

RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION

CHARACTERISTICS OVERVIEW CHART

Verbal Skills	Grade Levels	Cognitive Level	Areas Addressed
<input type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mixed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Verbal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PK <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elementary <input type="checkbox"/> Middle/High	<input type="checkbox"/> Classic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High Functioning	<input type="checkbox"/> (Pre)Academic/Cognitive/Academic <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptive Behavior/Daily Living <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Behavior <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communication/Speech <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Emotional

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Individuals with autism (AU) demonstrate developmental impairment in social relationships, behavior, communication, and/or intelligence. Relationship Development Intervention (RDI) is a parent-based, cognitive-developmental approach that can be used to address these challenging areas.

DESCRIPTION

The purpose of RDI is to improve social-emotional, cognitive, and functioning abilities. As such, the main intervention agents are parents or caregivers. Through workshop sessions, primary caregivers are trained to implement strategies, including joint attention, conjoint pretend play skills, social communication, and functional and adaptive behaviors. With RDI, children with autism learn as their parents provide continuous and daily opportunities to use social-emotional and social-cognitive skills.

To date, few empirical studies have investigated the effectiveness of RDI in children with autism. However, according to the author of the curriculum, the positive findings of the one published study suggest a potential direction for future research (Gutstein, Burgess, & Montfort, 2007).

The RDI program has six over-arching goals: Stage 1 – Emotion Sharing; Stage 2 – Referencing; Stage 3 – Coordinating Actions; Stage 4 – Variations; Stage 5 – Reversals and Transformations; and Stage 6 – Co-Regulation. Child and adolescent participants in the RDI program pass through six levels and 24 stages.

Levels of the RDI Program	
Level	Brief description
1. Novice	The main goal of this level is to develop emotion sharing, a reciprocal system of face-to-face sharing of excitement and joy. Critical to emotion sharing is seeking information from another person.
2. Apprentice	The apprentice learns that change occurs, adaptation is necessary, and that it is essential to communicate as an equal partner.
3. Challenger	The individual learns to collaborate, improvise, and work cooperatively with others.
4. Voyager	The main goals for this level are the sharing of perceptions, points of view, and imagination.
5. Explorer	The main goal of this level is sharing diverse ideas.

Note: Adapted from Gutstein and Sheely (2002a, 2002b)

RDI is a training model that includes features designed to be less intrusive. The intervention may be implemented in multiple settings where the child’s life experiences take place. Parents or caregivers are able to give immediate response in the most natural environment when using RDI. In addition, this intervention empowers parents to model various experience-sharing abilities in a socially meaningful way.

STEPS

Gutstein, Burgess, and Montfort (2007) outline the following training steps of RDI:

1. *Parent or caregiver training.* Parents or caregivers attend six days of intensive workshops regarding the theory, principles, and components of RDI.
2. *Consultation meeting.* Following the training sessions, parents plan regular weekly or biweekly meetings with a certified RDI consultant. Meetings address goal setting, program planning, and progress updates.

3. *Parent-child re-evaluation.* Parents and their children both participate in re-evaluation every six months to monitor and adjust intervention.

BRIEF EXAMPLE

Tina is a 9-year-old girl in inclusive educational settings with pull-out services. She demonstrates common core challenges of autism in language use, social interaction, and adaptive behavior. In order to enhance Tina's social-cognitive abilities, her parents decided to adopt RDI. Therefore, they went to RDI training sessions and learned how to demonstrate experience-sharing skills.

At home and other family events, Tina's parents focused on sharing attention, social communication, and explaining social meanings. They took notes of Tina's progress and concerns; sometimes they brought videotapes to the meetings with the RDI consultant. During these regular meetings, they discussed future goals and possible activities for improving Tina's social skills.

TIPS FOR MODIFICATION

Since RDI is a parent-based approach, it allows for flexible modification of interventions when an unpredictable situation occurs. Through multiple and frequent opportunities, the child learns to respond in more flexible and adaptive ways. For instance, turn-taking skills may be trained during regular family time at home or be modified in content for community events or other social activities.

SUMMARY

RDI focuses on creating multiple and frequent opportunities for children with AU to establish social-emotional and social-cognitive abilities. All the target trained skills may be built into the child's daily routine and life experiences.

