



Study: Parents matter most for toddlers with autism

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A new study has found toddlers with autism significantly improve after intensive intervention by their parents and now researchers hope to show kids as young as 12 months can be diagnosed and helped through similar efforts.

“We taught families to work with their children 20 to 25 hours a week in their everyday activities—not only play but also meals and snacks, caregiving, family chores—and taught them how to bring their children into that activity. We also taught them how to go out in the community, how to take the child to a playground, to a grocery store, to a restaurant, and use these strategies,” Amy Wetherby, director of the Autism Institute at Florida State University’s College of Medicine and lead author of the journal, *Pediatrics*, study said in a news release about the study.

“We tried to help parents make interactions fun and fruitful learning moments. But we also taught the parents how to push their child — because their child has autism, and we are finding these children at this very critical moment when their brain is more able to learn. If the parent can start early, then we are more likely to change the child’s trajectory of learning for the rest of their life.”

Even though the American Academy of Pediatrics wants every child screened for autism at 18 and 24 months, without early intervention, early diagnosis does little good, the study found.

“The findings are important because this treatment is viable for any community,” Wetherby said in the news release. “We have early intervention that’s federally and state funded. Now we’ve tested a model that any early intervention system should be able to offer to all families of toddlers with autism. It’s affordable, and it’s efficient in terms of clinicians’ time.”

The FSU Autism Institute’s courses and tools are being distributed by [Autism Navigator](#) to teach early intervention methods to providers, primary care professionals and families.

Researchers at Florida State are now working with Emory University to identify autism and begin intervention in children as young as 12 months.