

ABSTRACT – PLAY Project

“The PLAY Project Home Consultation Intervention Program for Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Randomized Controlled Trial” (2010-2013)

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This three-year multi-site randomized controlled trial showed improvements in both parent-child interaction and autism symptomology. The study focused on the impact of PLAY Project autism intervention: a parent-mediated play and relationship focused program.

Objective: Evaluate the effectiveness of the PLAY Project Home Consultation (PLAY) model, in combination with usual community services (CS), to improve parent-child interaction and autism symptomatology in young children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) compared to CS only.

Methods: Children (N=128) with ASD, 2 years-8 months to 5 years-11 months, recruited from five disability (Easter Seals) agencies in four U.S. states, were randomized in two one-year cohorts. Using videotape and written feedback within a developmental framework, PLAY consultants coached caregivers monthly for 12 months to improve caregiver-child interaction. CS included speech/language and occupational therapy and public education services. Primary outcomes included change in: parent and child interactions; language and development; and autism-related diagnostic category/symptoms. Secondary outcomes included parent stress and depression; and home consultant fidelity. Data were collected pre and post intervention.

Results: Using intent-to-treat (ITT) analysis, large treatment effects were evident for parent and child interactional behaviors on the Maternal and Child Behavior Rating Scales. Child language and developmental quotient did not differ over time by group. PLAY children improved in diagnostic categories on the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS). PLAY caregivers’ stress did not increase; depressive symptomatology decreased. Home Consultants administered the intervention with fidelity.

Conclusions: PLAY intervention demonstrated substantial changes in parent-child interaction without increasing parent stress or depression, although child developmental and language outcomes were not affected. ADOS findings must be interpreted cautiously as results do not align with clinical experience. PLAY offers communities a relatively inexpensive, effective intervention for children with ASD and their parents.

Summary of findings available at www.playproject.org