

Effective Treatments for Autism

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While there is much controversy over the cause of autism, there have been remarkable advances in its treatment. In fact, study upon study shows that behavioral treatments rooted in applied behavioral analysis (ABA) yield significant positive results. In addition, the synergistic application of behavioral and medical treatments may allow children to acquire skills more rapidly, achieve more frequent positive outcomes, and actually lose their diagnosis of autism and be deemed recovered.

ABA now is the most recognized and scientifically supported treatment for autism. By changing the antecedents and consequences of behaviors symptomatic of autism, ABA specialists teach children the skills in which they are delayed, thereby replacing challenging and aberrant behaviors with functional and adaptive skills.

Research has shown that with early intensive ABA therapy, 47 percent of children with autism fully recover and lead healthy, happy lives. Many more show significant improvements in communication, skill acquisition and reduction of problematic behaviors. Sadly, delay in diagnosis and limited funding for this therapy have prevented most children from receiving this type of care. With the precipitous rise in the number of cases, there are long waiting lists for the most experienced therapists.

There is a strong body of evidence supporting a biomedical cause in the onset of autism. The dramatic rise in the incidence of autism in the last decade, without any concordant change in the diagnostic criteria, points toward environmental triggers playing a role in the genesis of the disorder. Many experts feel that exposure to toxins, along with the effect of certain medicines and an intense vaccination schedule on the immune system, can trigger a destructive cascade affecting crucial metabolic pathways.

This cascade can result in significant immune and gastrointestinal symptoms and in turn can affect the way the brain functions.

Biomedical interventions that show promise may include ridding the body of poisons, lowering inflammatory states, reducing oxidative stress and normalizing the immune system. Functional interventions may include dietary therapies, nutrient support to help rebuild the body's gastrointestinal, immune and metabolic pathways, and detoxification of heavy metals.

These therapies can lead to a dramatic reduction in autistic and neurobehavioral symptoms. The outcome is children who are mainstreamed educationally and socially. While there still is a need for further research to verify the benefits of these biomedical treatments, many clinicians and parents have reported astounding results.

With early, intensive ABA and comprehensive biomedical treatments, children affected by autism can lead fulfilling, productive lives. Linking families and treatment experts through effective and early diagnosis, improved funding channels, community involvement and increased access to resources is key to facilitating these relationships and bringing hope to thousands of families.

Doreen Granpeesheh received her Ph.D. in psychology from UCLA and is licensed by the Medical Board of California and the Texas State Board of Psychologists. She is a psychologist and board certified behavior analyst, and has been providing behavioral therapy since 1979. In 1990, Granpeesheh founded The Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD) and through its 17 offices worldwide, has provided diagnosis, assessment and behavioral treatment for over 5,000 children with autism and related disorders.