

I'm interested!

What does research tell us about how interest-based interventions affect the social-communicative behavior of young children with autism spectrum disorders

Researchers at the Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL) evaluated 14 studies of 30 young children with autism spectrum disorders to determine the value of interest-based interventions for promoting the development of the children's social and communicative abilities.

The interest measures used by the investigators in the studies in this synthesis were described as narrow, ritualistic, obsessive, circumscribed, perseverative, or situational interests. Interests were also described and measured in terms of child preferences, choices, or personal interests. The researchers looked for child social-communicative outcomes in four categories: child positive affect, social responses, joint attention, and language.

The findings of the CELL analysis were that interest-based interventions—regardless of whether they are based on a child's personal or situational interests—do have positive effects in terms of the child's social-communicative behavioral outcomes. The researchers found that the interest-based interventions were effective regardless of the children's ages, but that they were most effective for children who were 45 months of age and older. The interventions were similarly effective regardless of the type of settings in which they took place.

These findings are in keeping with other research about the important role interests play in learning for children with and without disabilities. Interests influence how children engage with and interact with adults and peers



which, in turn, affects the development of their ability to communicate and their social skills and competence. A child's interests can be embedded easily in both formal and informal learning activities and opportunities. Giving young children choices among different materials, toys, and activities is one way to access and incorporate interests as part of learning.

This *CELLnotes* summarizes findings reported in Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., & Hamby, D.W. (2012). Effects of interest-based interventions on the social-communicative behavior of young children with autism spectrum disorders. *CELLreviews* 5(6), 1-10.

Acting on the Evidence

Download free, two-page *CELL* practices guides in versions for parents or practitioners at www.earlyliteracylearning.org

Child interests are important building blocks for learning. Using child interests as part of participation in everyday activities is a powerful approach for encouraging a child to learn new skills and competencies. All of the *CELL* practice guides that have been developed for both parents and early childhood practitioners encourage the use of interest-based learning as part of home, community, and classroom activities. The two-page practice guides listed below are available for free download on the *CELL* project web site: www.earlyliteracylearning.org. At this web address you can find multimedia practice guides such as videos that illustrate practices supported by this research.



Especially for PARENTS

Infants:

Fun Games with Sounds
Book Reading Made Fun for All
Playing with Words

Toddlers:

My Turn, Your Turn
Toddler Fingerplays and Action Rhymes
Act Natural

Preschoolers:

Talking and Listening
Adventure in a Box
Alpha Fun

Especially for PRACTITIONERS

Infants:

Literacy-Rich Outings
Infant Scribbling Activities
Games Babies Play

Toddlers:

One at a Time
Hear This
Act Natural

Preschoolers:

A Place to Write
Fun with Letters
Talk Is Fun