

Flinders Early Intervention Program

For over 30 years, Inclusive Directions has provided services for children with developmental needs, disability and specialist equipment requirements facilitating their development to reach their full potential.

We are pleased to be able to offer increased supports and services to more South Australian children with a disability and their families through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Since 2003, the Flinders Early Intervention Program has assisted over 300 South Australian children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families.

As parent and caregivers of children with ASD are well aware, ASD is characterised by impairments in social interaction and communication, as well as restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour. These impairments and patterns of behaviour decrease a child's ability to engage and function within mainstream educational and social environments, as well as on a day-to-day basis.

We feel that every child with ASD, regardless of their age or ability, should have the right to access early intervention.

Over the years, a variety of interventions have shown promise for improving symptoms of ASD, however, Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) is the only intervention for children which, to date, has empirical support demonstrating its efficacy (New York State Department of Health Early Intervention Program, 1999).

How does the program work?

Our program provides intensive behavioural intervention using the Structured Program for Early Childhood Therapists working with Autism (SPECTRA). This is based on sound learning theory, known as Operant Conditioning.

Essentially, this is a program of table-based, ABA learning techniques administered by trained and experienced therapists, which target those impairments and patterns of behaviour that characterise ASD.

At the entry level, the behaviours targeted include eye contact, social smiling, response to name, receptive and expressive language skills, pre-academic skills (such as matching and counting), self-help skills, turn-taking and imitation.

What is meant by intensive?

The first two weeks of the program feature daily therapy sessions of approximately three hours, using the table-based, ABA techniques described above, to address key behaviours and skills. This amounts to approximately 15 hours of therapy each week, in line with leading research recommendations.

During these two weeks, skills are taught within an incidental framework, where opportunities to teach the behaviours being targeted are contrived within a structured but fun environment. This approach not only facilitates the generalisation of learned behaviours, but also makes the therapy more appealing for the children.

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What does a typical therapy session look like?

During the intensive phase of the program, a typical therapy session involves a Senior Therapist working with the child on a series of "trials", designed to teach the child critical skills and competencies.

These trials are continued throughout the therapy session, interspersed by break and rest periods, as required.

What happens after the intensive period?

Following the intensive two-week program, our team provide ongoing support for parents for a period of eighteen weeks, as they continue to incorporate the ABA techniques into their home routines.

We can also provide ongoing therapy, to ensure that the progress achieved during the two week intervention can be built upon over time.

As a parent, can I be involved?

We view the partnership between the parents and our team as an essential element of a successful home based program.

As such, a component of the two-week intensive program features parents training as therapists, with specific emphasis on learning techniques for tackling problem behaviours that occur in the home or community setting.

This training is then complimented by the ongoing support and supervision provided during our follow-up period, during which we provide clinical oversight and guidance to assist in the management of challenging behaviours.

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Case Study

Chad* entered the Flinders Early Intervention Program (FEIP) as a five year old with Autism Spectrum Disorder and severe behavioural issues.

Chad's family often experienced frustrated, angry outbursts, resulting in unintended injuries to his mother. Chad's outbursts were so frequent, his brother had taken to wearing a football helmet whilst at home.

Chad's outbursts were also interrupting his schooling and preventing his participation in class.



Upon entering the FEIP, our Senior Therapists worked with Chad's parents to develop a specific program, tailored to his strengths and targeted to address areas of identified need.

This program was then implemented using the table-based, ABA technique for a period of two weeks. This intensive period was followed by 18 weeks of ongoing therapy, support and supervision for parents, to ensure consistent and effective application of ABA techniques.

At the conclusion of Chad's program, his focus and concentration was increased, and his emotional and aggressive outbursts were dramatically reduced.

Today, Chad successfully attends and participates in mainstream Primary School. He enjoys being a part of his family and spends time with his brother, playing and socialising.

Chad and his family continue to use ABA techniques to introduce and master new skills and challenges.

*Chad is a fictional name.

For further information:

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