

13TH EUROPEAN

PEDIATRICS & PEDIATRIC NEUROLOGY CONFERENCE

August 31-September 02, 2017 | Prague, Czech Republic

Early intervention for autism spectrum disorder: What the evidence says**Karola Dillenburger**

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Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are pervasive developmental disorders that are diagnosed along a continuum of behavioural variants in social interaction, communication, and imagination. Some individuals on the spectrum are 'high-functioning' and able to cope in every day environments, while others are severely affected, non-verbal, and may have comorbid diagnoses, such as intellectual disability, epilepsy, and/or obsessional, conduct, or mental health disorders. If untreated, the lifetime cost to society for each individual with ASD is estimated between £0.9-1.5 million depending on the level of functioning. Of course, the cost for quality of life for the individual and their family is much higher and the potential economic and social impact of effective interventions is enormous. Despite the general endorsement of evidence-based behaviour analytic interventions across most of North America, a more controversial approach is taken by governments across much of Europe (including UK and Ireland) to support an 'eclectic' approach, although there are no clear guidelines what this entails and not a single study is published anywhere to show effectiveness of an eclectic approach being equal or superior to ABA-based interventions. In contrast, the evidence base showing the efficacy and effectiveness of ABA-based interventions spans all valid and recognised research methodologies. A skilled Board Certified Behaviour Analyst (cf. BACB.com) identifies the appropriate intervention on the basis of a *functional assessment and analysis* of the target *behaviour*. It is important to note that *behaviour* is defined holistically as the interaction of an organism with their environment, including anything we do, e.g. feeling, thinking and acting. This talk outlines the evidence.

Biography

Karola Dillenburger BCBA-D is Professor of Behaviour Analysis and Education and Director of the Centre for Behaviour Analysis (CBA) at the School of Social Sciences, Education, and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland. The CBA offers the MScASD and the MScABA, that includes an approved Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) distant learning course sequence. Professor Dillenburger's research focuses on bereavement and trauma as well as on evidence-based early intervention for vulnerable children, and parenting across the lifespan. She has published widely and has held honorary appointments in Germany, Czech Republic, Australia, Canada, and USA.

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