

National Standards Project

ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS



The National Autism Center announces the completion of the National Standards Project and the publication of the National Standards Report.

The National Standards Project answers one of the most pressing public health questions of our time—how do we effectively treat individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)?

The National Autism Center launched the project in 2005 with the support and guidance of an expert panel composed of nationally recognized scholars, researchers, and other leaders representing diverse fields of study. The culmination of this rigorous multi-year project is the National Standards Report, the most comprehensive analysis available to date about treatments for children and adolescents with ASD.

Families, educators, and service providers are constantly bombarded by a massive amount of confusing and often conflicting information about the myriad treatments available. The National Standards Report will help reduce the resulting turmoil and uncertainty by addressing the need for evidence-based practice standards and providing guidelines for how to make treatment choices.

The primary goal of the National Standards Project is to provide critical information about which

treatments have been shown to be effective for individuals with ASD. The project examined and quantified the level of research supporting interventions that target the core characteristics of ASD in children, adolescents, and young adults (below 22 years of age) on the autism spectrum.

This groundbreaking report covers a broad range of applied treatments and identifies the level of scientific evidence available for each. It includes 775 research studies—the largest number of studies ever reviewed. For the first time, families can find specific information about the age groups, treatment targets, and diagnostic populations to which these treatments have been applied.

The National Standards Report will serve as a single, authoritative source of guidance for parents, caregivers, educators, and service providers as they make informed treatment decisions. We are confident that these findings and recommendations will change lives and give hope and direction to people whose lives are touched by autism.

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The National Standards Report

The National Standards Report is the most comprehensive analysis available about treatments for children and adolescents with ASD.

Significant Findings

The findings include the identification of:

- **11 “Established” Treatments:** treatments that produce beneficial outcomes and are known to be effective for individuals on the autism spectrum. The overwhelming majority of these interventions were developed in the behavioral literature (e.g., applied behavior analysis, behavioral psychology, and positive behavior support).
The 11 Established Treatments are: Antecedent Package; Behavioral Package; Comprehensive Behavioral Treatment for Young Children; Joint Attention Intervention; Modeling; Naturalistic Teaching Strategies; Peer Training Package; Pivotal Response Treatment; Schedules; Self-management; and Story-based Intervention Package.
- **22 “Emerging” Treatments:** treatments that have some evidence of effectiveness, but not enough for us to be confident that they are truly effective.
- **5 “Unestablished” Treatments:** treatments for which there is no sound evidence of effectiveness.

There is no way to rule out the possibility these treatments are ineffective or harmful.

The report encourages parents, educators, and service providers to use this information about treatment effectiveness as they make decisions about which treatments to select. It also strongly advises decision-makers to consider other factors in addition to treatment effectiveness, including the judgment and data-based clinical recommendations of qualified professional(s), the values and preferences of the individual with ASD and those who care for him/her, and the capacity of their local schools and/or treatment programs to deliver the treatment correctly.

The project identified significant limitations of current autism treatment research. The National Autism Center is hopeful that the results of the project will encourage the research community to concentrate its efforts and conduct more research in areas that have not been studied adequately. In addition, research on all treatments should be extended to appropriate age groups, treatment targets, and diagnostic populations.

About the National Autism Center

The National Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting effective, evidence-based treatment approaches for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and to providing direction to families, practitioners, organizations, policy-makers, and funders. The Center’s goal is to serve individuals with ASD by responding to the rising demand for reliable information and by providing comprehensive resources for families and communities.