

EARLY INTERVENTIONS IN AUTISM- PARENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

What is Autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder. Children with Autism have marked impairment of reciprocal social interaction, language and communication along with repetitive behaviors.

EARLY INTERVENTIONS IN AUTISM:

- Recognizing these problems in development at an early age and starting early intervention will help them to slowly overcome these deficits to the extent possible.
- **Simply waiting and expecting that child will become all right with age will lead to accumulation of impairments and deficits that become more difficult to overcome later.**
- Early intervention is systematic, structured teaching of new skills and competencies to children who are showing signs of Autism, and creating more opportunities for their learning the skills that they lack.
- **You know your child, The Best.** These children learn faster with home-based intervention in their real-life settings, with parents as trainers. Therefore, parents can learn the techniques of intervention and practice them at home.
- The training activities can be incorporated in the child's daily routine.
- Developing a good structured daily routine is very helpful.
- All members of the family need to participate in training the child – the task of teaching is not mother's alone.
- **It is preferable to avoid excessive exposure to TV, cell phone and other electronic media**, as this will tend to make the child more solitary and lose out on opportunities to learn social and communicative skills.

AREAS OF TEACHING AND TRAINING:

Social development:

- Children with Autism lack a natural ability to relate, interact and respond to people around them. But, it is possible to teach them these skills through systematic, step-by-step, repetitive inputs.
- **Joint Attention:** Doing things together or one-one basis.
- **CALL, LOOK, COME, GO, TAKE, GIVE, SHOW, BRING AND POINT.** These are activities to enhance **joint attention**, i.e., child and mother focusing their attention on an object and then doing things together.

USE SIMPLE, ATTRACTIVE TOYS.

- Use it in all daily activities like eating, bathing etc. “Dear, Look at the soap, see foam!!! Wow....” Show it- make him look, then, ask him- make him point.
- Mother – child games: Take turns and play with your child. Passing the ball, tickling, peek-a-boo, stacking building blocks, gentle swinging on the legs etc.
- Use picture books and show your child to point at objects. You can **make your own scrapbook** of what he likes, food, games, his day to day activities, pictures of family members etc. for **pointing**. Show him or ask him to point at objects around.

DO IT WITH YOUR CHILD. YOU ARE ENHANCING JOINT ATTENTION.

- Initially child may remain indifferent, but with repeated attempts and modifying the approach, which works best with a given child, child slowly starts responding and starts enjoying these activities and games.

DO IT PLAYFULLY. YOUR CHILD WILL ENJOY IT.

- Once the child enjoys these simple activities one could move and to more elaborate - clap-clap game, run and catch, throw ball and catch, kick ball back, swinging, coloring, finger painting etc can be used.
- Careful natural observation of the child will help in deciding what the child wants and then one can organize new activities around it. In other word, child’s choice for activity is recognized, and given importance.
- **CHOOSE THE ACTIVITIES YOUR CHILD LIKES. FREQUENTLY CHANGE THEM SO HE DOESN’T GET BORED.**

Self-help skills Training (adaptive skills)

- It is very important to encourage, teach and train these children in taking care of themselves in their daily activities, so that they become more and more independent as they grow older.
- This can start with simple things such as
 - drinking from a cup,
 - eating by self. Later,
 - toilet indication,

- undressing, dressing,
- brushing, toilet training,
- grooming skills, bathing skills,
- simple household chores can be the focus of training.
- **Break the tasks into small steps, let your child learn and practice them one by one.**
- Appreciate him at every step will help him remember and learn fast.
- **Tell him---show him---help it by holding his hands---do it for him.**

Doesn't come at the first attempt. Encourage the child to do it by himself.

Communication and language:

- Start early; focus on gestures accompanied by simple words. Use **mirror** to promote imitation.
- Talk and play while feeding, dressing, bathing, etc. Keep it very simple. Rhymes, lullabies, songs – make actions and dance with your child. Help him imitate you.
- **LISTEN TO NOISES AND SOUNDS, TAKE INTEREST AND IMITATE HIS/HER SOUNDS. TRY TO FIGURE OUT THE MEANING OF CHILD'S UTTERANCES AND REPHRASE IT WITH THE CORRECT WORD.**
- Point, show and name the objects that are in the child's focus of attention repeatedly
- **Notice and take pleasure in utterances, vocalizations, and words.**
- **Ask 'what?' Questions. "What do you want? You are asking for water? WATER....Say water. show me where is water?"**
- Use pictures to communicate. Make a **scrap book** for your child. Ask him to show or point what he wants, give him choices. Then move on to Recognizing, naming, pointing.

Cognition:

- **DO NOT FORCE YOUR CHILD INTO ANY ACTIVITY.**
- Try different methods and find out which approach suits the child best.
- **You will know better what your child likes.**
- Concepts: such as size, shape, colours, Temperature (hot/cold), etc.
- Sorting, arranging, classifying activities enhance concept formation.
- Later they need to learn readiness or pre-academic skills such as scribbling, drawing, coloring.

Medical problems:

- Medications cannot cure Autism. However, can be used to control problem behaviours.

- Seizure disorder and ADHD are commonly associated problems, which require medicines.
- DO NOT STOP OR START MEDICATIONS ON YOUR OWN. If any side effects occur, report immediately to your doctor.

A FEW DO'S AND DON'T'S:

- **Get accurate information about Autism.**
- Discuss with other families who have Autistic children.
- Organize your and your family's life so that needs of all family members are met.
- Do not feel compelled that you have to be attending to the child all the time. It is very important to take time off from the caring for the child for rest, relaxation, entertainment, and pursuing your own hobbies, interests and other activities.
- Maintain your social and personal life. Attend functions and occasions, don't avoid them.
- **It is better to avoid experimenting with expensive and unproven treatments.**
- Get to know the resources that are available for in your place (hospitals, intervention centres, special schools) and approach them for help.
- Do not allow others to be rude with your child. You can develop your own appropriate methods to deal with such situations, rather than silently suffering.
- **Learn what works best for your child.**
- **Find out what the child has learnt to do first. Then move on to what s/he needs to be taught.**

Adapted with permission from:

Good Intervention Practices in Autism Spectrum Disorders – Guidelines for Parents by Prof. Dr. Satish Chandra Girimaji, Head of Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, NIMHANS, Bangalore.

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