

## **Autism and Parent's Choices Fact Sheet**

- Two major approaches to treating autism are: 1) the developmental approach which focuses on relationships and reciprocal interactions between caregivers and children to enable the child to master the foundations of relating, communication, and thinking, and 2) the behavioral approach (ABA) which means the design, implementation, and evaluation of environmental modifications, using behavioral stimuli and consequences to produce socially significant improvement in human behavior.
- Children with autism differ dramatically from one another. While they share some common symptoms, such as difficulties with social interaction and the social use of language, they differ in their developmental profile. For example, some are under-reactive to sounds or touch while others are over-reactive to these sensations. Some have better visual memories, while others have better memories for sounds or words.
- Consequently, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences<sup>1</sup>, in their 2001 landmark report, “Educating Children with Autism,” called for tailoring the treatment approach to the unique features of the individual child.
- The National Academy of Sciences report concluded that there is some evidence for both developmental approaches and behavioral approaches but no definitive evidence for either. There also were no comparative studies between them. This has been confirmed by most recent systematic reviews<sup>2,3</sup> and meta-analysis<sup>4</sup> of the different studies available.
- Developmental approaches tend to focus more on tailoring relationships to the child’s unique profile and using naturalistic situations to help a child learn, while behavioral approaches tend to be more structured and focus on discrete skills. A number of approaches are hybrids of the two, and many parents and schools use combinations of both developmental and behavioral approaches. However, clinical experience indicates that many children are unable to tolerate structured interventions which focus primarily on discrete skills.
- Several developmentally-based interventions are showing efficacy<sup>5,6</sup> and they are also showing that they can be implemented at a lower cost than behavioral-based interventions<sup>7,8</sup>.
- Therefore, it is essential that new state or federal insurance legislation, which we strongly support, focuses on **parent choice** and that both developmental and behavioral program be among the options from which parents can choose. In this way, parents, doctors, and clinical team members can determine how best to tailor the treatment program to optimize progress for each child.

## References

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- <sup>2</sup> Ospina, M., Krebs Seida, J., Clark, B., Karkhaneh, M., Hartling, L., Tjosvold, L., Vandermeer, B., Smith, V. (2008) Behavioural and Developmental Interventions for Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Clinical Systematic Review, *PLoS ONE* 3(11): e3755. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0003755.
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- <sup>4</sup> Spreckley, M., Boyd, R. (2009) Efficacy of Applied Behavioral Intervention in Preschool Children with Autism for Improving Cognitive, Language, and Adaptive Behavior: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis, *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 154(3): 338-344.
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- <sup>7</sup> Solomon, R.S., 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(3) 205-224.
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