

Guide to Early Intervention Approaches and Programs

Please note that the approaches and programs covered below are based on what is generally available in NSW and based on the HCWA Early Intervention Table http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/disability-and-carers/hcwa_tables.pdf . Please note: not all programs are listed.

Early Intervention Approaches

In order to understand how different therapy programs compare to each other it is helpful to consider the early intervention approaches they generally fit into.

Behavioural

This approach is based on the learning theory that behaviour is shaped by antecedents (triggers) and reinforcement. This is a highly structured, adult-led approach using direct teaching principals. Observable and specific goals are used to allow data collection and progress monitoring.

Combined approaches

Some programs have been developed using principals from both the behavioural approach and social/developmental approaches.

Social/Relationship/Developmental

Often the terms developmental, social, and relationship approaches are used interchangeably. These approaches are generally play based and taught in the child's natural environment. While adults play an integral part in these approaches they do not actively structure or lead the learning opportunity.

Early Intervention Programs

The following programs are colour coded to show into which approach they fit best. Some therapists and services will offer the complete programs outlined below. Many will offer therapy that uses elements of these specific programs. You can talk to your therapists about which programs they use and how they follow them. You will find more detailed descriptions below.

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

Early Start Denver Model (ESDM)

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children)

Building Blocks (following Aspect's Comprehensive Approach)

SCERTS (Social-Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support)

DIR/Floortime (Developmental, Individual Difference, Relationship-Based Model)

RDI (Relationship Development Intervention)

Behavioural

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

An ABA program can help children improve their social, communication, academic, and daily living skills, and can also help decrease challenging behaviours. An ABA approach involves breaking down complex skills or behaviours into smaller steps and teaching them through the use of clear instructions, rewards and repetition. ABA programs are highly structured and time-intensive, generally involving upwards of 20 hours of one-on-one therapy with the child per week.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

PECS provides an alternative means of communication for children who have limited verbal language. It is a systematic process that begins with teaching a child to exchange a single symbol (pictures) for a preferred item. This exchange process is then developed to enable a child to discriminate between symbols and make more complex communication acts such as asking and answering questions, or commenting. Symbols can be combined to make simple sentences. Parents can be trained to use this program at home but it is often delivered/managed by a Speech Pathologist.

Combined

Early Start Denver Model (ESDM)

ESDM promotes learning through play in natural routines in combination with structured teaching techniques associated with behavioural therapies. Positive adult affect is used to build relationships and to increase learning opportunities. This approach also aims to develop play skills and language. ESDM is carried out in one to one therapy sessions, preschool settings, and with parents at home.

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children)

TEACCH is an intensive intervention program to promote learning and development - in particular, in the areas of communication and social skills, independence, coping skills and skills for daily life. Children are supported by creating a very structured learning environment.

Building Blocks (following Aspect's Comprehensive Approach)

This is a comprehensive family centred early intervention service, delivered by a team of Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Special Education Teachers and Psychologists who adhere to a transdisciplinary framework. The goal of the program is to develop the family's capacity to meet their child's daily needs by building foundations in areas such as social interactions, communicating, behaviour, play, self- help skills and community access.

SCERTS (Social-Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support)

The SCERTS model is used to teach children how to regulate their emotions and communicate with others. SCERTS concentrates on three key areas: social communication, emotional regulation, and transactional support (providing helpful aids to communication and learning). The model incorporates aspects of different well-established autism therapies, in an individualised program designed by parents and the child's therapist.

Social/Relationship/Developmental

DIR/Floortime (Developmental, Individual Difference, Relationship-Based Model)

This approach focuses on promoting development by encouraging children to interact with parents and others through play. It is thought that this interaction will help children reach milestones in their emotional development. DIR/Floortime has several parts, including assessment, home interactions, educational interactions, play dates and specific therapies. DIR/Floortime is usually delivered by parents. They are usually helped by a DIR/Floortime certified professional, who develops and oversees the program. Other professionals provide specific therapy services.

RDI (Relationship Development Intervention)

This is a parent-led approach that focuses on teaching children how to develop social competence and successful relationships. Through the RDI program, parents are trained in techniques and strategies that make use of everyday activities to support the child's social development. Parents work with a consultant trained in the approach.

Parent Training programs

There are parent training programs available that also use the principals of these approaches

Social/Relationship/Developmental

Hanen

These are family-centred training programs that aim to promote communication skills in children by educating parents. The training programs are also designed to provide social support to parents. The programs are run by Hanen-certified Speech Pathologists and consist of three main parts: initial assessment, group training program and video feedback sessions. There are two programs that are relevant to children with autism:

Hanen 'More than Words'

Parents learn techniques to encourage their child to communicate as part of daily life at home. This is aimed at children who have limited or no verbal language.

Hanen 'Talkability'

This program teaches parents practical strategies to help their child learn "people skills". These skills include the ability to "tune in" to the thoughts and feelings of others by paying attention to non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, eye gaze, and tone of voice. This is aimed at children with verbal language skills.

Information contained in this booklet has been taken from:

Raising Children Network www.raisingchildren.net.au

Autism Spectrum Australia www.autismspectrum.org.au

The Hanen Centre www.hanen.org

Positive Partnerships www.positivepartnerships.com.au