EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICES

How can we achieve the best treatment outcome?
We are doing A — Should we do B?

Many parents of children on the autism spectrum wonder if they are doing the right thing to help their children learn, become independent, and live happy lives. Often, it is difficult to accept that there are no simple answers or magic pills that treat ASD. The lack of answers can leave parents unsure of themselves and what resources to trust.

Evidence based practices (EBP) for individuals on the autism spectrum are therapies and treatments that have gone through rigorous research and review and have been found to be effective for treating individuals on the spectrum. Separating out treatments according to whether or not they are evidence based is one way to choose a treatment from among an ever-growing body of treatments.

It is important to note that not every evidence based treatment works for every child on the autism spectrum, so it is most important to note not only what the treatment does, but who it is designed for, and who can benefit from it.

How is a Treatment Determined to be Evidence Based?

To be considered an evidence based practice, a treatment must have gone through scientifically based research, which is systematic and objective and designed to further knowledge in the particular field of study.

Scientifically based research:

- Uses thorough, structured, systematic, scientific, experimental methods;
- Makes sure the hypotheses are tested and the results are based on detailed data analyses;
- Has measurements which are tested and retested in multiple ways by
different investigators to be sure the results are applicable;
- Includes an experimental design that is controlled to make sure the experiment is measuring what it is supposed to be measuring;
- Has been reviewed and critiqued by other experts in the field on every level, from design, through implementation to conclusion;
- Has been evaluated by a peer-reviewed journal or panel of experts, using a rigorous, objective, and scientific review; and
- Acknowledges limitations of the treatment, including potential side effects.

In other words, in order for treatments to be recognized as evidenced based, they must “pass the test” by going through a rigorous system of scientific analysis. This helps parents, educators, and experts learn what treatments have been “proven” to work, as opposed to those that may be “fads,” be experimental (and not yet proven), or at the very worst, cause harm to you or your child.

What Treatments are Evidence Based?

If you are not sure how to figure out which interventions have “passed the test” and are considered evidence based, please know that you are not alone! There are several resources that have been developed for parents to help you make an informed decision about choosing the best intervention for your child.

Two independent groups of researchers have studied and evaluated the various treatment options available. They are the National Autism Center and the National Professional Development Center.

In 2005, The National Autism Center developed the National Standards Project to help determine those treatments that have been shown to be effective for individuals on the autism spectrum. A panel of ASD scholars, researchers, and other leaders representing other allied fields of study gathered to develop a comprehensive analysis about treatments for children and adolescents with on the autism spectrum. The summary of their findings is found in the National Standards Project.

In 2007, The National Professional Development Center (NPDC) began a similar project. The NPDC and the National Standards Project had very similar findings and issued similar reports. The NPDC developed evidence based practice (EBP) briefs for all 24 identified evidence based practices, while the National Autism Center divided its report into 3 categories (Established Treatments, Emerging
Treatments, and Un-established Treatments).

Both the National Standards Project and the NPDC project rely on research completed as of 2007. Thus, they do not include research that may support or refute the effectiveness of treatments since that time. The NPDC is in the process of updating its review of treatments to determine if more treatments can now be listed as evidence based.

See the summary sheet for the two projects below:

![Chart showing overlap between evidence-based practices and established treatments.](image)

This chart shows the overlap in findings between the NPDC and the National Standards Project.

Related Articles:

- [How Do I Choose A Treatment?](#)
- [Discrete Trial Training](#)
- [Functional Behavioral Assessment: What Is It?](#)
- [Pivotal Response Treatment ® (PRT)](#)
- [Augmentative and Alternative Communication for Individuals with ASD](#)
- [Picture Exchange Communication System™](#)
- **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)**
- **TEACCH**
- **Parent (Caretaker) Training**

Additional Resources:

- **National Professional Development Center**
- **National Standards Project**
- **Chart Comparing the National Standards Project and the NPDC Project**
- **Evidence-Based Practice Briefs for 2014**

The Center for Autism Research and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia do not endorse or recommend any specific person or organization or form of treatment. The information included within the CAR Autism Roadmap & trade; and CAR Resource Directory & trade; should not be considered medical advice and should serve only as a guide to resources publicly and privately available. Choosing a treatment, course of action, and/or a resource is a personal decision, which should take into account each individual's and family's particular circumstances.