



# Project ImPACT Overview

## What is Project ImPACT?



Project ImPACT is an evidence-based parent-mediated intervention program based on best practices in early intervention.

- Teaches core social communication skills in a developmental framework
- Uses a blend of developmental and ABA teaching strategies within play and daily caregiving routines
- Uses effective parent coaching and engagement strategies to help parents learn and use the intervention
- Includes elements to support community use, including detailed procedures, family-friendly materials, and two flexible delivery models

## Who is Project ImPACT for?



Project ImPACT is for young children with social communication delays, including autism spectrum disorder. It is designed for children up to age six, but may be used for older children with cognitive and language delays.

## How was Project ImPACT developed?



Project ImPACT is the result of over 15 years of research and development. The developers worked together with families, providers, administrators, and experts to ensure that Project ImPACT can be used effectively in a variety of community intervention programs.

## Who can deliver Project ImPACT?



A variety of early intervention professionals - including speech therapists, BCBA's, special educators, social workers, psychologists, and occupational therapists - can coach families effectively in Project ImPACT.

## What can families expect?

Project ImPACT is a 12-week program that can be delivered as an individual or group coaching model. In both models, sessions focus on helping parents learn strategies to teach their child new social communication skills and manage their child's behavior.

- *Individual coaching model:* The parent, child, and coach meet once or twice a week for 60-90 minute sessions for 12 weeks
- *Group coaching model:* The parent attends six, 2-hour parent-only group sessions, and meets with the child and coach for six, 1- hour individual coaching sessions. Group and individual sessions alternate weekly for 12 weeks.
- The coach and parent work together to set child goals, learn and practice, strategies and problem solve
- Between session, parents practice what they learn to teach their child new skills



## What are the benefits of Project ImPACT?

- Children get many more hours of learning and practice, which improves their social communication
- Children learn in meaningful activities, which helps them use skills in new situations and over time
- Parents feel more confident supporting their child's development
- Parents experience less stress and have more positive parent-child interactions



## Frequently Asked Questions

**How can I know if ImpACT will work for my family and my child?** ImpACT uses an individualized approach where your coach works with you to choose social communication goals, strategies, and activities that are most important to you and your family. The strategies are based on a long history of research in child development and ABA. There's a lot of research evidence showing that this program helps children build skills and helps parents feel more confident in addressing their child's needs.

**This sounds like it is a lot of work for me. What if I don't have time to practice?** This approach does require more parent participation than other programs. Your coach will work with you to come up with a plan that works for your family's schedule and routines. The goal is to teach you to use the strategies during activities that you already do with your child every day. Some parents set aside other time to practice at the beginning, but we know this isn't always possible. That's okay. By the end of the program the strategies will be simple to use throughout the day without adding another thing to your list!

**I'm looking for a neurodiversity-affirming approach to intervention. Is Project ImpACT a neuro-affirming practice?** Neurodiversity is a concept that recognizes and values neurological conditions, including autism, as natural variations in brain function rather than solely as disorders that need to be fixed or normalized. Neurodiversity-affirming practices emphasize understanding and supporting children in a way that respects their unique strengths, challenges, and perspectives, and focus on promoting inclusion, acceptance, and accommodations to help them thrive. Project ImpACT incorporates neurodiversity-affirming principles by focusing on skills that naturally lead to learning, social connection, and well-being, promote autonomy, and support coping and self-regulation. In addition, Project ImpACT uses an individualized and strength-based approach, naturalistic intervention strategies, and collaboration with the family to ensure that intervention is tailored to the needs and preferences of the child.

**I was told my child should get ABA. Is this program ABA?** ABA, or applied behavior analysis, is a set of learning principles that guide certain intervention programs. Project ImpACT is a Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention (NDBI), a newer class of interventions which blends learning principles with developmental principles to build social communication throughout play and daily routines. NDBIs have a very strong evidence-base and are considered best practice for young children on the autism spectrum. Project ImpACT was co-developed by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and can be broadly considered ABA – however, since it is a NDBI, it may look quite different from many ABA programs.

**How is Project ImpACT different from (traditional) ABA?** The focus of Project ImpACT is to help children engage and communicate their wants and needs in a way that is understood by others. As the parent, you choose the social communication goals you want for your child with the support of a coach. Project ImpACT uses naturalistic ABA techniques, which means your child begins a teaching episode within the context of play or other daily routine by communicating an interest in something. You then prompt or cue your child to communicate in a slightly more complex way and then reinforce them naturally, by giving them what they ask for. Project ImpACT does NOT use mass trials or discrete trial teaching (DTT), artificial reinforcers, compliance training, punishment or aversives, and does not attempt to suppress non-harmful behaviors (e.g., stimming) that your child may use to self-regulate.

**I think my child needs speech therapy instead of Project ImpACT. What is the difference?** Many of the strategies used in Project ImpACT are similar to those used in speech therapy, since Project ImpACT was co-developed by a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP). Whether you work with an SLP or not, you can learn strategies to help your child communicate from your coach. Your coach can help you decide if work with an SLP is needed to help your child develop other kinds of communication skills.

**What if I think my child needs more intensive services or I like the services I am already getting?** Project ImpACT isn't meant to take away from services that your child needs, but it helps to bring together the most common strategies and skills in a way that works for parents of young children with social communication delays. The program will help your child adjust to the types of strategies used in more intensive center-based programs and help you learn the vocabulary and strategies that are involved in other services. This program is a great way to help you and your child build skills you need to help your child be successful as they grow.

**Are you recommending this program for me because I need to learn how to be a better parent?** This program is not a parenting class. Project ImpACT is a way to give you some strategies to interact a little differently with your child since they are learning a little differently than some other children. The coach will learn about your child from you, and then will work with you to choose specific strategies that will help your child.

**I want to participate in this program. What will I be doing in these sessions?** Appointments usually start by reviewing strategies with your coach and talking about how it is going at home. You might read about the strategies and watch videos of other parents using them. The coach shows you how to use the strategy with your child and coaches you while you practice for most of the session. The coach will also talk with you about the best ways to use these strategies at home that work for you and your family.