



Media Kit

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Media Inquiries

Please contact us for journalists' requests and inquiries, upcoming news, and program information.

We can also provide:

- Interviews with Dr. Solomon as an autism expert
- Additional information on the organization, its affiliates, and continued research
- Photos, video clips, digital images, and logos.

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Program Backgrounder

The P.L.A.Y. Project has been training parents and professionals for the past 9 years to provide affordable and effective interventions for young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Beginning The P.L.A.Y. Project

The P.L.A.Y. Project (Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters) began in 2001, when Richard Solomon, MD, decided to create an affordable early intervention program for young children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Ann Arbor, MI. As a developmental and behavioral pediatrician, Dr. Solomon realized that families who received a diagnosis needed guidance, support and effective treatment options.

Dr. Solomon designed The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consulting program as a response to the lack of services in his community and across the country. He saw that most families could not afford to pay \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year for the intensive interventions recommended for young children with ASD. The P.L.A.Y. Project, by comparison, trains parents to provide the hours of intervention their children need, reducing the cost to around \$4,000 per year.

Dr. Solomon started The P.L.A.Y. Project by hiring and supervising a small number of qualified therapists as Home Consultants. Through structured monthly home visits, the consultants trained parents to effectively engage their children with ASD in day-to-day interactions. The program emphasized the importance of helping parents become their child's best play partner.

What began as a community-based program has quickly grown into a model that is being replicated nationally. Dr. Solomon has trained more than 300 child-development professional to be Home Consultants. There are nearly 100 agencies in 27 states and 3 countries outside of the U.S. providing families with the intensive programming they need.

The intervention is based on the Developmental, Individualized, Relationship-based (DIR) approach of Dr. Stanley Greenspan, popularly known as Floortime. The methods and techniques are designed to help children resolve the three core deficits of autism: 1) self-isolation and impaired social skills; 2) language delay and impaired communication; and

The results of research on the model are encouraging. Dr. Solomon has evaluated the ability of parents to successfully use play-based approaches, and his results indicate that parents can learn the play-based methods. Nearly half of the children using The PLAY Project Home Consultation model make good to excellent progress, and there was 90% parent satisfaction with the services provided. The research was recently published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*. Dr. Solomon is currently conducting a controlled study of The P.L.A.Y. Project, in partnership with Easter Seals and with the help of a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health.

The P.L.A.Y. Project Vision

Our vision is to be a community-based, national autism training and early intervention center dedicated to empowering parents and professionals to implement intensive, developmental interventions for young children with autism in the most effective and efficient way.

The P.L.A.Y. Project Mission

- Promote early identification and early intervention
- Educate community regarding National Academy of Sciences recommendations:
 - 1) Begin interventions early (18 months to 5 years)
 - 2) Use intensive intervention 25 hours per week
 - 3) Have a teacher/play partner to child ratio of 1:1 or 1:2
 - 4) Use interventions that are engaging
 - 5) Have a strategic direction (e.g. social skills, language, etc.)
- Use community based approaches to promulgate Developmental, Individualized and Relationship-based interventions (DIR®)
- Support families in a parent-professional partnership
- Scientifically evaluate effectiveness of program



Research Overview

Research Finds Play-based Programming Effective for Autism* In a recent study, 74 young children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) participated in a year-long PLAY Project Home Consultation (PPHC) program. Home consultants trained parents through structured monthly home visits to use social-pragmatic (play-based) methods of intervention. Videotapes of the children were rated at the beginning and the end of the PPHC intervention.

Overall, there was a significant increase in the children's development.
Nearly half (45.5%) of the children in the study
made good to very good functional developmental progress.

Details of the Study

Autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) are increasing dramatically. The National Academy of Sciences recommends individualized, comprehensive, and intensive therapies, yet such interventions are not readily available. The Michigan PLAY Project Home Consultation (PPHC) program appears to be a cost effective, clinically efficacious and replicable intervention program.

Purpose To present the program evaluation results for the first year's pilot of 74 PPHC program families.

Design/Methods 74 young children (ages 18m-6y) diagnosed with ASD, participated in the PPHC program. Parents were encouraged to deliver a minimum of 15 hours per week of 1:1 interaction. Video measures by blind raters before and after intervention documented children's functional developmental gains and parents' interactional skills. Clinical and standardized measures of autism severity, and parent satisfaction were also obtained before and after the first year of intervention.

