

# Early intensive behavioural intervention using the principles of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA).

## **An effective treatment for Developmental Delay?**

The majority of the literature published in relation to treatment of developmental disorders, relates to Autism Spectrum Disorders, specifically.

A smaller stream of literature has assessed the efficacy of treatments for developmental delay, mainly with a focus on reducing maladaptive behaviours that may occur in this population.

A notable study by Roberts and colleagues (2003) concluded that interventions, particularly those that involve parents and are based on applied behaviour analysis techniques, can reduce problematic behaviours in young children with developmental disabilities. Importantly, this reduction may improve cognitive and social function as children are better placed to engage with academic and social pursuits following a reduction in aggression.

A more recent paper by Brosnan and Healy (2011) also reviews literature which suggests that ABA can reduce challenging behaviours for children with a range of developmental disabilities, including intellectual disability.

The literature also notes the importance of providing treatment options that provide ongoing social and emotional support for children with developmental delays and their families.

Webster and colleagues (2008) found that 85% of families with children who had a diagnosis of global developmental delay or language impairment had stress levels that were clinically significant, highlighting the importance of empowering families in interventions for their children.

Further, Roberts et al. (2003) noted that the reduction in problematic behaviours as a result of ABA based interventions was often seen to reduce family stress.

Consistent with the work on autism alone, research finds that for those with intellectual impairment, the impact of behavioural interventions improves with intensity of the intervention (Eldevik, Eikeseth, Jahr, & Smith, 2006) and therefore, is beyond the expectation of informal networks.

Clearly, social and economic goals of an individual are dependent on an ability to manage problematic and aggressive behaviours, and engage socially and academically.

Each of these things have been shown possible via ABA-based interventions for this population.

## **Factors influencing outcomes of ABA based interventions**

As with all ABA interventions, there is a requirement to target the program to the specific needs and goals of the individual, while working within the framework of the theoretical and evidence base provided by the intervention type.

Inclusive Directions is committed to providing interventions for children that are specific and targeted to their strengths and abilities, as well as those skills and behaviours that need to be developed. The packages available at Inclusive Directions are varied as we recognise that each family's needs are different.

Each child coming through our programs is allocated an experienced case manager, who provides initial and ongoing consultation to structure a program specifically for the child's needs and developmental level.

The case manager then continues to provide supervision of the implementation of the program and is able to assist families, and those working with the families, in progressing through programs and challenging areas.

Consistent with research findings that suggest that the impact of behavioural interventions improves with increased frequency, we do recommend that each child does as many hours as possible.

Parental involvement with the program is sometimes able to increase the hours of intervention provided to the child but, in many cases, the number of hours required for therapy is beyond the capacity of the child's informal support networks.

With this in mind, we offer options for parents to access behavioural intervention programs that span periods of 4, 6 and 12 months and are delivered by qualified and experienced therapists. These options also assist parents as they learn and incorporate the ABA techniques into their home routines.

As parental understanding of how the program works and its basic principles increases, the frequency of the program is able to be increased through generalisation across the child's daily activities and environments.

Ultimately, this generalisation ensures that the child progresses as best he or she is able.



## Structured Program for Early Childhood Therapists working with children with Autism (SPECTRA)

Inclusive Directions follows the Structured Program for Early Childhood Therapists working with children with Autism (SPECTRA; Young, Partington & Goren, 2009) which directly targets the skill and abilities found to be deficit in children diagnosed with developmental disorders, such as Global developmental delay and ASD.

In line with evidence regarding improving outcomes (Wallace & Rogers, 2010), it is recommended that SPECTRA be implemented at least 15 hours per week, though recommendations for optimal number of hours are generally around 30 hours per week (Reed, Osborne, & Corness, 2007; Smith, et al., 2000).



It is clear that while the evidence available supports the use of ABA and intensive behavioural interventions to reduce problematic behaviours and improve academic and social outcomes for children with global developmental delay, there remains room for further work in this area.

Inclusive Directions is committed to continuing research to increase the evidence base for interventions for this population, through the provision of a number of packages for children with global developmental delays.

Results to date demonstrate positive outcomes for many of the children involved, in addition to a significant reduction in parental stress following commencement of the program.

Results are currently being disseminated for publication following the cessation of the research study.

## References

### References

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