

Overview

The Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) is an early intervention program designed to promote language, learning, and engagement for young children 12-48 months of age with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). ESDM is supported by the principles of developmental psychology and applied behavior analysis (ABA). Their teaching interventions are delivered within play-based, relationship-focused routines. The ESDM curriculum is designed to address all areas of the child's development using applied behavior analysis (ABA) based teaching strategies that involve interpersonal exchange and positive affect, shared engagement with real-life materials and activities, adult responsiveness and increasing parent sensitivity to child cues, and focus on developing the child's verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Three main goals are: 1) bringing the child into social relationships, 2) following the child's lead when socially engaging the child, and 3) developing play activities to fill in any learning deficits that the child may have.

How goals and objectives are prioritized and selected for treatment

Goals and objectives are selected based on the developmental profile of the individual child and the goals of the child's family.

Measures for determining if treatment is working

Independent measures of adaptive behavior, autism symptoms, cognitive ability, and language level used to test for changes in child skills. Additionally, parents complete taped play samples periodically to identify changes in parent skills.

Who can implement this treatment?

Trained clinician Trained educator Trained parent Other

Both clinicians and parents are active treatment providers. Parents are taught basic ESDM strategies and asked to use them during everyday activities.

What is the role of the family?

ESDM includes a strong parent-family component that is flexible to each family's characteristics. Parents are encouraged to use ESDM strategies during everyday activities such as meals, bath time, and play. Parents choose objectives from the curriculum that they view as important as intervention targets.

In which setting(s) can treatment be implemented?

Clinical or therapy room Classroom Childcare program Home Community Other

Is special training recommended or required to conduct or implement treatment?

No Yes, recommended Yes, required

Training/certification: 1) Reading ESDM manual 2) Attending training workshops 3) Submitting training materials for certification including videotaped therapy sessions, a completed child curriculum, developing child objectives and data collection system. Trainees receive feedback until meeting fidelity.

Certification is available for three different levels: Advanced, Parent Coaching, and Trainer-of-Trainer.

Authors of Early Start Denver

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Additional information describing Early Start Denver

Website:

<http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/mindinstitute/research/esdm/>

Treatment Manual:

Rogers S.J. & Dawson G. *Early Start Denver Model for Young Children with Autism*. New York, NY: Guilford Press; 2009.

Top 4 research references supporting Early Start Denver

1. Dawson, G., Rogers, S., Munson, J., Smith, M., Winter, J., Greenson, J., et al. (2009). Randomized, controlled trial of an intervention for toddlers with autism: The Early Start Denver Model. *Pediatrics*, 125(1), 17-23. (Open Access)
2. Smith, M., Rogers, S., & Dawson, G. The Early Start Denver Model: a comprehensive early intervention approach for toddlers with autism. In: Handleman JS, Harris SL, eds. *Preschool Education Programs for Children With Autism*. 3rd ed. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed Corporation, Inc; 2008:65–101
3. Vismara, L.A., & Rogers, S.J. (2008). The Early Start Denver Model: A case study of innovative practice. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 31, 91–108. (Open Access)
4. Vismara, L.A., Young, G.S., Stahmer, A.C., Griffith, E.M., & Rogers, S.J. (2009). Dissemination of evidence-based practice: Can we train therapists from a distance? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 39 (12), 1636-1651. (Open Access)