

JASPER

INFORMATION SHEET



What is the Joint Attention, Symbolic Play, Engagement & Regulation (JASPER) approach?

JASPER is a therapy approach designed for preschool and school aged children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other children who have differences in play and social communication skills. JASPER uses behavioural principles, along with naturalistic strategies, to teach children skills that lay the foundation for social communication. Clinicians work directly with the child through play-based sessions. The intervention involves an initial assessment, followed by 45-60 minute sessions, 1-3 times per week. JASPER is usually delivered as a 'block', meaning it is delivered intensively for a set time period (often three months), rather than the child receiving JASPER on an ongoing basis. The clinician uses strategies including imitating, modelling, adjusting the environment, and expanding on play routines and language to achieve goals.

The four main targets of JASPER are:

- **Joint Attention:** Children with autism often have difficulty coordinating their attention with others to share their experience. These joint attention skills are also linked with language abilities for children with autism, so joint attention skills are modelled and taught directly within JASPER.
- **Symbolic Play:** Play is modelled in different play routines and the aim is to increase play diversity and flexibility.
- **Engagement:** Children are supported to develop and maintain their engagement, as increases in engagement mean more opportunities for social communication and learning. A balance of structure and flexibility is used to extend the child's skills whilst following the child's interests in play.
- **Regulation:** Strategies are used to support the child to remain regulated within the session and are founded in a behavioural approach.



JASPER was developed by Dr Connie Kasari and her research team at the Center for Autism Research and Treatment at the University of California, Los Angeles. Telethon Kids Institute has several staff members trained in JASPER. JASPER therapy is more widely used in the United States (US), including within ongoing research trials. CliniKids is proud to be one of the first organisations in Australia offering this evidence-based approach for children and their families.

What does the research say?

JASPER has been tested both within the Kasari Lab and by independent researchers in randomised controlled trials (RCTs) with children with autism ranging from 12 months to 8 years. Studies around JASPER's efficacy have shown improvements in joint engagement, social communication, and play skills. In the US, the JASPER approach is often used alongside other behavioural interventions. The findings of research into JASPER have been published in peer-reviewed journals, and JASPER was one of two social communication interventions recommended by the UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as evidence based (2013). JASPER continues to be researched across various settings including the home and school. We do not currently have research around the use of JASPER in an Australian context.

Who is JASPER suitable for?

JASPER is suitable for children with a range of play abilities, including children who are at an exploring level of play (e.g., banging, or mouthing toys) to those who can use pretend skills in play (e.g., pretending a block is a piece of food and feeding it to a doll, or role playing). JASPER is suitable for children who are pre-verbal, to those who speak in sentences. JASPER is currently most widely used with children with autism but is also being adapted and researched for use with other clinical populations including Downs' Syndrome. JASPER works on a very specific skill sets (social communication and play) and it is recommended that families with broader needs engage in other therapies alongside JASPER to ensure their child's holistic needs are met.

Who can provide JASPER therapy?

JASPER can be provided by accredited clinicians who have received JASPER training and completed the certification process. Training involves a week of face-to-face intensive training, followed by external evaluation (through video submission) by the program developers to ensure the clinician is delivering JASPER correctly before they are accredited.

How can I get involved?

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

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