

Interventions based on early intensive applied behaviour analysis for autistic children: a systematic review and cost-effectiveness analysis

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Declared competing interests of authors: none

Published July 2020

DOI: 10.3310/hta24350

Plain English summary

Early intensive applied behaviour analysis for autistic children

Health Technology Assessment 2020; Vol. 24: No. 35

DOI: 10.3310/hta24350

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Plain English summary

Autism is a lifelong condition that affects how people understand the world and interact with others. Early intensive applied behaviour analysis-based interventions are an approach designed to help young (preschool) autistic children. This approach is often delivered on a one-to-one basis, for 20–50 hours per week, over a period of several years.

This project obtained and analysed the original data from studies of early intensive applied behaviour analysis-based interventions, to determine whether or not these interventions are beneficial. It also investigated whether or not the interventions represent good value for money.

The results suggest that early intensive applied behaviour analysis-based interventions may improve children's intelligence, communication, social and life skills more than standard approaches. However, some results could be inaccurate or incorrect, and there was no evidence about other important outcomes, such as the severity of autism and where children went to school. Most studies lasted for around 2 years, which means that it is not known if early intensive applied behaviour analysis-based interventions have meaningful long-term benefits.

It was not possible to fully assess whether or not these interventions provided value for money, as the benefits of early intensive applied behaviour analysis-based interventions were unclear, although the available evidence suggested that they did not. Early intensive applied behaviour analysis-based interventions may, however, provide value for money if their effects were to last into adulthood, or if receiving early intensive applied behaviour analysis had a large impact on the type of school children attended.

Future studies of early interventions may be helpful, but should consider looking at which components of early applied behaviour analysis-based interventions are the most important, rather than at whether or not they work better than other interventions. Future studies should also follow best current research practice and evaluate outcomes that matter to autistic people and their families.

ISSN 1366-5278 (Print)

ISSN 2046-4924 (Online)

Impact factor: 3.370

Health Technology Assessment is indexed in MEDLINE, CINAHL, EMBASE, the Cochrane Library and Clarivate Analytics Science Citation Index.

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 16/104/15. The contractual start date was in July 2017. The draft report began editorial review in May 2019 and was accepted for publication in December 2019. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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