



Title: Intensive Intervention Programs for Children with Autism

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Reference: February 2001, ISBN 1-896956-40-8, full text downloadable www.ahfmr.ab.ca

Aim:

To review the published research on the effectiveness of intensive intervention programs for children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Results and Conclusions:

Three critical reviews of intensive intervention programs for autism by ECRI, BCOHTA, and Smith were summarized. Of the three reviews, the one by ECRI was the most inclusive, analyzing studies on Lovaas therapy, TEACCH, the Rutgers Program, the Denver Program, LEAP, and the Autism Preschool Program. All critical reviews analyzed studies on Lovaas therapy and concluded that these studies were methodologically flawed. The outcome measurement instruments used in all of the studies assessed in the critical reviews were similar. Most researchers employed standardized measures of IQ tests, adaptive functioning, and language development.

Insufficient evidence is available to establish a relationship between the amount (intensity and duration) of any intensive intervention treatment program and outcome measures (intelligence tests, language development, adaptive behavior tests). It appears that children improve in functioning with intensive intervention programs, but it remains to be determined if any one program is more effective than another.

Recommendations:

Well-designed research studies using multiple independent measures are required. Optimal intensity and duration of intensive intervention programs for children with ASD remain to be determined through well-designed studies. Studies on the impact of these interventions on family members would also be useful to identify appropriate 'system changes' that would enhance quality of life for both the family members and the child with ASD.

Methods:

In light of recent work, it was decided to select and summarize published critical reviews. Systematic searches for critical reviews were conducted via MEDLINE, PreMEDLINE, Best Evidence, CINHAL, HealthSTAR, EMBASE, ERIC database, PsycINFO, HTA, EED, DARE, Cochrane, ISTAHC, CMA practice guideline, US National clearinghouse, and ECRI. In addition, a listing of outcome measures from the primary studies included in these critical reviews is detailed in relation to the validity and reliability of the measures.