

Dr. Steve Gutstein

When I created the Relationship Development Intervention® Program, I wanted to shift the perception of how we can and should operate in the Autism world as guides and facilitators. Above all, I wanted to show that it is possible, by constructing and re-tracing small, gradually more complex developmental steps, to provide opportunities for people with ASD to attain a quality of life as competent, independent and emotionally connected adults. I have learned that if we are thoughtful, careful, and patient, we can help people on the Autism Spectrum revisit and then follow the same developmental paths as everyone else.

For those unfamiliar with our approach, you will learn that the RDI® Program is anchored by a set of ideas, clear goals and frameworks for reaching those goals; finding a way for each child with ASD, despite age, ability or vulnerability, to have a second chance at mastering the foundational abilities and developmental building blocks of later competence. Dynamic Intelligence is what allows us to successfully solve complicated problems, prioritize multiple demands, carry on meaningful relationships and achieve long term goals. Jobs, friendships, marriages and most aspects of daily life are primarily 'dynamic' in nature, although each has static elements that must also be mastered. Almost all human communication and interaction occurs during dynamic encounters, they are the things that make us who we are today. I use the MESSIER acronym to remind us of the very different set of human abilities we require to navigate the real world in which we live.

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Multiple

WE ARE CONSTANTLY SHIFTING OUR ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS AND DO IT WITHOUT CONSCIOUS REFLECTION MOST OF THE TIME. FACED WITH MULTIPLE GOALS AND DAILY DEMANDS, WE EASILY FIND WAYS TO PRIORITIZE.

For families who practice RDI®, their lives and those of their children reflect this multiplicity of roles and shifting demands. Autism, although important, is not the central focus of RDI® parents, siblings or even the person who has autism. RDI® helps parents resume their natural roles as the primary guides to their child. In so doing, parents use their wisdom to guide both the child with autism and their other children, so they can experience the multiple demands of contemporary life and prioritize those demands in a healthy and efficient manner.

The RDI® Program is invested in:

- Building minds
- Developing dynamic abilities for real world success
- Applying best practices to learning
- Strengthening and empowering parents, brothers and sisters
- Tailoring intervention to build on each person's uniqueness



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Equilibrium

MOST DAYS HOLD THE PROMISE OF EVER-CHANGING PROBLEMS AND NEW CHALLENGES. FRESH INFORMATION LEADS TO SOLUTIONS WE HAVE NOT PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED.

Persons with ASD are different from one another. Each has his own set of unique obstacles and strengths. The RDI® Program provides a creative, easily adapted, venue for the parents and consultant to apply the curriculum to help the individual grow.

Like the world we live in, the RDI® Program changes in an on-going manner to make use of the latest research and technology. Between sessions, parents document their progress and maintain ongoing guidance with their consultant using virtual charting and online communication tools. Feedback occurs through this continuous dialogue. Clarification and progress dovetail between face-to-face sessions to efficiently maximize time during and between sessions.

simultaneous

WE INTERPRET THE MEANING OF COMMUNICATION IN AN INTEGRATED, SIMULTANEOUS WAY: FACIAL EXPRESSION, GESTURE, POSTURE, PHYSICAL SPACE, CONTEXT, PROSODY AND WHAT WE KNOW FROM THE PREVIOUS ENCOUNTERS WITH THE PERSON. WHAT LIES BEHIND THE WORDS IS THE VERY ESSENCE OF COMMUNICATION.

Successful human communication requires processing along a “wide bandwidth,” the transmission capacity of a communication pathway. In RDI® we use the term bandwidth to refer to the ability of a person to integrate multiple channels of information into a single packet of meaning. From a neurological perspective, high bandwidth processing describes a collaborative ability to integrate many different brain processing centers into complex levels of meaning.

Because the human brain is an experience dependent organ, RDI® is ultimately trying to influence this integration. Parents have been given this awesome task by virtue of their primary relationship with their child; they are first in line to directly impact the child’s perceptions and thoughts about the world. The parents’ choice of daily activities with their child helps form the neural functioning and development of his brain. No different from the role parents play with their typically developing children, RDI® provides the structure to empower parents in the guidance of their child on the spectrum.

SURPRISING!

LIFE IS FULL OF SURPRISES. HUMAN BEINGS REQUIRE A CERTAIN LEVEL OF UNCERTAINTY TO THRIVE AND DEVELOP. MINIMIZING THIS UNCERTAINTY LEADS TO STAGNATION, MAXIMIZING IT LEADS TO RETREAT. THE MIDDLE GROUND OF UNCERTAINTY IS WHERE LEARNING, GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OCCUR. VARIETY THEN, IS NOT THE SPICE OF LIFE BUT THE VERY STUFF OF IT.

Situations fashioned for any learner are those that create new challenges based on prior understanding. Parents do this intuitively but are faced with a tightrope experience for a child on the spectrum. Too much leads to anxiety, not enough to an over-reliance and desire for more repetition. The guided participation relationship is elemental to the RDI® Program. It is tied into a hierarchy of objectives that are designed to progressively generalize into the larger world in which the person with autism must eventually become independent. Activities center around every day life experiences where the child or young adult actively borrows the guide's mental processes thus becoming ever more confident in his own perceptions and volition in the world around him. Activities are based on lessons that maintain an "edge" experience and spotlight success based on the mastery of ambiguity and safe uncertainty. Parents, the persons who care most about their child and his later independence, are the conduit of these cognitive discoveries. They learn to stay one step ahead and, as Vygotsky so aptly named it, maintain the "zone of proximal development."

