

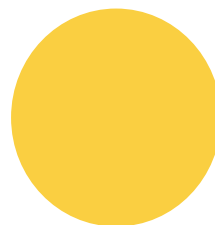


# A Developmental Perspective on Autism

Information for Parents and Caregivers



**ADAPT Manitoba**  
Association for Developmental Autism Programs and Therapies







# Welcome to Developmental Therapies for Children with Autism

## Family-Based Support for Children with Autism

When your child is diagnosed with autism there is a lot to learn and many choices to be made. But a diagnosis does not change who your child is, or who you are as a family. No two families are alike and no two children with autism are alike. Making choices about the right services/therapies and your child's needs can be challenging.

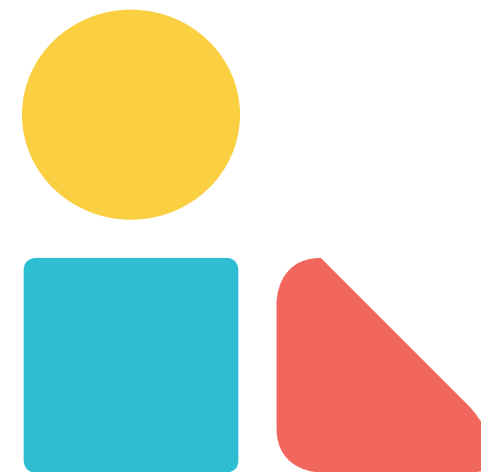
Developmental therapies offer choices that support parents to guide their own children in a way that fits their family. They focus on teaching your child how to learn through everyday activities, interaction and engagement with you, their parent or caregiver.

**When you are your child's teacher, they are more comfortable, confident and willing to learn.**

ADAPT Manitoba (Association for Developmental Autism Programs and Therapies) is a group of parents and professionals who support developmental therapies for children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Both research and experience support the effectiveness of relationship-based, developmental approaches to parenting and therapy. In Manitoba, developmental therapies include:

1. DIR/Floortime® (Developmental Individual Differences)
2. RDI® (Relationship Development Intervention)
3. Hanen® (including More than Words)





# DIR/Floortime Therapy®

“As a parent, understanding your child’s reality will strengthen your relationship, giving you the confidence needed to effectively support your child’s growth. It will allow you to relax and enjoy your child’s company while getting to know them for who they are.”

## About

DIR/Floortime works with what children naturally like to do, playfully enticing them into meaningful and challenging interactions. Over time, these interactions improve self-regulation, social connections, communication, problem-solving and reasoning.

DIR takes into account three main components:

1. Your child’s developmental level (D)
2. Your child’s sensory processing profile and individual differences (I)
3. Your child’s relationship in which they experience trust (R) and connection

Floortime is intentional playtime that extends and supports the child’s ideas to encourage communication and extend their thinking while having fun.

DIR/Floortime is designed for preschoolers and young children, but can be adapted to support people of any age.

## How it Works

As a parent, you can work DIR/Floortime into daily life anytime and anywhere by strategically tailoring your interactions to your child’s developmental level. Your consultant will help you learn and practice unique strategies to do this. Strategies may include playful interaction and extending and supporting new ideas in your child’s thinking. For example, you might make small changes to how you play a familiar game to encourage more flexible thinking.

Learning these new ways to interact takes practice and commitment. Typically, parents meet monthly with a consultant for coaching and modelling. Parents implement what they learn at home, committing to about 20 hours a week of one-on-one interaction with their child. It’s important to begin by scheduling 20 – 30 minute Floortime sessions, six to eight times a day. The more you can fit in, the more time your child has to practice relating, communicating and thinking. The strategies you learn through Floortime will become new habits that change the way you engage with your child. As your child grows, they’ll mature through six developmental levels common to all children, leading into logical thinking, collaboration, and readiness for academic learning.

Your consultant assesses your child’s progress by videotaping short, playful interactions and giving you feedback, suggestions and customized support. Often, families work with their DIR/Floortime consultant into the school years, starting with regular meetings and reducing consultant involvement as the family gains more independence.

## Benefits and Results

In the short term, you’ll see your child share more moments of connection and interest with you. They’ll have fewer behavioural outbursts and when there are meltdowns, you’ll be able to help your child calm down.

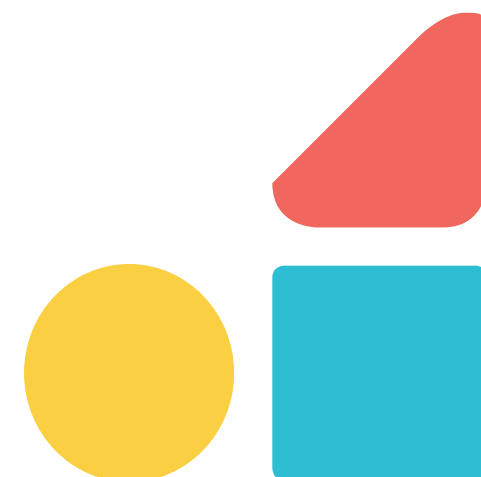
Over the long term, new social-emotional connections start to form in your child’s brain, helping them relate to others and communicate more easily. Your child becomes more flexible in dealing with sensory challenges, learning to manage or change his or her environment. As your child starts to master these new abilities, they’ll also start to see more success academically and in their school environment.

