

Brief Report: Autistic Children's Attentiveness and Responsivity Improve After Touch Therapy (Abstract)

Field, T., Lasko, D., Mundy, P., Henteleff, T., Kabat, S., Talpins, S. & Dowling, M. (1997). Brief report: Autistic children's attentiveness and responsivity improve after touch therapy. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 27(3), 333-338.

This paper reports a study done to examine the effectiveness of touch therapy on autistic children's behavior. A group of 22 children diagnosed with autism who were attending a special education preschool participated. They were divided into 2 groups, one receiving touch therapy and the other serving as a control group. Touch therapy consisted of a standardized protocol for body massage with moderate pressure. This took place 15 minutes a day, 2 days a week for 4 weeks. A total of 8 sessions were completed. The children in the control group received the same amount of individual attention, but during their time, they sat on the lap of the examiner, engaged in a simple shape and color game.

Assessment, which was completed on the first and last day of the study, included classroom observation, the Autism Behavior Checklist (ABC), and the Early Social Communication Scales (ESCS). The 2 groups did not differ on baseline measures. Following the touch therapy, both groups improved, showing decreased touch aversion, off task behavior, orientation to irrelevant sounds, and stereotypic behaviors. However, the touch therapy group improved more than the control group in stereotypic behaviors and orientation to irrelevant sounds. On the ABC scale, only the touch therapy group improved on the sensory scale, the relating scale, and the total score. Significant changes occurred for the touch therapy group on the ECSC also. Improvements were noted in the areas of joint attention, behavioral regulation, social behavior, and initiating behavior. The authors suggest the effectiveness of touch therapy might be related to changes in vagal tone and/or EEG patterns.