



The Autism Program
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HOW MANY HOURS?

In treating children with autism the question always arises as to what are the optimum hours of treatment a child should receive each week. The National Research Council (2001) recommended 25 hours per week for children birth to 8 years of age. The Council did not prorate the amount of hours for children under 3 years of age, nor did it cite specific studies as reference that these were optimum hours.

A recent study (Dawson, Rogers, Munson, Smith, Winter, Greenson, Donaldson & Varley, 2009) sheds more light on the subject. Forty-eight children with a diagnosis of autism and between the ages of 18 and 30 months were randomly assigned to two groups. The purpose of the study was to compare the Early Start Denver Model, a developmental behavioral intervention to community providers, but the hours of service provided to each group is of much interest to parents and providers.

The study lasted two years and the children in the Denver program gained 17.6 points on the composite Mullen Scale compared to 7 points for the community group. However, there were important differences in the number of therapy hours the children in each group received. The Denver group averaged 20.4 individual therapy hours per week plus 16.3 hours of parental interaction. The community group averaged 9.1 individual therapy hours per week plus 9.3 hours per week of group interventions. In total, the Denver group received 36.7 hours per week of interventions and the community group received 18.4 hours per week. Thus, it seems that the greatest difference between the two groups was hours, the Denver children receiving double the hours of the community group.

References

Dawson, G., Rogers, S., Munson, J., Smith, M., Winter, J., Greenson, J., ...Varley, J. (2010). Randomized, controlled trial of an intervention for toddlers with autism: The Early Start Denver Model. *Pediatrics*, Advance online publication. doi: 10.1542/peds.2009-0958.

National Research Council. (2001). *Educating children with autism*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