Results 68 of 74 children completed the 8-12 month program. Average age was 3.7 years. Most parents had some college education. Pre/post ratings of videotapes by blind raters using the Functional Emotional Assessment Scale (FEAS) showed significant increases ($p < 0.0001$) in Child Sub-scale scores.

Translated clinically, 45.5% of children made good to very good functional developmental progress. Based on home consultants clinical ratings 66% showed significant ($p < 0.001$) progress. Low fidelity (fewer hours) of intervention yielded a trend toward poorer outcomes ($p=0.09$). Pre/post ratings of FEAS Parent Sub-scale score of parent's abilities to interact contingently with the autistic children showed no statistical differences. Satisfaction with home consulting services showed an overall satisfaction rate of 90%. Average cost of intervention was \$3500/year.

Conclusion Nearly half the children participating in the PPHC program made good to excellent progress in the first year of intervention. Parents have the interaction skills necessary to effectively engage their autistic children. More hours of intervention resulted in improved outcomes. The PLAY Project Home Consulting program shows promise as a cost-effective intervention for young children with autism.

Parents demonstrated the
interaction skills necessary to
effectively engage their children
with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

*Study published in the May 2007 issue of the peer-reviewed journal, Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, referenced below: Solomon, R., J. Necheles, C. Ferch, and D. Bruckman. "Pilot study of a parent training program for young children with autism: The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consultation program." Autism 11, no. 3 (2007) 205-224.



Continuing Research

Supported by The National Institute for Mental Health and in collaboration with Easter Seals and Michigan State University

Preliminary evidence shows that our parent-training model is effective and The P.L.A.Y. Project continues to scientifically evaluate the effectiveness of its program.

Dr. Solomon is currently conducting a new study of The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consulting model through the support of a \$1.85 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).



With the help of Easter Seals, a major national partner, this new study will test whether The P.L.A.Y. Project intervention model can:

- Improve developmental outcomes for young children with autism compared to controls.
- Be replicated effectively in a community setting.
- Serve as a model program for effective intensive interventions for young children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) in this country.

The long term goal for this project is to disseminate the model widely and to develop strategies for addressing the national need.

Details of the study

With research-design guidance from Michigan State University, and community-outreach support from Easter Seals, The P.L.A.Y. Project is conducting a clinical trial. Drawing participants from five Easter Seals autism service locations, the study compares the outcomes of 120 children with autism, making it the largest study of its kind.

The clinical trial is:

- **Controlled:** We are comparing the outcomes of 60 children who participate in The P.L.A.Y. Project with the outcomes of 60 children who receive standard, community interventions. Before and after the 12-month intervention, each child is assessed with a battery of tests to measure developmental level, speech and language, sensory-motor profile, and social skills.
- **Community-based:** The study is designed to assess how The P.L.A.Y. Project model operates in a community where the therapists have been trained by Dr. Solomon, but are not under his direct supervision. The results will be demonstrate the program's effectiveness when disseminated in communities nationally.

Reasons for this study:

- The number of children identified with ASDs is increasing.
- There is a national shortage of personnel trained in intensive approaches as recommended by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) (Lord et al, 2001)
- Most states do not typically provide broad support for intensive interventions, and the unmet national need is enormous.
- We have preliminary clinical evidence to show that this parent training model is effective.
- Early dissemination of the model into community agencies, schools and hospitals has also been successfully accomplished.
- The P.L.A.Y. Project has established an alliance with a major national partner – Easter Seals.

A successful trial would support efforts to encourage private insurers and government agencies to approve major increases in funding for autism intensive intervention services, resulting in wide dissemination of this model and significant social benefit.



The P.L.A.Y. Project® Overview

What is The P.L.A.Y. Project? “P.L.A.Y.” is short for Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters. Created by Richard Solomon MD and based on the DIR® (Developmental, Individualized, Relationship-based) theory of Stanley Greenspan MD, our program emphasizes the importance of helping parents become their child’s best P.L.A.Y. partner. We are a national autism training and research center, with these key components:

Early Autism Diagnosis Dr. Solomon has presented to hundreds of pediatricians and primary care providers to educate them about the importance of early diagnosis and referral. A key component to The P.L.A.Y. Project mission is early intervention.

