



Early Start Denver Model (ESDM)

INFORMATION SHEET



What is the Early Start Denver Model?

The Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) is a comprehensive, evidence-based early intervention approach for young children with autism. The ESDM aims to promote a child's development across all domains, including expressive and receptive language, joint attention, imitation, cognition, play and social skills, and fine and gross motor skills. The ESDM utilises a range of strategies to teach a developmental curriculum to young children with autism in a naturalistic, play-based manner.

The ESDM is based on several models of child development and autism including the Denver Model, contemporary Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), Pivotal Response Therapy (PRT) and models of interpersonal development and social motivation.

In the ESDM, complex behaviours are broken down into discrete teaching steps which are taught in play and social interactions. Multiple skills are targeted in each play period by a trained clinician.



Who developed the ESDM?

The ESDM was developed by psychologists Dr Sally Rogers and Dr Geraldine Dawson at the MIND Institute at the University of California, Davis. The ESDM approach refined and adapted the Denver Model and applied the theory to younger children with autism.

What does the research say?

The ESDM has been researched in several large studies in the United States, China, Italy, and Australia. It is currently one of the few comprehensive early intervention models that has been validated in randomised controlled trials for children as young as 18 months. After receiving intensive therapy, children were found to have made improvements in IQ, adaptive behaviour, communication skills, daily living skills and motor skills. Children with a range of ability levels and learning styles were found to benefit from the approach. Those children with more significant challenges made the most gains over a two-year period.

Additional research is needed to independently replicate these findings and to determine the most important components and required treatment time to gain the most benefit. Studies are currently being conducted in many different countries around the world.

Who is the ESDM suitable for?

The ESDM has been developed to support children diagnosed with or showing early signs of autism from 12 months of age up until age 5.

Who can deliver therapy using the ESDM?

The ESDM is designed to be used in an interdisciplinary way by trained therapists from a range of clinical backgrounds. Therapists complete several structured training units in an online introductory course and face-to-face advanced training. Therapists who are certified ESDM therapists have participated in additional supervised and guided practice to ensure that they are following the ESDM curriculum and using the teaching principles appropriately.

How can I get involved?

CliniKids is currently taking enquiries from families who would like more information about ESDM or who would like to receive ESDM therapy. If you would like to register your interest or access further information, please contact us:

clinkids.reception@telethonkids.org.au or (08) 6319 1133