

RDI Program 101

The Relationship Development Intervention (RDI)[®] Program was developed by renowned clinical psychologists, Dr. Steven Gutstein and Dr. Rachele Sheely and their team of consultants in Houston, Texas. Based on the latest research on neuroplasticity, the RDI program aims to improve neural connectivity in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders, as well as many other childhood disorders such as Reactive Attachment Disorder, ADHD, Tourette Syndrome, etc. The RDI consultants complete a year long extensive certification training, and currently are available in 25 countries worldwide.

RDI provides a comprehensive program to restore the natural Guided Participation Relationship between parent and child where it has been disrupted or never developed due to atypical development. As a result of this disruption, parents often describe a high level of anxiety in their special needs children which is expressed in inflexibility, behavioral problems, learning difficulties, social and communication challenges.

What sets the RDI program apart is the intensive parent training component designed for both parents' involvement from the beginning, and real life coaching taking place in the home setting with the whole family. A trained RDI Consultant works with each family to develop an individualized set of objectives that may include simplifying the home environment, slowing down the pace of life, balancing the entire family's schedule and life outside of a special needs diagnosis. The RDI program believes that making lasting, meaningful and lifelong changes begins at home with the child's parents first, and that the remediation process should take place amidst each family's unique culture and relationships.

How does the RDI Program Work?

Relationship Development Assessment

Parallel to the process of trust and communication building between a parent and his/her child, the RDI program also emphasizes a partnership between parents and their consultant. An RDI consultant serves as a parent coach who provides education on the core deficits of ASD, puts together a systematic plan to implement each objective in practical ways and together with parents, monitor progress.

An initial RDI assessment consisting of select, age appropriate activities is administered to the parents and their child, followed by a session between the consultant and the client, provides a complete picture of each person's strengths and weaknesses, possible co-occurring conditions and developmental obstacles. In addition, information on potential activity themes, communication and environmental modifications, as well as needed scaffolding levels would emerge from the assessment process.

Based on the initial assessment a comprehensive short term plan for each family is set in motion. Common initial parent objectives may include assigning a 15-minute daily increment for quality time, slowing down communication pace, increasing use of non-verbal communication channels, or reducing screen time for everyone in the family.

Take a look at this RDI Assessment video clip donated by Maureen Chung Mo Lan, an RDI Consultant based in Hong Kong. This video clip has been annotated to highlight the overall assessment goals.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SM1dHn2j13o>

Ongoing RDI Parent Training

After the assessment process is completed, parents and an RDI consultant begin their collaborative work to remediate the areas of deficits. An invaluable tool for RDI consultants and families is the RDI Online Learning System, which is a private platform used to organize ongoing communication, video submissions, current and future objectives and yearly assessment findings. In addition, parents have access to a video library containing samples of RDI work donated by other families, webinars on a variety of topics and ongoing discussion groups with other parents.

Below is a link to a video tutorial on the RDI Learning System

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWk8hTEe8vE>

The frequency and format of ongoing supervision for each family is individualized, depending on the progress and the objective at the moment. It is common that parents and consultant would meet without the child whether it's a face to face, Skype or phone consultations. Home visits and community outings are also important for an RDI consultant to guide parents in their most natural setting. To help parents understand their objectives, a consultant might utilize modeling, role playing, planning ahead, watching video clips of daily interactions as well direct work during follow up sessions.

Take a look at these two clips of RDI parent training sessions.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k86BxqvREk&index=38&list=FLF1AmPGRkTfZOJD6AmaMltA>

Gina Underwood from Texas, modeling the use of self-talk to parents

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DU0u6_5UL74&index=67&list=FLF1AmPGRkTfZOJD6AmaMltA

Maisie Soetantyo from San Francisco, modeling use of multi-channel communication and breakdown repair

The ultimate goal of RDI consultants is to work themselves out of a job when parents have moved out of crisis, normalized their family lives and developed competence in guiding their child through day to day learning opportunities.

About the Author

Maisie Soetantyo has been a certified RDI Consultant for 11 years, and in addition to providing RDI programs for families with special needs children, she runs the RDI Certification Training Classes for the South East Asia region.