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“ By doing what your child loves, your child will love being with you. ”

—Richard Solomon, MD, Founder of The P.L.A.Y. Project

Home Consulting The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consultant Program provides training and support for families of young children (18 months to 6 years) with autism. Trained consultants teach parents techniques that are effective, fun, and useful in day-to-day interactions with their child with autism. By providing training in the home, consultants see the family in an environment where the child feels comfortable, rather than in a setting unfamiliar and possibly intimidating to the child.

Home Consultation typically costs around \$4,000 per year (compared to other interventions that can be \$40,000 to \$60,000 annually). The program includes:

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- Family support
- 10 home visits per year
- 3 hour sessions roughly divided between 1 hour of modeling, 1 hour of coaching the family and 1 hour of feedback.
- Selected videotaping of home visit interactions, followed by video analysis, written evaluations and feedback.
- Assistance with educational programming.

Training and Education Through community workshops and agency trainings, Dr. Solomon teaches the specific methods that have worked for families and their young children with autism across the country. To date, about 100 agency professionals have been trained in The P.L.A.Y. Project methods and thousands of parents and professionals have attended Dr. Solomon’s community workshops.

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1) Agency Training We train agencies to provide home consultation services to families. Home Consultants attend a 4-day training retreat, followed by a year of supervision from Dr. Solomon and his team of experts.

- Over 40 agencies in 17 states have been trained as Home Consultants.
- We have trained non-profit organizations such as Easter Seals, state government agencies, and private therapy institutions.

2) Community Workshops Our community trainings help parents and professionals learn about autism and the benefits of early intervention.

DVD/CD-ROM For parents and professionals who want to learn the basics of play-based therapy, this educational DVD has dozens of the best video clips of parents demonstrating effective play-based interventions with their children with autism, chosen from hundreds of home visits and analyzed by Dr. Solomon.

Research The P.L.A.Y. Project is committed to evidence-based practice. Evidence is gathered routinely within the intervention model. The video documentation and analysis that is used to train parents has also been a useful tool for assessing program effectiveness.

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Frequently Asked Questions

1) What is Autism?

Autism is neurological, developmental disorder. Evidence is accumulating that autism is a genetic disorder though other factors (e.g. toxic exposures) may contribute to its cause. The three core deficits of autism are: 1) self-isolation and impaired social skills; 2) language delay and impaired communication; and 3) stereotyped or repetitive behaviors.

2) Is there a cure for Autism?

Unfortunately, there is currently no cure for autism. However, there are treatment options for children who receive a diagnosis. The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) 2001 report recommends intensive interventions beginning as early as possible, providing 25 hours per week of 1:1 or 1:2 teacher:child ratio using intervention that is engaging and has a strategic direction (i.e. strategies to repair language, academic and/or social skills deficits).

3) What is intensive intervention?

The P.L.A.Y. Project is an “intensive intervention.” This means that children receive many hours of engagement. The National Academy of Sciences defines “intensive” programming as 25 hours per week of one-on-one interaction.

4) What skills are targeted in The P.L.A.Y. Project?

Our program focuses on helping children with ASD build emotional connections and engage in meaningful relationships with their family and others. By focusing on relationships, we help children gain skills, by moving up the six Functional Developmental Levels (FDLs)*:

- 1) Self-regulation and shared attention
- 2) Engagement and intimacy
- 3) 2-way communication and initiation
- 4) Complex communication and language
- 5) Emotional ideas, shared meaning, simple symbolic play
- 6) Emotional thinking, complex symbolic play

5) What is DIR/Floortime?

“DIR” is short for **D**evelopmental, **I**ndividual-differences and **R**elationship-based. “Floortime” refers to the practice of getting down on the floor and playing with the child at his/her level. In this model we apply techniques that

5) What is DIR/Floortime? (continued)

match the child’s **D**evelopmental level—in other words, “meet ’em where they’re at.” Each child is seen as an **I**ndividual and the program is tailored to match the **I**ndividual capacities and needs of the child. We help the child gain social skills and language by building strong **R**elationships with adults, and eventually with peers.

6) What is the relationship between The P.L.A.Y. Project and DIR?

The P.L.A.Y. Project is a practical, family-friendly, and affordable application of the DIR framework. Based on the DIR theory, the home consultants train parents to deliver intensive, one-on-one interventions that are individualized and engaging. The P.L.A.Y. Project is a much more structured version of DIR. We also provide a community-based delivery system through Home Consultation. Dr. Greenspan and Dr. Solomon are colleagues and Dr. Greenspan fully supports this structured application of his theory. Dr. Solomon is on the faculty of Dr. Greenspan and Dr. Serena Weider’s Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders (ICDL).

