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Effect of sustained attention on Early Start Denver Model outcomes

Katherine McLeod, Giacomo Vivanti, PhD*

Introduction: There is very little research on the use of sustained attention as an outcome predictor for the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM). We hypothesized that a child's level of sustained attention prior to therapy will correlate with positive ESDM outcomes.

Methods: 10 pre-preschool age children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder received one year of ESDM therapy. A novel coding scheme was developed to evaluate each child's pre-treatment level of sustained attention. Mullen Scales of Early Learning were evaluated prior to and after one year of ESDM. Pre-treatment levels of sustained attention were compared to pre- and post-treatment Mullen scores. Sustained attention was evaluated as an outcome predictor for ESDM.

Results: Preliminary results identified a positive correlation between the duration of an episode of sustained attention and the pre- and post-treatment Mullen scores. A positive correlation was also identified between the functional use of an object during an episode of sustained attention and the pre- and post-treatment Mullen scores.

Conclusion: Preliminary results support the hypothesis that a child's level of sustained attention prior to therapy will correlate with positive ESDM outcomes. More participants are required to confirm the significance of the preliminary results.