

## Enhancing Social Engagement & Communication for Very Young Children with Autism



## Best Practices for Very Early Intervention in ASD:

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can be accurately identified as early as 18 months, and using early intervention (EI) practices that are developmentally appropriate for very young children with ASD is essential during this critical period. This brief summarizes a recent article\* providing an overview of EI practices for very young children with ASD that enhance communication and promote social interaction. Practical EI strategies based on this information are provided.

### Article Summary:

In their recent article, Schreibman and colleagues discuss a set of common intervention practices that can be used to successfully support the development of very young children with ASD. Collectively referred to as a Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention (NDBI) approach, these practices enhance child learning by increasing opportunities for social communication and shared engagement between a child and their adult partner. Techniques to do this include:

- 1) Using activities that the child enjoys and finds motivating
- 2) Selecting developmentally appropriate and child specific learning targets
- 3) Building of skills from simple to more complex
- 4) Practicing skills across a range of learning environments and with multiple people

When used by trained professionals or by a child's caregiver, the NDBI approach to practice successfully supports young learners in clinics, schools, and homes. These strategies can be effectively implemented by a range of people and across multiple environments to support the development of young children with ASD.

### Practical Strategies:

- Following the child's lead
  - Allow the child to choose what to play with, how to play with it, and how long to play with it
  - Imitate the child's actions as he or she plays
  - Use 2-3 word phrases to describe the play
- Transforming common daily activities into motivating 'play' routines
  - Incorporate the use of songs or consistent phrases when completing daily routines or transitions
  - Position yourself so the child can easily see your face during the interaction
  - Take turns completing steps during routines (preparing meals, dishwashing, brushing teeth)
- Building new skills
  - Use materials that are preferred and motivating
  - Teach in natural environments
  - Reinforce approximations and attempts by allowing immediate access to requested object or activity
  - Use simple, clear, and consistent language when asking the child to do something
  - Intersperse easier already mastered tasks with more difficult new tasks
- Generalizing new skills
  - Practice mastered skills in new environments and with new people
  - Incorporate newly learned language and/or gestures into other routines
  - Demonstrate new ways to play with preferred toys (using blocks as telephones)

\*Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions: Empirically Validated Treatments for Autism Spectrum Disorder. Schreibman et al., 2015, JADD