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*imperfect

THE WORLD IS IMPERFECT. RARELY IN OUR MODERN WORLD DO WE COMPLETE SOMETHING WITHOUT INTERRUPTION OR FINISH IT WITH 100% PERFECTION. MOST TIMES DECISIONS AND FOLLOW-THROUGH ARE BASED ON 'GOOD ENOUGH' CRITERIA.

Challenging a child on the spectrum to enjoy rather than retreat from new experiences can be tricky and demanding. Because children tend to embrace things they perceive as unchanging, parents can find it difficult to “rock the boat.” They worry about “getting it wrong.” As in all relationships, there are significant periods of getting it wrong. In fact, the importance of dealing with manageable failure is crucial to the development of personal competence. RDI® customizes the lifestyle of parents to reduce environmental and family stress, creating a workable reality where everyone survives and thrives in the imperfections of daily life. The emphasis on catching up by a certain age is not as important as the return to a normal process of development.

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emotional

EMOTIONS ARE A CRITICAL COMPONENT TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD AROUND US. THEY INFLUENCE HOW WE FEEL ABOUT OURSELVES, HOW WE FACE THE FUTURE AND THE ACTIONS WE TAKE.

For parents of children on the spectrum, many of their emotional experiences relate to encounters where they entertain their child or avoid meltdowns. Mission previews help parents regain their emotional footing and look into the future for the memories they will help their child create for himself. These mission previews don't describe a perfect, or even a cured child. Rather, they are a preview into the immediate and long term future, small vignettes that will benchmark success toward the greater goal of adult independence. These are not exercises, they are guideposts that restore parent empowerment. Most important, they renew dreams of which they have been robbed.

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relative

IN THE REAL WORLD, INFORMATION HAS MEANING AND VALUE BASED ON ITS RELATIVE PERSPECTIVE TO THOSE THINGS WE HAVE ALREADY LEARNED OR COME TO UNDERSTAND. IT IS FROM THIS RELATIVE STANCE THAT WE SEE THE WORLD FRESH EACH DAY AND ALLOW OURSELVES THE NEW INFLUENCE AS WE MAKE DECISIONS AND CHOOSE THE PATH WE WILL TRAVEL.

The beginning of the RDI® Program establishes the consultant as the guide, the parents as the apprentice. This parallels the relationship that the parent will establish with the child; once the transference of information and knowledge have occurred, each will become independent. Thus, from the very beginning, the consultant engages the parent in this process. Typically, hours of face to face time decrease—just as when riding a bike, a good guide helps you take off the training wheels.

Consultants effectively evaluate their communication with the family. They customize both mode and frequency of communication—all in order to transfer concepts, skill and responsibility. Collaboration is built into the program early on, in ever increasing amounts.

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New Parents

NEW: 1. ALREADY EXISTING BUT SEEN, EXPERIENCED, OR ACQUIRED RECENTLY OR NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME [PREDIC.] UNFAMILIAR OR STRANGE TO (SOMEONE) : A WAY OF LIVING THAT WAS NEW TO ME. 2. JUST BEGINNING AND REGARDED AS BETTER THAN WHAT WENT BEFORE: STARTING A NEW LIFE.

Recent research indicates that RDI® has potential to exert a powerful impact on children's capacity and motivation for experience sharing, communication and social interaction. Data demonstrates that children in families participating in RDI® were rated by parents as able to adapt to unexpected change and transition as well as typically aged peers, over 70% of the time. Parents are taught to break down the process of learning to think and perceive dynamically in small, simple components. Adopting this style serves to slow down and amplify the information feedback system so that both parents and children are more readily able to respond to one another.

If you're new to the RDI® Program and would like to learn more: **Read** *The RDI® Book: Forging New Pathways for Autism, PDD and Asperger's with the RDI® Program* (In print. Look for it in 2009!), **Research** and contact a Certified Consultant by visiting the website, www.rdiconnect.com, and **Reserve** your space in one of the upcoming 4 day Parent Training Workshops by emailing parents@rdiconnect.com.

New Professionals

GUIDE: 1. A PERSON WHO ADVISES OR SHOWS THE WAY TO OTHERS 2. A PRINCIPLE OR STANDARD OF COMPARISON 3. SHOW OR INDICATE THE WAY 4. DIRECT OR HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON THE COURSE OR ACTION OF.

Why is this approach so powerful? The RDI® Program for professionals teaches clinicians how to mindfully guide parents through the thousands of missed moments that make up the blueprint of development; giving professionals a panoramic view of the intricacies of the guided participation relationship.

Both personal and universal, the RDI® Program for professionals is made up of consultants from all over the world with a variety of different backgrounds and experience levels. They spend an average of 18 months learning to function as “guides to the guides” helping caregivers learn to modify their communication, slow their pace and focus on the underlying opportunities available in their daily routines. During this time frame, consultants in training are closely supervised and mentored through two case studies. Following certification, consultants have rigorous ongoing continuing education and quality assurance requirements. For professionals who are interested in the schedule of Professional training courses and their pre-requisites, please visit www.rdicconnect.com.

