

## Relationship Development Intervention (RDI™) Program

Efficacy Rating  
Level #4

The RDI™ Program is a remediation program to ameliorate the core deficits of autism and to improve dynamic intelligence. The goal of RDI™ is to improve the quality of life for the person with autism for: independent living, genuine friendships, intimate relationships, marriage and satisfying family life, and to obtain and maintain a satisfying job/career.

### *What is the RDI™ Program?*

RDI™ is a program for educating and coaching parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and others who interact and work with the child. RDI™ is based upon the latest information from developmental psychology and autism research. RDI™ is specifically designed as a program for systematic long-term remediation of the specific deficits which impede people on the autism spectrum from marrying, living independently, contributing to their families, pursuing meaningful careers and developing reciprocally satisfying friendships. It is the mission of those involved in RDI™ to develop methods that allow increasing numbers of individuals on the autism spectrum to attain a quality of life.

RDI™ empowers families. The bulk of resources are invested in preparing parents to act as participant guides, creating daily opportunities for their child to respond in more flexible, thoughtful ways to novel, challenging and increasingly unpredictable settings and problems. Both fathers and mothers are essential participants in the treatment process.

Real-world competence for the child emerges from participating as an active but junior partner (an “Apprentice”), who is carefully guided by parents and other adults to master complex problems and settings, despite increasingly greater levels of uncertainty and unexpected change. Guides help the child capture and stockpile critical memories that build an experiential repository of success in gradually more complex environments. Parents are taught to re-think their daily lifestyle, structuring activities throughout the day to provide safe, but challenging opportunities for discovery.

More information about RDI is available at their web site;  
[www.rdiconnect.com](http://www.rdiconnect.com).

### *Autism as a Deficit in “Dynamic Intelligence”*

In the RDI™ Program, Autism Spectrum Disorders are conceived of as a deficit in “Dynamic Intelligence”. The domains of Dynamic Intelligence that are addressed in the remediation program are identified as five “processes” that research has identified as universal and specific to autism:

- Creative-Flexible Thinking & Problem-Solving
- Dynamic Analysis
- Episodic Memory
- Experience-Sharing
- Self Awareness

**Objective-Based Program:** The RDI™ Program has over 900 Objectives in a web-based “Operating System” for use by parents and RDI™ Program certified consultants for collaborating in treatment together. Objectives are identified and the consultant provides assignments and guidance for the parents in implementing the RDI™ Program in the normal family lifestyle. Extensive video clips are provided in the operating system as examples and resources. Video modeling and demonstration by the consultant are extensively used for feedback about the developing parent-child relationship.

Parent education & training is obtained through intensive 4-day parent training sessions and/or through direct service with an RDI™ Program Certified Consultant working on parent objectives. Child objectives are set through the Relationship Development Assessment (RDA).

Parents engaged in RDI™ overwhelmingly report significant improvement in their own quality of life, as well as the lives of their “non-affected” children. While family is central to the RDI™ model, treatment success also depends upon the commitment of school staff and other professionals to implement essential principles of remediation.

**School-based Support:** Objectives related to improving Dynamic Intelligence are presented to schools in support of the remediation of autism. A “cognitive apprenticeship” methodology is advocated for the school setting in support of the remediation of the core deficits of dynamic intelligence.

The RDI™ Program was developed by Dr. Steven Gutstein and Dr. Rachelle Sheely at the Connections Center in Houston Texas. Over the last ten years it has evolved into a comprehensive psycho-social treatment program for the remediation of autism. The current evolution of the RDI™ Program can be found by registering on the [www.rdiconnect.com](http://www.rdiconnect.com) website.

## Relationship Development Intervention (RDI™) Program References & Resources

Website: [www.rdiconnect.com](http://www.rdiconnect.com)

### References:

- Gustein, S.E. (Winter, 2005) *Relationship Development Intervention: Developing a Treatment Program to Address the Unique Social & Emotional Deficits in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Autism Spectrum Quarterly.
- Gutstein, Steven. (2000). *Solving the Relationship Puzzle*. Future Horizons Inc.
- Gutstein, S.E. & Sheely, R.K. (2002). *Relationship Development Intervention with Children, Adolescents and Teens: Social and Emotional Development Activities for Asperger Syndrome, Autism*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd.
- Gutstein, S.E. & Sheely, R.K. (2002). *Relationship Development with Young Children: Social and Emotional Development Activities for Asperger Syndrome, Autism, PDD, and NDL*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd.
- Gutstein, S.E. & Sheely, R.K. (2002). *Under the Big Umbrella*, Connections Center Publishing, Houston, TX.
- Gutstein, Steven, (2006). *My Baby Can Dance: Stories of Autism, Asperger's and Success through The Relationship Development™ (RDI™) Program*, Connections Center Publishing, Houston, TX.

### Resources:

#### **Parent & Consultant Resources**

Web-Based Resources: Go to the RDI™ Program website <[rdiconnect.com](http://rdiconnect.com)> for:

- Going to the Heart of Autism: The Relationship Development Intervention™ Program DVD, Connections Center Publishing, Houston, TX.
- RDI™ Program Operating System (OS 5.0): Objective-Based Curriculum and Program Planning & Intervention Resources
- Information on 2-Day & 4-Day Parent Training Sessions
- Comprehensive listing (with summaries and critical reviews) of the research literature base for the development of the RDI™ Program.
- Library of video clips of parents and consultants implementing the RDI™ Program that are keyed to program objectives.

#### **RDI™ Program Reading List: Books for Understanding the Foundation of the RDI™ Program:**

- Rogoff, Barbara, *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1990.
- Siegel, Daniel J., *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*. The Guilford Press, New York, NY, 1999.
- Fogel, Alan, *Developing Through Relationships: Origins of Communication, Self, and Culture*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL., 1993.
- Sroufe, L.Alan, *Emotional Development: The Organization of Emotional Life in the Early Years*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1995.
- Hobson, Peter, *The Cradle of Thought: Exploring the Origins of Thinking*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2002.
- Berk, Laura E., *Awakening Children's Minds: How Parents and Teachers Can Make a Difference*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2001.
- Sternberg, Robert J., *Wisdom, Intelligence and Creativity Synthesized*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2003.
- Tomasello, Michael, *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2003.
- Eilan, N., Hoerl, C., McCormack, T. & Roessler, J. (Editors.), *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology* Clarendon Press, Oxford, UK, 2005.
- Rochat, Philippe, *The Infant's World*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2001.
- Stern, Daniel N., *The First Relationship: Infant and Mother*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002.
- Bloom, Paul, *How Children Learn the Meaning of Words*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000.

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