7) How does The P.L.A.Y. Project compare with Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)?

P.L.A.Y. and ABA are complimentary and have different strategic directions. Many families are choosing to apply both methods. Developmental interventions, such as The P.L.A.Y. Project and DIR, are much more flexible than behavioral approaches, such as ABA. Our strategies are child-centered with activities based on following the child’s lead; ABA is program-centered with a skill-and-drill based curriculum. Play-based methods are especially helpful in addressing the social deficits of children with autism.

8) Where is The P.L.A.Y. Project located?

The P.L.A.Y. Project headquarters is in Ann Arbor, MI, but there are P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consulting programs all over the country, from Connecticut to California. See our list of agencies in this document, or go to our website www.playproject.org and click on “Home Consulting: In Your Area.”

*Stanley Greenspan defines the Functional Developmental Levels (FDLs) in his book, *Engaging Autism*.



Dr. Rick: A Biography of Richard Solomon, MD

Founder and Medical Director of The P.L.A.Y. Project

Dr. Solomon is the Medical Director of The P.L.A.Y. Project at The Ann Arbor Center for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. Board-certified in general pediatrics and developmental and behavioral pediatrics, Dr. Solomon has been diagnosing and treating children with autism for nearly twenty years.

Dr. Solomon's interest in young children with autism and their families began even before he went to medical school in 1977. In 1975, he worked with elementary school age children, many of whom were autistic, in a small special education program in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The type of intervention was play-based and, as a 'mental health worker' he spent 8 hours per day, 5 days per week for two years, interacting with the children. Subsequently, in 1983, as a fellow in the National Center for Clinical Infants Program, he met Stanley Greenspan MD, the nationally known child psychiatrist, and learned about Dr. Greenspan's DIR (Developmental, Individual differences, Relationship-based) approach.



Dr. Solomon formally studied DIR, attending the annual conferences and training institutes of Dr. Greenspan and his associate Serena Wieder PhD, who eventually formed the Interdisciplinary Council on Learning Disorders (ICDL). Dr. Solomon is now a board member of council, and a medical editor of the ICDL Newsletter.

From 1989 to 1998 Dr. Solomon was the director of developmental and behavioral services at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Because of state Medicaid law in Pennsylvania, all children diagnosed with ASDs, regardless of parental income, could receive as much intervention as the physician ordered—commonly between 20–40 hours per week—free of charge. Dr. Solomon, along with avid parent support, a dedicated staff, close working relations with the early intervention, and educational systems and large mental health agencies played a central role in organizing community-based training programs and services for young children with autism.

Dr. Solomon was eager to translate his Pennsylvania experience to Michigan. He discovered, however, that there was no Medicaid re-imbursment for the intensive treatment of young children with autism in Michigan. In fact, there were and are, like most states in the U.S., very few intensive and comprehensive services of any kind in Michigan. It was this lack of intensive services that led to the development of The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consultant Program.

A brief biography:

- MD, Residency and Fellowship: Michigan State University
- B.S. Psychology: University of Michigan
- DIR Certified Faculty by the Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders
- Fellow, American Academy of Pediatrics (FAAP)
- Adjunct Clinical Associate Professor, University of Michigan
- Chairman of the Autism Committee for the Michigan chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

Dr. Solomon's Recent Article

Solomon, R., J. Necheles, C. Ferch, and D. Bruckman. "Pilot study of a parent training program for young children with autism: The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consultation program." *Autism* 11, no. 3 (2007) 205–224.

Dr. Solomon's Media Appearances

- NBC affiliate, Channel 4 Detroit News
- Michigan Radio
- 'Parenting', 'Redbook', and other magazines



Testimonials

For the past nine years, The P.L.A.Y. Project has educated parents, child-development professionals, teachers, doctors and community leaders about developmental, play-based interventions for young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

What professionals are saying about...

Dr. Rick:

"I've known Rick Solomon for many years and he's not only a pioneer and a leader in Michigan, but also one of a small group of clinicians and researchers who are transforming the way we care for infants, young children and families with various challenges throughout the world."
—Stanley Greenspan, M.D.

