

Evidence-Based Practices for Treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

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What is evidence-based practice?

An intervention is considered to be an evidence-based practice when there is scientific evidence to support its claims. Evidence-based practices must be selected for implementation based on sound professional judgment, coupled with the careful review of available data, input from individuals and family members, and an honest evaluation of interventionists' capacity to implement the interventions accurately.

Why is it important to identify evidence-based practices?

The long-term outcomes for children and adults diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are greatly impacted by the types of interventions that they receive. Intervening early and with efficiency can make a remarkable difference in the social, behavioral, communicative, and self-help outcomes for people affected by ASD. For this reason, extra time and resources are rarely available to invest in unproven or inconsistently effective practices. Families and practitioners who serve children and adults with ASD are empowered when they are able to select treatments that are likely to have a maximal positive impact and will be acceptable and feasible.

How are evidence-based practices identified for the treatment of ASD?

The National Autism Center developed the National Standards Project to identify and publish a list of

evidence-based practices for the treatment of ASD.

Panels of experts reviewed 6,463 research abstracts and ultimately 775 research studies in which treatments were tested for people with ASD under 22 years of age. The panelists checked the quality of studies and evaluated the effects of the treatments (National Autism Center, 2009).

What evidence-based practices have been identified for treatment of ASD?

The National Autism Center has identified the following eleven treatments as established, evidence-based treatments.

1. **Antecedent Package.** These approaches to treatment involve making changes to the environment prior to the onset of problem behavior.
2. **Behavioral Package.** These treatments involve the analysis of behavioral data collected before and after problem behavior to design a plan that includes altering the consequences provided for appropriate and inappropriate behavior.
3. **Comprehensive Behavioral Treatment for Young Children.** Sometimes referred to as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) or Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention (EIBI), these programs involve intensive early behavioral interventions that help develop communication, social, and academic skills.
4. **Joint Attention Intervention.** Typically taught through other established treatments, these interventions serve to increase the ability of individuals with ASD to focus on an object or activity jointly with another person and are a fundamental part of communication and social skill development.
5. **Modeling.** This strategy for instruction shows the child or adult precisely what behavior or skill should be exhibited through an explicit set of examples.
6. **Naturalistic Teaching Strategies.** These strategies can be used to teach a wide variety of skills in a real-life, contextualized format that is child-directed and likely to lead to generalized success with the skill

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7. **Peer Training Package.** These approaches include training peers how to interact with a child who has ASD, and then facilitating these interactions as the treatment itself.
8. **Pivotal Response Training.** This treatment is designed to target fundamentally important skills by creating situations in the natural environment that will teach skills and improve social interactions for children with ASD.
9. **Schedules.** These are used to help a child with ASD to organize their time, anticipate upcoming activities, and reduce confusion and stress.
10. **Self-management.** These strategies teach children with ASD ways to complete tasks independently and to evaluate and record their performance as a means of increasing motivation and independence.
11. **Story-Based Intervention Package.** These interventions provide instruction for an upcoming event using written descriptions that clarify expectations or skills that are being targeted.

Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center** (VKC) works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, service providers and advocates, researchers and policy makers. It is among only a few centers nationwide to be a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, a *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center, and a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities Training Program. The following are some of the ways the Center's programs and staff can assist families, educators, and other service providers.

Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD)

TRIAD is a Vanderbilt Kennedy Center program dedicated to improving assessment and treatment services for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families while advancing knowledge and training. See TRIAD.vumc.org.

TRIAD Families First Program

This free training series provides parents of children with autism (ages 2-5) with techniques to enhance social and communication skills and to manage challenging behaviors. Contact familiesfirst@vumc.org.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a free statewide phone, web, and print referral service in English and Spanish. It connects the Tennessee disability community with service providers and resources. Its website database has over 3,000 agencies searchable by TN county and service. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC, TN Council on Developmental Disabilities, TN Department of Health, and the TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Contact TNPathfinder.org, (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636.

Other Resources

- **National Autism Center's A Parent's Guide to Evidence-Based Practice and Autism**
www.nationalautismcenter.org/learning/parent_manual.php
- **National Autism Center's Evidence-Based Practice and Autism in the Schools**
www.nationalautismcenter.org/learning/ed_manual.php
- **Autism Speaks**
www.autismspeaks.org

Contact the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

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