RESEARCH TABLE

Number of Studies	Ages (year)	Sample Size	Area(s) Addressed	Outcome
1	2-8	16	Experience sharing, reciprocal communication, functional behaviors, flexible and adaptive behavior	+

STUDIES CITED IN RESEARCH TABLE

1. Gutstein, S. E., Burgess, A. F., & Montfort, K. (2007). Evaluation of the Relationship Development Intervention program. *Autism, 11*, 397-411.
This study examined the effectiveness of RDI with 16 children with autism. This five-year-long intervention resulted in positive change in flexibility and educational placement. Children were reported to be more socially engaged with more reciprocal communication, better functioning, and more flexible behaviors.

REFERENCES

- Gutstein, S. E., Burgess, A. F., & Montfort, K. (2007). Evaluation of the Relationship Development Intervention program. *Autism, 11*, 397-411.
- Gutstein, S., & Sheely, R. (2002a). *Relationship development intervention with young children: Social and emotional development activities for Asperger Syndrome, autism, PDD, and NLD*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Gutstein, S., & Sheely, R. (2002b). *Relationship development intervention with older children, adolescents, and adults: Social and emotional development activities for Asperger Syndrome, autism, PDD, and NLD*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Relationship Development Intervention:
http://www.autismtaskforce.com/downloads/relationship_development_intervention_april_2007.pdf
This pdf document provides a description of RDI and cites multiple resources.
- Understanding RDI: <http://www.rdiconnect.com/>
The home of RDI, this website offers specific information for families and educators.

- Relationship Development Intervention (RDI). Association for Science in Autism Treatment (ASAT): <http://www.asatonline.org/intervention/treatments/relationship.htm>
- Gutstein, S. (2001). *Solving the relationship puzzle*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons. This book by the author of RDI describes this intervention in detail.
- Gutstein, S., & Sheely, R. (2002a). *Relationship development intervention with young children: Social and emotional development activities for Asperger Syndrome, autism, PDD, and NLD*. London: Jessica Kingsley. This book by the authors of RDI describes this intervention in detail.
- Gutstein, S., & Sheely, R. (2002b). *Relationship development intervention with older children, adolescents, and adults: Social and emotional development activities for Asperger Syndrome, autism, PDD, and NLD*. London: Jessica Kingsley. This book by the authors of RDI describes this intervention in detail.

GENERAL RESOURCES

- Autism Internet Modules (AIM) www.autisminternetmodules.org. The Autism Internet Modules were developed with one aim in mind: to make comprehensive, up-to-date, and usable information on autism accessible and applicable to educators, other professionals, and families who support individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Written by experts from across the U.S., all online modules are free, and are designed to promote understanding of, respect for, and equality of persons with ASD.
- The Autism Web Course: http://cdd.unm.edu/swan/autism_course/about/index.htm. This web course was developed out of materials from the Interactive Collaborative Autism Network (ICAN). The Autism Programs at the University of New Mexico has updated and added information to this web course.
 - Characteristics
 - Assessment
 - Academic Interventions
 - Behavioral Interventions
 - Communication Interventions
 - Environmental Interventions
 - Social Interventions
 - Family Support Suggestions
- Indiana Resource Center for Autism (IRCA) <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/fmain1.html>. The Indiana Resource Center for Autism staff's efforts are focused on providing communities, organizations, agencies, and families with the knowledge and skills to support children and adults in typical early intervention, school, community, work, and home settings.
 - IRCA Articles: <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/index.php?pageId=273>

- Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism www.txautism.net. The Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism in conjunction with the network of Texas Education Service center with a grant from the Texas Education Agency has developed a series of free online courses in autism. Please check the training page, www.txautism.net/training.html, for update lists of courses, course numbers and registration information. Current courses include the following:
 - Asperger Syndrome 101
 - Augmentative and Alternative Communication and the Autism Spectrum
 - Autism for the General Education Teacher
 - Autism 101: Top Ten Pieces to the Puzzle
 - Classroom Organization: The Power of Structure for Individuals with ASD
 - Communication: The Power of Communication for Individuals with ASD
 - Futures Planning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - Navigating the Social Maze: Supports and Interventions for Individuals with ASD
 - Solving the Behavior Puzzle: Making Connections for Individuals with ASD