Relationship Development Intervention® (RDI) is a treatment for children on the autism spectrum where the main focus is on the parent-child relationship. Individual families have reported improvement following treatment with RDI. However, the research in support of RDI is limited, so it is not considered an empirically-supported treatment. For this reason, families interested in pursuing RDI may want to consider using it as a supplementary intervention. Families interested in RDI could consider using it in addition to treatments such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Pivotal Response Treatment®, which have strong scientific support, rather than in place of them.

*What does RDI treatment look like?*

RDI is done in different locations, including at the home and in private centers. Usually, a trained RDI therapist will come to the family’s home and train the caregiver in specific activities that are designed to help with development. The caregiver is then asked to practice these activities regularly. Often, the activities involve slowing social interactions down to make them easier for the child on the autism spectrum.

RDI tries to target core developmental skills based on the theory that improvements in these skills will lead to improvements across many different areas. For example, the idea would be that if your child improves in his or her ability to follow your gaze, he or she will also improve his or her ability to recognize emotions (because your child will be looking at your face more), and your child’s vocabulary should improve (because your child will be more aware of what you’re looking at when you’re talking about or naming something).

In addition to gaze-monitoring, some of the core skills targeted by RDI include:

- Synchrony (matching emotions and actions) with other people
- Checking in about what others are communicating
- Anticipating others’ actions
- Flexible thinking and problem solving

Related Articles:

- [How Do I Choose a Treatment?](#)
- [The Importance of Data Collection in Measuring Progress](#)
- [Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)](#)
- [Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT)](#)

Recommended Link:

- [CAR Resource Directory (Select Mental/Behavioral Health – Behavior Therapy)](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Official RDI Website](#)
- [RDI Summary, from the Association for Science in Autism Treatment](#)
- [Video examples of RDI](#)

The Center for Autism Research and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia do not endorse or recommend any specific person or organization or form of treatment. The information included within the CAR Autism Roadmap & trade; and CAR Resource Directory & trade; should not be considered medical advice and should serve only as a guide to resources publicly and privately available. Choosing a treatment, course of action, and/or a resource is a personal decision, which should take into account each individual's and family's particular circumstances.