



KIT "Keeping In Touch" February 2011



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Resource Article

This month's KIT features a how-to article on promoting joint attention in toddlers: "Intervention for Toddlers with Autism: Building on the Parent-Child Relationship to Promote Joint Attention" by Hannah Schertz and Michele Robb. The article addresses the issue of intensity of services for toddlers with autism and in the process gives practical suggestions for intervention.



Schertz and Robb present the story of Ryan, who was diagnosed with autism at 26 months of age. Ryan received early intervention services beginning at 14 months old. By the time he was diagnosed, he was receiving speech, occupational therapy and physical therapy for a total of seven sessions a week and making no progress.

At 33 months old Ryan became one of three children to participate in a very small study on teaching toddlers to engage in joint attention as a precursor to working on language skills. The article describes the program, which teaches joint attention in four phases: focusing on faces, turn taking, responding to joint attention and initiating joint attention. The

program is taught to parents in weekly visits, which include a review of parents' daily notes, observation of a weekly video of a parent-child interaction and discussion

of activity plans for the next week. Parents take the responsibility of choosing and conducting the daily activities. None of the activities addressed teaching the child to talk.

The outcome of the study for Ryan was that he not only learned to participate in and initiate joint attention, he also began to repeat words, finish "I want..." sentences and use short phrases. He was one of two out of the three children in the study who learned to engage in joint attention. The outcome of the study for his mother was, as she states, "I have been given the chance to stop being merely a case manager for Ryan's services." "I am a person now. Better yet, I am Mommy again."

The article gives very practical information for working with parents on teaching joint attention to their children. And, as the author points out, "This approach stands in contrast to more structured, expert-implemented approaches that target isolated skills." For this author, working with parents is the essence of early intervention and she gives the reader some excellent suggestions on how to do that.

Schertz, H. & Robb, M. (2006). Interventions for toddlers with autism: Building on the parent-child relationship to promote joint attention. *Young Exceptional Children*, 9(3) p. 20-27.

On the WWW



The website South African Speech Language Hearing Association www.saslha.co.za provides a link to an interesting PowerPoint presentation entitled, *Joint Attention – a Pivotal Skill in Early Social Understanding* by Sue Rumble from the University of Stellenbosch. The PowerPoint is an informative presentation on the development of joint attention. It explains that joint attention: (1) typically develops between 9-12 months; (2) is not simply looking at the same thing at the same time, but instead a shared intentional focus/reference; (3) is the basis for social referencing; and (4) provides shared experience for language acquisition. It also touches on theory of mind, concerns for the lack of/delayed joint attention (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder), and simple ways to promote joint attention.

To access the presentation click on the hyperlink below.

[Joint Attention - Sue Rumble](#)

What Do the Data Say?

How early can differences between typically developing children and children later diagnosed with autism be identified?



To explore this question we look to the work of Julie Osterling and Geraldine Dawson. Osterling and Dawson (1994) analyzed the videotapes of 22 children's first birthday parties. Eleven of the children were typically developing and 11 were later diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In the review of the videotapes, the researchers discovered that children later diagnosed with ASD showed little or no joint attention behaviors such as pointing, vauge-pointing, or showing an object to another. Yet, the typically developing children all demonstrated these skills. The children with ASD also failed to orient to their name being called more often than their typically developing peers.

In a subsequent study (2000) these researchers along with Emily Werner and Nuhad Dinno conducted a downward extension of the study by examining earlier videotapes from the original sample as well videotapes of infants, 4 typically developing and 4 later diagnosed with an ASD. The results of this study suggested that signs of ASD may be detected as early as 8-10 months of age.

Autism is not diagnosed during the first year of life. However, these studies show the possibility that children with ASD may in fact behave differently from typically developing even as early as infancy.

Osterling, J. & Dawson, G. (1994). Early recognition of children with autism: A study of first birthday home videotapes. *Journal of Autism and Developmental disorders* 24(3). Accessed February 2011 from <http://depts.washington.edu/uwautism/research/publications.html>

Werner, E., Dawson, G., Osterling, J., & Dinno, N. (2000). Brief report: Recognition of autism spectrum disorder before one year of age: A retrospective study based on home video tapes. *Journal of Autism*

and *Developmental Disorders*, 30(2).
Accessed February 2011 from
<http://depts.washington.edu/uwautism/research/publications.html>

Consultation Corner



From February through July 2011, we are excited and honored to have Dr. Hannah Schertz from Indiana University in Bloomington as the KIT consultation corner expert addressing the topic *Understanding and Facilitating Joint Attention in Young Children*.

Hannah Schertz, Ph.D., is a member of the Special Education faculty at Indiana University in Bloomington. In addition to teaching and research responsibilities, she is developing an online graduate certificate program in autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Dr. Schertz coordinated early intervention and other programs in South-central Indiana from 1979 to 2005. Between these two positions, she taught in and coordinated the Early Childhood Special Education master's program at the University of Northern Colorado.

Dr. Schertz has nurtured a longstanding interest in young children with ASD and their families. She is wrapping up a three-year multi-site research grant, funded by Autism Speaks, to study a parent-mediated intervention model for toddlers with ASD and their parents. This developmentally oriented intervention is designed to build preverbal social communication competency through the parent-child relationship. Related to her interest in young children with ASD, she served as lead editor for the *Young Exceptional Children Monograph No. 12: Supporting Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Families*.

Continuing Education for KIT Readers



The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) is offering a continuing education opportunity for KIT readers.

In line with the focus on *Understanding and Facilitating Joint Attention in Young Children*, readers are invited to receive continuing education contact hours for reading the monthly KIT publications (February through June) and completing a multiple-choice exam about the content covered in these KITs.

If you are interested, take the exam online at www.edis.army.mil and upon successful completion, you will receive a certificate of non-discipline specific continuing education contact hours.

Please send your Consultation Corner questions and KIT ideas via email to ediscspd@amedd.army.mil

