



# RESEARCH RUNDOWN

## Parent Satisfaction with Behavioural Intervention Programs for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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How do families rate the goals, procedures, and results of an early intensive behavioural intervention program for children with autism spectrum disorder? We analyzed family satisfaction survey answers to find out how satisfied parents are with the program and what improvements can be made. Overall, parents reported high levels of satisfaction with the program.

### What is this research about?

Early intensive behavioural intervention (EIBI) is one of the most frequently requested, recommended, and used treatment programs for children with autism spectrum disorder. Understandably, the effectiveness of EIBI is measured primarily by the outcomes of the children, but the impact these programs have on families should also be considered. Our study looked at how appropriate the goals, procedures, and results of St. Amant Autism Early Learning and School-Age Learning Programs are from the perspective of parents.

### What did the researchers do?

We assessed family satisfaction in two ways. In the first part of the study, we analyzed parent responses from the satisfaction surveys St. Amant Autism Programs have administered since 2003. Satisfaction surveys were administered annually to Early Learning and School Age program families. Exit satisfaction surveys were also administered to families in their final year of the Early Learning or School-Age program.

For the second part of the study, we sent out a satisfaction survey that we created to the parents of children currently receiving service from the Early Learning Program. Our satisfaction survey was more comprehensive compared to the Autism Program versions, containing almost 80 items focused on goals and outcomes, staff, methods, and impact.

Answers to the survey questions were analyzed to determine whether parents are satisfied with the program. We also categorized responses to open-ended questions according to common themes.

### What you need to know:

We measured parent satisfaction of an early intensive behavioural intervention program for children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Archived family satisfaction surveys were analyzed and we also administered a new more comprehensive satisfaction survey. Most parents reported high levels of overall satisfaction with the program. Parents cited staff as both the biggest strength and limitation of the program.

### What did the researchers find?

For both the annual Early Learning Program family satisfaction surveys and the exit surveys, parents rated their overall satisfaction with the program quite high. Eighty-three percent of parents rated their overall satisfaction as either *satisfied* (37%) or *very satisfied* (46%) on the annual surveys, and exit surveys had a 91% satisfaction rating.

The annual School Age Program family satisfaction survey had similar satisfaction results. Forty-two percent of parents rated their overall satisfaction as *very satisfied* and another 38% were *satisfied*. Parent satisfaction ratings on the School Age Program exit surveys was also high, as



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91% of parents rated their overall satisfaction as *satisfied* (47%) or *very satisfied* (45%).

All versions of the surveys (i.e., annual and exiting surveys in the Early Learning and School Age programs) also asked parents for suggestions about how to improve the program to better suit their needs. *Staffing issues* was the most common theme parents identified in both programs. For example, "There were too many changes in tutors." Interestingly, *good staff* was also the most common theme reported when asked about the most helpful aspects of the program for both Early Learning and School Age responses.

Five parents completed the new survey we created. Parents rated satisfaction with the *goals/outcomes* highly, with the majority scoring these items as a 5 on a scale of 0-5. For items related to *staff, methods, and impact*, parents were moderately satisfied with most rating them as a 4. Parents were also highly satisfied with items related to information and support, and use of services with most parents indicating the maximum score of 5. Responses to the open-ended questions were mixed. While most respondents indicated that they liked that the program was tailored to their child's needs, responses to what could be improved varied from shortening the wait list to too many staff changes.

Overall, these survey results indicate that parents with children in both the Early Learning and School Age Programs were highly satisfied with the programs.

## Why is it important?

Striving to improve services should be a top priority for all service providers. We identified successes and areas for improvement directly from the consumers of an early intensive behavioural intervention program. We've learned that staff were listed as both the biggest strength and limitation of the programs. Thus, parents' experiences with staff are a vital component of their experience in the program. Making changes based on parent recommendations may not only improve parent satisfaction, but may also contribute to improved services for the children.

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## Additional Resources

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Project completed 2016. Please see: <http://stamant.ca/research/our-research/project-summaries/> for more project summaries.