



THE PLAY AUTISM INTERVENTION PROGRAM – GUIDE FOR PARENTS

What is the PLAY Project?

The PLAY (Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters) Project is an evidence-based autism intervention developed by Rick Solomon MD, a Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrician. The PLAY Project is devoted to helping parents develop a better connection with their child through play, and helping the child improve their language, development, behavior, and social skills. Children do not need an autism diagnosis to benefit from The PLAY Project, any child with delays in communicating and relating can benefit. We watch parents develop a joyous relationship with their child because of the PLAY Project.

The PLAY Project Early Intervention Program offers support and training for families of young children with autism/red flags in the home, clinic, school or TelePLAY setting. We find the home is where the child is most comfortable and acts most naturally. Parents are coached by credentialed professionals to implement methods and techniques that are effective, fun, and useful in day-to-day interactions with their child.

The success of the PLAY Project spans thousands of families all over the world with more than 100 sites in 30 states and 9 countries. PLAY Project Consultants hold degrees in child development fields (e.g. Speech, OT, Psychology, Social Work, or Special Education) and master the PLAY Project intervention through intensive training and supervision by Dr. Solomon and his experienced staff.

Do I need a diagnosis of autism to start the PLAY Project?

Research for The PLAY Project was done with children with an autism diagnosis and their families. However, The PLAY Project model has been successfully used in many settings with children that show red flags for autism or have delays in communicating and relating.

How does the PLAY Project help my child?

You are your child's first and best teacher and you know your child better than anyone else. PLAY Project is considered a parent-implemented autism intervention. The PLAY Project Consultant assesses your child's developmental and behavioral changes at each visit. The assessment is used to develop the child's individualized PLAY Plan: a set of techniques and activities designed to help your child reach these outcomes:

- Increased caregiver/parent and child interaction
- Increased social interaction of child with autism
- Improved social-emotional development of child with autism
- Improved autism-related diagnostic category/symptoms including behavioral compliance.



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Our certified PLAY Project Consultants are specialists in the fields of child development and autism spectrum disorders who are trained to educate, guide, and support you as you learn to nurture your child's social and emotional development, but we consider you, as parents and caregivers, to be the expert on your child.

What is a typical PLAY Visit like?

Your PLAY Project Consultant coaches you in the PLAY Project methods, principles, and techniques so you can help deliver the intervention with your child throughout your everyday interactions. During visits, you and the PLAY Project Consultant work with your child. Siblings and other caregivers are welcome to join in the play-based activities, too. Our Consultants show you practical ways of making every interaction with your child a growing and learning experience. Bath-time, meals, outdoor play: each of these daily routines can be used to help your child build meaningful relationships. To keep your child's autism intervention at the high intensity level, we recommend 2 hours per day of PLAY-time between caregiver and child; this can usually be done in multiple 15-20-minute sessions. Families report that this time is enjoyable and *does* fit into their schedules.

What can I expect at my first PLAY Project visit?

At the first visit, the certified PLAY Project Consultant gets to know you and your family and explains the basic elements of what will occur in future visits and answers your questions. Our PLAY Project Consultants are partners in your child's progress.

We will collect the following information at the first visit:

- Your child's background
- The current services your child is receiving
- Your Consultant may complete formal and informal assessments to establish your child's baseline for autism behaviors and levels of cognitive, language, adaptive, social, and sensory functioning

The interaction between the PLAY Project Consultant and the Caregiver includes:

- A discussion of the PLAY Project intervention & sharing of resources with the family
- A discussion about the PLAY Project consultant's role as your coach



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Establishing a mutual formal agreement detailing the obligations and expectations for both the PLAY Project Consultant and the caregivers.

Next, your PLAY Project Consultant may observe and video record you and your child in natural play for 15 minutes. Beginning at this session or the next, your PLAY Project Consultant will begin coaching and modelling techniques for increasing interaction between you and your child. No special toys are needed.