Agency Trainings:

"The P.L.A.Y. Project training was a great experience. Dr. Solomon put together a well thought out training filled with all the information needed to succeed as a home consultant. The videos, discussion, and home visit were enlightening and fun. A large amount of information was disseminated over a four-day training, but I left feeling excited to implement The P.L.A.Y. Project in our community. I felt supported by Dr. Solomon and his staff in my new position as a home consultant, and continue to feel supported as we expand our program and send more staff to training."
—Sara Scott, Easter Seals, Peoria IL

Our DVD/CD-Rom

"The P.L.A.Y. Project CD-Rom is an effective resource in teaching parents the basic concepts, functional developmental levels, and techniques of Floortime and The P.L.A.Y. Project. Parents have the ability to review the materials at their own pace and go back as much as they want for clarification. The video clips allow parents to witness other families traveling the same journey they are about to embark on. Parents have a better understanding of The P.L.A.Y. Project if they view the CD-Rom before their home consultant visits, which is why it is now a requirement for all new families in our program."
—Sara Scott, Home Consultant, Easter Seals, Peoria IL

What parents are saying about ...

Dr. Rick's Community Workshops

"We listened to the whole seminar . . . and we thought, Okay, this is something we can do. It felt like the most natural thing for us to do." —Mick Katschor, parent

Our Home Consulting Services:

"We have immensely enjoyed seeing Magdalyn's progress so far by our family participation in The P.L.A.Y. Project. It has provided a cost effective and realistic program to enhance our daughter's potential for development. We have seen her grow and connect on many different capacities since beginning in February. We are excited to see what the future holds for her. It has filled us with optimism and useful tools to continue her progress and her journey."
—Steven and Kelly VanSingel, parents

"The P.L.A.Y. Project has offered us the training and avenues to move our child forward. The video feedback allows us to revisit training and provides us guidance. It helps strengthen our skills and provide positive feedback. We feel we are not alone in the new world of autism."
—Amy Suhrheinrich, parent

"We are very pleased with the results we've seen with our son after only three months with the P.L.A.Y. Project. We've been able to connect with him in a way that was not possible before. He's showing great eye contact, attention and has tried speaking more and more. We're very pleased with his progress thus far and look forward to seeing future results."
—Edward and Heather Yest, parents

"It is really helpful to have a consultant who is caring and understanding about our children . . . The P.L.A.Y. Project has been truly inspiring to our family. When you never know if you are doing enough or all the right things, this plan helps us as parents to ensure that we are doing all and everything we can to help our children. Not only has it helped our son dramatically, it has also helped our family as a whole, our everyday quality of life and all those others who are blessed to have contact with our wonderful son, Dominic."
—Brian and Lorrie Gray, parents

Not only has The P.L.A.Y. Project helped our son dramatically, it has helped our family as a whole.



About Autism

Autism is a complex neurobiological disorder that typically lasts throughout a person's lifetime. It is part of a group of disorders known as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Today, 1 in 10 individuals is diagnosed with autism. It occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups and is four times more likely to strike boys than girls. Autism impairs a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. It is also associated with rigid routines and repetitive behaviors, such as obsessively arranging objects or following very specific routines. Symptoms can range from very mild to quite severe.¹

Autism is the fastest growing disability in the United States. Based on statistics from the U.S. Department of Education and other governmental agencies, autism is growing at a startling rate of 10-17% per year.

Autism Treatment

The National Academy of Sciences recommendations for the education of young children with autistic spectrum disorders states that parents and professionals should:

- Begin interventions early (18 months to 5 years)
- Use intensive intervention 25 hours per week
- Have a teacher/play partner to child ratio of 1:1 or 1:2
- Use interventions that are engaging
- Have a strategic direction (e.g. social skills, language, etc.)



Autism Information Sources

Organizations and websites with information about autism spectrum disorders:

- Easter Seals: www.easterseals.com
- Autism Society of America: www.autism-society.org
- Autism Speaks: www.autismspeaks.org
- Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders (ICDL): www.icdl.com
- Your Child: www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/

Autism in the media

- Science Daily: "Autism Costs Society an Estimated \$3 Million Per Patient" www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/04/070403112757.htm
- MSNBC: "Autism: The Hidden Epidemic?" www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6844737/
- Time Magazine: "The Secrets of Autism" <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101020506/scautism.html>
- Time Magazine: "A Tale of Two Schools" <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1191852,00.html>

¹ Definition courtesy of Autism Speaks