

ENGAGING AUTISM

DIRFloortime Improves Social Emotional Learning



Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that primarily affects social interaction, communication, and behaviour. Individuals with ASD often experience challenges in emotional regulation, behaviour management, learning, and the development of meaningful social relationships. Everyone presents a unique profile of strengths and challenges, which necessitates a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to intervention. These interventions may include parent-mediated strategies, therapist-led sessions, or child-focused therapies

Introducing DIRFloortime: A Developmental Approach

Developed by Dr. Stanley Greenspan in 1989, DIRFloortime is an evidence-informed intervention model designed to support the emotional and functional development of children, particularly those with developmental differences such as ASD. The acronym "DIR" stands for:

- **Developmental (D):** Emphasizing the importance of understanding a child's behavior and learning within the context of their developmental stage.
- **Individual Differences (I):** Recognizing and accommodating each child's unique neurological and sensory processing differences.
- **Relationship-based (R):** Fostering strong emotional and relational connections between the child and caregiver or therapist, which are essential for emotional and social growth.

DIRFloortime uses play as its primary tool of engagement, encouraging children to explore and express themselves in enjoyable and meaningful ways. Through guided play, caregivers and therapists introduce challenges that support the development of critical emotional capacities such as empathy, communication, and social skills.

Evidence from Research: A Systematic Review

A 2023 systematic review conducted by Divya, Begum, John, and Francis examined the effectiveness of DIRFloortime in improving social-emotional learning among children with ASD. The review included twelve studies published between 2010 and 2020, encompassing 312 participants aged 2 to 19 years from diverse countries including the United States, Canada, India, Iran, Taiwan, Turkey, and Egypt.

The primary focus of the review was on functional and emotional development rather than broader developmental outcomes. While the studies varied in terms of intervention duration and cultural context, a consistent finding emerged: DIRFloortime significantly enhanced social-emotional development across the participant group.

Key Findings

The review concluded that DIRFloortime is an effective developmental intervention that integrates other supportive strategies to improve the social and emotional functioning of children with autism. Despite some variability in study design, the evidence strongly supports DIRFloortime as a valuable approach for engaging children with ASD in meaningful developmental progress.

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Reference:

Divya, K. Y., Begum, F., John, S. E., & Francis, F. (2023). DIR/Floor Time in Engaging Autism: A Systematic Review. *Iranian Journal of Nursing and Midwifery Research*, 28(2), 132–138. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijnmr.ijnmr.272_21

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