

Remediating Autism Through Relationship

RDI Utilizes the Latest Research

Over the past 20 years, we have used the latest research to put many parts of the 'autism puzzle' together:

Those with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome and PDD-NOS do not have a behavioral or social disorder, but a neurologically based **information-processing disorder**.

The specific information-processing disorder (ASD) has a profound effect on the internal and external relationships of those on the spectrum. This has a devastating effect on their motivations and abilities for friendships, employment and independence, regardless of IQ, language abilities or academic achievements.

Autism impacts those on the spectrum in specific ways. These **'core deficits'** include the motivation and ability:

- To share experiences
- To co-regulate with others
- To integrate thoughts feelings and meaning to create personal memories productively in the future
- For self-awareness and appraising 'best-fits' between self and environment
- For flexible, +creative thinking and problem-solving

Other approaches developed to treat Autism Spectrum Disorders have not demonstrated an impact on outcomes related to employment, independent living, friendships or marriage. Language and academic skills have never been correlated with improvements in core deficits of Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Relationship Development Intervention Means **Remediation**

To improve the outcome we must specifically target the information-processing deficits. Children on the spectrum can learn and are often very bright or gifted, but can they acquire the motivations and abilities that will help them succeed in real life - outside of school or other institutions? Can we help them learn the foundational success skills that are not measured by IQ tests?

We often take for granted the success skills in typical individuals: enjoying novelty, coping with uncertainty, 'going with the flow', connecting with others, valuing others' feelings, ideas and imagination, being flexible, responsive and adaptable, managing and resolving conflict, seeking out challenges, collaborating with others, taking initiative, being part of a team, assessing situation, seeing the big picture, being resourceful, improvising a solution, finding 'good enough' solutions, being open to feedback and learning from mistakes. To help those on the spectrum lead productive, independent lives these are the kinds of things that must be in a remediation curriculum.

Other therapies attempt to teach social skills as compensation, but studies have shown that the skills do not generalize. In one study, Dr. Simon Baron-Cohen's research team provided instruction in Theory of Mind skills. Their multiple-week course taught a group of intelligent children with autism methods of understanding how other people think and perceive things. After the course, all the children passed a final exam. In theory, they now possessed the skills to go into the world and become more involved in understanding the minds of people around them – literally opening up a whole new universe to them. Yet, as researchers followed up on the children's real-world behavior, they found that they did not act any differently in conversation and were no more curious about

other people's minds than prior to the course.

A Developmental Approach for Developmental Disabilities

The results of Baron-Cohen's study are not surprising when we take into account how children learn. Typically developing children are never taught theory of mind skills in a course with a final exam. They aren't taught to connect with others, value others' ideas or see others' points of view through any lesson plan nor do we ever worry about their relationship skills generalizing outside the classroom. They don't learn to share experiences with others, think, solve problems, become self-aware or create meaningful personal memories through scripts, rules or instructions. ***They learn by engaging in a relationship.***

Typically developing children are not explicitly taught, but do **learn** the foundations of success skills very early in life, even before the development of spoken language. Their learning happens in the real world, from parent to child, through their active engagement with each other. This learning would not be possible without the interpersonal relationship to guide their development. However, those on the autism spectrum have a neurological vulnerability that causes them to leave the path of typical development (most often before 9 months). The parent-child feedback system then breaks down and the child's development spirals away from typical development, depriving them of the very relationship that is the true gateway to complex cognitive, emotional and social functioning.

RDI's remediation approach assesses exactly where the child left the path of typical development, and then to restore the parent-child feedback system so the parent has the opportunity to go back and guide their child through the missing steps in a systematic way. Then, just as in typical development, each small step becomes an experiential building block to the next with new skills emerging without needing to be explicitly taught.



Remediation: Applying a remedy. A gradual, systematic process of correcting a deficit to the point where it no longer constitutes an obstacle to reaching one's potential.

Relationship Developmental Intervention (RDI) is based on the latest scientific research about autism, the brain and developmental psychology. We:

- ❖ Design dynamic, evolving, comprehensive programs with the potential to remediate the core deficits of ASDs and provide the majority of people with ASD an improved quality of life.
- ❖ Provide parents with the tools that give their children opportunities for success and develop the ability for families to independently carry on the process.
- ❖ Help increase the student's motivation to accept challenges and master new, more complex environments.
- ❖ Help students develop the internalized ability to succeed in complex dynamic systems which require continuous information processing
- ❖ Develop the ability for children to independently discover new ways of engaging with their world.

Often described as the missing link in the treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders, RDI offers cognitive-developmental treatment programs that help parents learn how to guide their children to success in genuine give-and-take relationships, while addressing:

- ❖ Motivation
- ❖ Communication
- ❖ Emotional regulation
- ❖ Episodic memory
- ❖ Rapid attention-shifting
- ❖ Self-awareness
- ❖ Appraisal
- ❖ Executive functioning
- ❖ Creative problem-solving

*"We need to realize that one of the most powerful influences on development is what happens **between** people. Or, in the case for autism, that one of the most harmful things that can affect development is when certain kinds of interaction fail to happen between people." Dr. Peter Hobson*

For more information, contact the following RDI professional in your area



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rdiTM
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