



Naturalistic Developmental Behavioural Approaches for Very Young Children diagnosed with Autism

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Objectives

- Highlight the importance of early supports for very young autistic children
- Outlining the core features of early supports
- Introduction to Naturalistic Developmental Behavioural Interventions with a focus on the Early start Denver Model

Need for Early Supports



- Neurotypical children learn from other people, by watching them, and imitating them. Autism may impede this process and prevent children from reaching their potential
 - Many have difficulty learning through observing others and exploring their environments, and they have difficulty engaging with, playing with and communicating with others.
 - Autistic children may not find social experiences as inherently rewarding resulting in reduced time in interactions of all sorts
- Difficulties in learning about others and understanding other's behaviour
- The way to minimize the potential impact of autism on learning is by supporting **very young autistic children** to engage with other people so that they can begin to learn from them
- The aim in providing early supports is not to change the child but to enhance the potential for learning – thereby minimizing learning disabilities in later development.

Best Practice Guidelines

- Family
 - Family-centred and strengths-based
 - Cultural responsiveness
- Inclusion
 - Inclusive and participatory practice
 - Engaging the child in natural environments
- Teamwork
 - Collaborative teamwork
 - Capacity building
- Universal Principles
 - Individualised
 - Evidence base, standards, accountability and practice
 - Outcome-based approach
 - Manualised with Fidelity Assessments

Important points in provision of support

1. As **autism is highly heterogeneous**, and presentation changes with developmental age and stage, *no one approach will meet the needs of all children.*
2. **Families/carers** are the most important resource for children, **and children learn and develop best in their natural everyday settings.**
3. **Those providing support should work in partnership** with the families/carers to build their capacity
4. Those providing support should work in a **culturally responsive, evidence-based, outcomes focused and timely manner.**
5. All supports should be **individualised for each child** and **designed to enhance developmental progress and improve functioning.**
6. This includes social communication (e.g., joint attention, imitation), language, emotional and behavioural regulation, play and adaptive behaviours → ***takes a transdisciplinary team to achieve this.***

Importance of supports in the early years

- Video

Naturalistic Developmental Behavioural Interventions (NDBIs)

- NDBIs utilize “*naturalistic*” approaches delivered in *everyday interactive social contexts* (e.g., play and daily routines) that young children find themselves in.
- Approaches are strongly informed by *developmental and behavioural science*
- The materials used are those *preferred and selected by the child* rather than the adult
- Follow into the *child’s attentional focus*
- Teaching is incorporated within *affectively rich social interactions*
- *Learning opportunities incorporated into everyday activities* with a focus on facilitating the generalization of skills beyond the current setting

NDBI Core components

1. The nature of the early targets

Functional skills including attending to others, imitating others, sharing emotions and interests via joint attention, engaging in coordinated, reciprocal activities with others, understanding that meanings are transmitted between people via gestures, sounds, expressions, and words

2. The contexts of delivery

Learning is embedded in activities that contain emotionally meaningful social interactions

Establishing adult-child engagement activities

Teaching episodes are child initiated so that the adult follows into the child's attention and interests

Many different NDBI approaches

- SOME EXAMPLES:
 - LEAP – Learning experiences and Alternative Program
 - PRT– Pivotal Response Training
 - SCERTS – Social Communication Emotional Regulation and Transactional Analysis
 - JASPER - Joint Attention Symbolic Play Engagement Regulation
 - ESDM – Early Start Denver Model
- Each model targets similar skill areas in but do so in different ways.
- All models agree on the importance of teaching and learning skills as early as possible

Early Start Denver Model (ESDM)



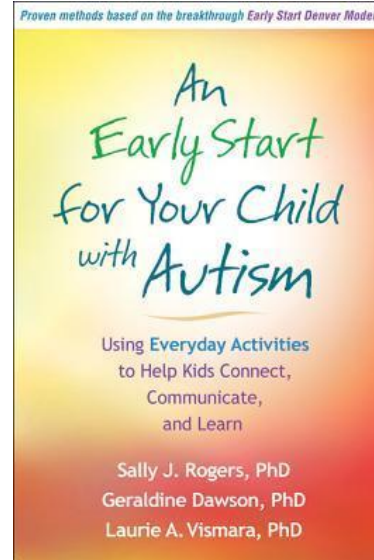
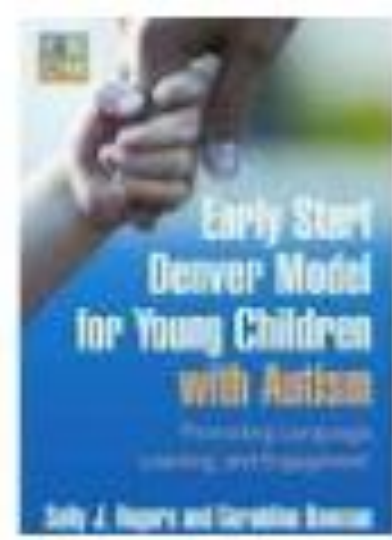
Sally Rogers & Geraldine Dawson

Goal: to provide structured, hands-on strategies

Suitable for children aged from 12 months – 60 months.

Comprehensive manualised early intervention with specific curriculum and teaching practises

Equips therapists / parents with the necessary skills to engage, communicate with, and teach their very young children with or at high likelihood for autism



ESDM elements

- Strong **developmental framework**
- Relationship based
- Family focused
- **Interdisciplinary approach**
- Uses behavioural principals
- Naturalistic teaching approach - designed for implementation in everyday settings – home, individual, groups, centres etc.



ESDM Principles

- Modulate and optimize child's arousal
- Turn taking and dyadic engagement
- Elaboration of activities
- Multiple and varied communication opportunities
- Adult language consistently appropriate developmentally and pragmatically (e.g., if child uses one word, adult uses two word phrases...and so on)



ESDM Goals



- To bring child back into the social loop by teaching the building blocks of social life
 - Imitation
 - Emotions
 - Communication
 - Sharing experiences
 - Social and Symbolic Play
 - Language
- Fill in gaps and accelerate developmental rate

ESDM basics

- Watch the child
 - Find the spotlight of their attention
 - Follow their lead
 - Narrate/comment on what they are doing
 - Be helpful
 - Copy the child
 - Begin to take turns
 - Be FUN
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- Online: <https://helpisinyourhands.org>



Group-based ESDM



- Long-day care setting
- 35 children each day in either inclusive or specialised class room
- Each child attends minimum 3 days per week = 15 hrs per week for 12 months
- Transdisciplinary team
- Manualized



Early Identification and Early Supports

- Early identification of autism and the timely provision of supports not only has the potential to maximize developmental and educational gains for the child, but also improves family functioning and wellbeing → reaps long-term benefits for society.
- From a rationalist perspective, early detection and access to supports serves to reduce whole-of-life costs incurred not only by the families, but also by governments.
- The importance of public education about the early characteristics of autism, and the value of early supports cannot be underestimated

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Thank you

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