As a parent, understanding your child’s reality will strengthen your relationship, giving you the confidence needed to effectively support your child’s growth. It will allow you to relax and enjoy your child’s company while getting to know them for who they are.

Clinically speaking, DIR/Floortime recognizes sensory needs and works on developing the tools your child needs to overcome the core challenges associated with autism: relating, communicating and thinking.

## Addressing Challenging Behaviours

We see all behaviours as communication. Instead of suppressing behaviours, we seek their root causes, looking for connections between the behaviour and the specific way your child responds to sensory inputs (or sensory overload). Your consultant will coach you to recognize the signs before an outburst happens, effectively respond, and provide you with the necessary support to get your child back on track.







# RDI – Relationship Development Intervention®

“As parents, you gain the knowledge and tools you need to feel confident and competent. By re-establishing what we call the “guiding relationship,” you can step back into what you would naturally do as a parent in a way that’s rewarding for both you and your child.

## About

RDI is a family-based therapy focused on building relationships and empowering you as a parent by restoring your role as your child’s guide and teacher in life. RDI will give you the knowledge, skills and tools you need to help your child grow, creating a safe yet challenging learning environment for them. As your child develops, they’ll become more flexible and thoughtful in how they respond to uncertain situations. RDI is a dynamic program that addresses the needs of people of all ages.

RDI takes advantage of everyday family activities to teach flexible thinking, intrinsic motivation and relationship skills. Over time, small steps lead to achieving big goals.

## How it Works

Choosing RDI means you want to be the agent of change your child needs to develop and grow. Parents are very involved, and by learning about autism through the RDI lens, parents can guide their children through thinking activities. With the help of their consultant, they better understand their child’s unique development and work to create small, targeted and manageable learning opportunities. It’s these specific small steps that build foundations for bigger goals.

The therapy begins with an in-depth assessment by a consultant who will get to know your family. They create a program based on your child’s current developmental achievements and needs. You’ll meet with your RDI consultant every two weeks. Children learn and grow best in the culture of their own families, so families are encouraged to work on their child’s learning goals in their own home and community. Your consultant will gradually leave your side by training you to take the lead with your child.

In between appointments, you’ll work on different assignments, including engaging with your child in new ways, learning and self-reflection. Parent-child interactions are recorded and shared with the consultant for feedback and support. RDI takes advantage of routine activities so that what starts off feeling new eventually becomes second nature. You’ll find new habits quickly become a way of life.

## Benefits and Results

Your child will begin to understand that they can feel safe when things are uncertain. They begin to want to try new things and to understand themselves better — how they think and what they need to be successful.

In the short term, this leads to sharing moments of joy, connection and growth. In the long term, children learn to manage their emotions, become more motivated to play with friends, learn how to work through challenges and have greater independence.

As parents, you gain the knowledge and tools you need to feel confident and competent. By re-establishing what we call the “guiding relationship,” you can step back into what you would naturally do as a parent in a way that’s rewarding for both you and your child.

Through RDI, you’ll learn the benefits of slowing down some of your daily activities and turning them into learning opportunities. RDI focuses on the process and on enjoying the moments of connection together. This leaves time to reflect and connect.

Clinically, we know that our brains continue to develop and change throughout life. RDI creates opportunities for new pathways to form in your child’s brain. Dynamic intelligence, which we typically draw upon to assess and address situations that are new, uncertain or changing, is strengthened through this process.

## Addressing Challenging Behaviours

Imagine trying to have a conversation when the TV and the radio are both turned up. For kids on the spectrum, everyday sounds, sights, and sensations that most people don’t even notice can be distracting or even aggravating and make it hard to respond to other people. Challenging behaviours are sometimes an attempt to reduce the stress of feeling overwhelmed.

Understanding a child’s perspective helps us see behavior as communication, so your consultant works with you to peel back the layers and identify the reasons behind your child’s particular behaviours. Once your therapist helps you understand your child’s unique difficulties, a plan can be made to respond to each behavior in a way that makes sense.





# Hanan's More Than Words®

“ You and your child will learn how to communicate better with one another. As a parent, you will better understand how and why your child communicates the way they do, and how to set goals for stronger communication and interaction.

## About

The Hanen Centre's More Than Words program helps parents teach their child how to build social and language skills. More Than Words is specifically designed for kids five and under who have autism and other social communication difficulties. Whether your child doesn't yet communicate or has the ability to have short conversations, this program will give you the knowledge, skills and tools to strengthen your child's communication abilities.