What are regular PLAY Project Visits like?

In between coaching and modelling, the PLAY Project Consultant will assess your child's progress and video record short playful interactions between you and your child. This regular video analysis helps the PLAY Project Consultant develop an ongoing PLAY Plan with individualized suggestions and recommendations for you to help your child keep making progress.

What can I expect after each visit?

At the end of each visit, your PLAY Consultant will give you simple, written suggestions that you can begin using with your child immediately. PLAY Consultants review the video with parents (written or live) and update the PLAY Plan to reflect growth and additional suggestions.

How do I get started?

To find a PLAY Project Consultant near you, please visit our website at <https://playproject.org/locations/> and if there is not a provider in your area, you can find a TelePLAY Consultant by visiting <https://playproject.org/teleplay-providers/>.

Is there evidence that the PLAY Project works?

Yes, there is a base of research and evidence for PLAY Project autism intervention. Results from a randomized controlled trial of PLAY Project was published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* in 2014. This large-scale study focused on the impact of PLAY autism intervention: a parent-implemented (a.k.a. parent-mediated) play and relationship focused program. The research study showed the significant improvements below.

Significant improvements in:

- caregiver/parent and child interaction
- social interaction of children with autism
- social-emotional development of children with autism
- autism-related diagnostic category/symptoms including behavioral compliance

Secondary outcomes:

- Improved parent stress and depression; and
- PLAY Project consultant were too true to the model (showed fidelity).

Additional Evidence for PLAY Project Autism Intervention

The PLAY Project early intervention program reduces autism symptomology and improves social impairment, a core deficit of children with autism.

The principles, methods, and techniques of the PLAY Project were developed on evidence-based practices in autism early intervention. For example, PLAY Project addresses the following:

- Use of a parent-mediated model for ASD (Wong C, Odom S, Hume K, Cox, et al, 2013)
- Meets the National Research Centers standards for intensive early intervention (2001)

How does ABA differ from the PLAY Project?

There are similarities and differences between ABA and the PLAY Project. The most important considerations are that they both are evidenced-based, and both meet the requirements for an intensive autism intervention according to the National Research Council (2001). PLAY and ABA are complementary because they address different and equally important aspects of what the child with ASD needs. Many children can benefit from receiving both types of intensive intervention and PLAY Project is a great way to get started with autism intervention while on waiting lists for additional services including ABA.

PLAY Project results in improved social interaction, a skill necessary for all others including educational readiness. Therefore, when the child has reached a certain level of social and language development, we recommend adding ABA to strengthen skills and get ready for school.

Comparison of Developmental and Behavioral Approaches		
Area	Developmental & Behavioral PLAY Project	Behavioral ABA
Parent Role	Parents as the expert; helping the child as a PLAY partner and being coached by professionals	Parents often not involved in direct ABA services
Emphasis	Social interaction	Educational readiness
Initiation	Child Initiated	Program Initiated
Philosophy	Follow child's readiness	Meet Program Goals
Structure	Strategic and Flexible	More Highly Prescribed
Intensity	15-20 hours/week, 1 on 1 focus on social interaction	20-40 hours per week, 1 on 1, focus on gaining skills
Interaction	Playful, social interaction	Task lists and checklists
Environment	More Naturalistic	More Controlled
Generalization to Other Settings	Early Generalization Common	Later Generalization Typical
Outcome	Relationship, Social Skills Language and Feelings	Competence in Varied Skills especially cognitive & Academic

What are the best resources for understanding the PLAY Project approach?

- *The Welcome to The PLAY Project Introductory online course* is a great introduction to the PLAY Project.
- *The PLAY Project Parent Guide* is a comprehensive manual of PLAY Project methods, principles, techniques, activities & so much more!
- *The above resources and a variety of online courses, webinars, blogs and free downloads for parents can be found at The PLAY Project PLAY Store:* <https://playproject.org/playstore/>