attention intervention for children with autism." *Behavior Modification*. Nov 30 (6):782-834.

Schertz, H.H., Odom, S.L. (2007). Promoting joint attention in toddlers with autism: a parent-mediated developmental model. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. Sep; 37(8) pp. 1562-75.

Solomon, R., Necheles, J., Ferch, C. & Bruckman, D. (2007). Pilot study of a parent training program for young children with autism: The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consultation program." *Autism* 11, no. 3 (2007) 205-224.

Mahoney, G., and F. Perales (2004). Relationship-focused early intervention with children with pervasive developmental disorders and other disabilities: a comparative study." *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* 26, 77-85.

McConachie H, Diggle T. "Parent implemented early intervention for young children with autism spectrum disorder: a systematic review." *J Evaluation in Clinical Practice*. 2007 Feb;13 (1):120-9.

McConachie H., Randle, V., Hammal, D., & Le Couteur, A. (2005). A controlled trial of

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a training course for parents of children with suspected autism spectrum disorder. Journal of Pediatrics 147, (3) (2005): 335-340.

SUPPORT FOR RDI® for intervening in the child and family's natural environment by incorporating intervention into daily routines that account for caregiver needs and child functioning.

Aldred C, Green J, and Adams C. (2004). A new social communication intervention for children with autism: pilot randomized controlled treatment study suggesting effectiveness. Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines; 1420-30.

Prizant, B. (2009). Creating a culture of family-centered practice for the autism community", Autism Spectrum Quarterly, Summer, 30-33.

The research evidence above is not an exhaustive list.

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