More Than Words teaches communication in the context of everyday activities, interactions and routines. Therapists don't spend time treating your child on their own, rather, they spend time strengthening your skills as a parent so that you can help your own child. Parents are active participants, and what they do every day helps their child succeed.

## How it Works

Communication is a huge part of everything we do. One of the most effective ways to help children communicate is to teach parents to support their child's communication throughout the day.

Your speech-language pathologist will help you learn so that you can follow your child's interests and sensory preferences to encourage back-and-forth interaction. Then, you'll learn to use games and daily routines as a framework for building communication. You'll also learn how to enhance communication development by playing with toys, reading books together and engaging in dramatic play.

Eight group-training sessions are led by a speech-language pathologist. In these sessions, you'll learn alongside other parents about the responsive interaction strategies to use everyday with your child and how they will help your child achieve their communication goals. You'll also learn when it's appropriate to apply each strategy.

Three times throughout the eight group sessions, the speech-language pathologist will record you and your child interacting while applying the strategies. You'll then watch the recording together. This will help you become more aware of what your child is learning. You will get feedback that is specific to your family and learn to consistently apply the strategies. At the end of the training sessions, you'll be able to reflect on your child's improvement and consider other services going forward.

## Benefits and Results

Your child will start to have more positive daily interactions with others and enjoy play time with other kids. Reducing challenging behaviours and building your child's vocabulary and general communication skills will also build their confidence in their world.

You and your child will learn how to communicate better with one another. As a parent, you will better understand how and why your child communicates the way they do, and how to set goals for stronger communication and interaction. More Than Words is successful because its primary focus is to provide you as a parent with the tools, strategies and support needed to help your child reach their full communication abilities.

The training includes adult learning principles so that every More Than Words program supports the diverse learning needs of the parents attending.

## Addressing Challenging Behaviours

Challenging behaviours can occur because of your child's inability to understand the people around them or because they, themselves are misunderstood. More Than Words builds your child's communication skills. Once your child understands the people around them better, they will have alternatives to acting out in frustration, increasing their positive interactions.

Your therapist will also help you understand your child's sensory needs and how to meet them, which can have a very positive effect your child's behaviour.







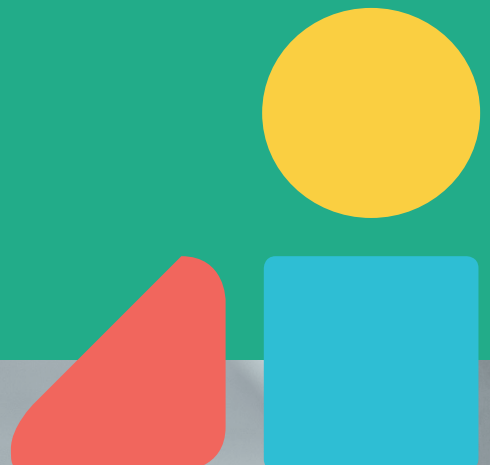
“

Autism parents, you are the foremost authority on your child. Listen to professionals and other parents, but know that their experiences, however successful, are not mandatory for your child.

Listen to your inner voice if it tells you a program, person or treatment isn't right for your child.

The 'it' thing is never the only one.

— Ellen Notbohm  
“The Autism Trail Guide:  
Postcards from the Road Less Traveled”



## The Research Behind the Therapies

These three therapies share a common base in educational theory and research, incorporating the most current research in neurodevelopment, attachment theory, and education. Each has strong support from the clinicians and families who work with them. Research specific to each therapy indicates that developmental therapies are effective in supporting communication, learning, and family well-being, and show that parents who participate more actively in their child's autism care have more positive outcomes than those who don't. Therapists and consultants must complete extensive training and supervision through organizations such as The PLAY Project®, the Interdisciplinary Council on Development and Learning (ICDL), The Hanen Centre®, and RDI Connect® in order to become certified.

For a summary and list of studies, visit [adaptmanitoba.ca/research](http://adaptmanitoba.ca/research).

*ADAPT Manitoba (Association for Developmental Autism Programs and Therapies) is comprised of professionals and parents who support developmental therapies for children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

*For more information on which developmental therapy is right for your child, visit our website [adaptmanitoba.ca/options](http://adaptmanitoba.ca/options)*





Our sincere thanks to Community Living Manitoba for their support and contributions on this project, and for the work they do to support the inclusion, self-determination and empowerment of people with intellectual disabilities in Manitoba.

This project was funded by the Government of Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada under the Social Development Projects for People with Disabilities program.



**ADAPT Manitoba**

Association for Developmental Autism Programs and Therapies



Employment and  
Social Development Canada

Emploi et  
Développement social Canada

For more information and resources on parenting children with autism in Manitoba, please visit:

**ADAPTMANITOBA.CA**

