

Critical Review: Is sibling-mediated intervention effective in increasing social communication in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)?

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This critical appraisal examined published literature for evidence that sibling-mediated intervention is successful in increasing the frequency of social communication in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). An electronic literature search resulted in the identification of six articles that met inclusion criteria: five multiple baseline designs, and 1 non-randomized control trial. Overall, findings indicate that there is suggestive evidence for the effectiveness of sibling-mediated interventions in increasing social skills in children with ASD. The clinical significance and limitations of the current research are discussed.

*Introduction*







full potential of sibling-mediated interventions and whether skills are maintained over time.

Five studies (Chu and Pan, 2012; Ferraioli and Harris, 2011; Oppenheim-Leaf et al., 2012; Tsao and Odom, 2006; Walton and Ingersoll, 2012) included quantitative and qualitative measures of treatment acceptability, or how much siblings and/or parents enjoyed the intervention, all of which indicated moderate to strong satisfaction. Parents and siblings showed positive opinions of the interventions and parents often reported an increase in quality and frequency of sibling interaction. The social validity data documented the social importance of the modest effect of the sibling-mediated interventions on social skills. Although these results are promising, more systematic evidence is needed. As mentioned above, siblings have the potential to teach many different skills to their brothers or sisters with ASD over time. However, lengthy interactions call for additional considerations, such as prevention of burnout for the sibling interventionists and awareness of developmental changes in the siblings' abilities and desires to participate in interventions. Therefore, it is important to measure sibling outcomes as important factors during intervention.

It is highly important to consider the functioning of the sibling applying the intervention. Factors such as sibling age, gender, and closeness with the target brother or sister could all play a role, both in how well a sibling can implement the intervention and how much the target child learns from the sibling. Future research is needed to determine which sibling factors are related to intervention effectiveness.

#### Limitations

As with most single-subject designs, a small number of children with ASD and TD siblings participated in the study, so the external validity is limited. Furthermore, there were no females with ASD included in all of the studies analyzed, however, this lack of females likely reflects the prevalence of males in the ASD population

