

Families Supporting Early Communication of Toddlers with ASD: Joint-attention Mediated Learning Intervention

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Difficulties in social communication is a defining characteristic of autism. It is often first seen in the delays in establishing joint attention between very young children with ASD and their caregivers. Joint attention is an early communication skill that typically emerges during the second year of life and is a precursor for verbal communication. In the Joint Attention Mediated Learning Project (JAML), developers designed a home-based, parent-implemented intervention based on the principles of mediated learning established by Feuerstein and Pnina Klein from Israel. During weekly home visits across an 8-month period, JAML coaches introduce to parents four early communication skills: focusing on faces, turn taking, responding to joint attention, and initiating joint attention. With coaching, the parents developed strategies that focus on those skills during play time with their toddlers and then plan ways in which communication opportunities can occur during regular routines during in the home and community. In a recent experimental study, the JAML intervention had a significantly positive impact on joint attention that maintained six month after the intervention ended. Examples of parents' facilitation of joint attention skills and data on the effects of the intervention will be provided.