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## Early intervention for children with autism improves I.Q., language and social skills

Early intervention for children with autism, as young as 6 months of age, may change the development trajectory for later symptoms of the disorder according to a research project being spearheaded by the MIND Institute at the University of California Davis Medical Center. A recent study published by Pediatrics recorded randomized trials of daily therapy through games and pretend play for children, which demonstrated an improvement in I.Q., language and social skills.

*“Early therapeutic intervention is the first thing a parent needs to do as soon as the first signs of autism emerge”*

Symptoms of autism often include lack of eye contact, not smiling, minimal babbling and little interest in social interaction. Simple games like peek-a-boo, patty-cake and other interactive activities can help increase an autistic child’s development and may even prevent latent symptoms of autism from evolving. The New York Times quotes David Mandell, Associate Director of the Center for Autism Research at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia as saying “what you ultimately might be doing [through early intervention] is preventing a certain portion of autism from ever emerging.”

“Early therapeutic intervention is the first thing a parent needs to do as soon as the first signs of autism emerge,” says Britt Collins, M.S, OTR/L at Salem Hospital Regional Rehabilitation Center in Salem, Oregon and co-author of Sensory Parenting. “Parents also have to follow through at home on a daily basis for early intervention to be most effective and impact future intensified signs or symptoms.”

Play serves as a vital medium for therapeutic interventions, like occupational therapy and language therapy, for children with autism since it draws them out and gives a medium to practice newly acquired skills with peers.

“Activities that elicit interaction - the laughter, smiles, and sparkling eyes that tell us that the child is connected to his world - are activities that enable the child to function more as a child, and less as a child with autism,” says Goldie E. Grossman, Ed.D, Director of Educational Support Team at Hillel Yeshiva in Ocean, NJ. “Intervention should be fun, light-hearted, and even silly.”

Toys and games support therapeutic play. “We established Fun and Function ([www.funandfunction.com](http://www.funandfunction.com)) to give parents and therapists the best play tools for children with autism and special needs. The progress is dramatic when children have fun learning language and social skills, developing sensory awareness, and strengthening movement,” says Aviva Weiss, Founder of Fun and Function and pediatric occupational therapist. “Our passion is helping each child achieve his or her potential, using play at every stage.”

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