Best Practice Toolkit for ASD to Guide Assessment, Programming, and Instructional Planning

Purpose: The Best Practice Guide for Autism is intended to provide Special Education administrators, coaches, and Effective Practice Specialists with an understanding of practices, procedures, and processes which will lead to **equity and access** to high quality instruction and interventions for all students who are eligible for special education services under autism. This Best Practice Guide is intended to describe and support decision making for planning and implementation in alignment with best practices to support the anticipated highest possible outcomes for any student identified with autism. Content in this guide is informed by evidence, research, and experience and is likely to be relevant for students with a range of neurodevelopmental needs, acknowledging that support should be individualized and should not be dependent upon diagnostic labels.

Maximizing each student's skills and potential requires the team to take an active approach to individualized planning. This guidance seeks to inform professionals working in schools, and those supporting schools staff, of the range of concerns that may arise for an individual learner and to suggest educationally appropriate steps to take in addressing these concerns for intervention and programming. Because each individual with autism and other related neurodevelopmental needs is unique, every Individualized Education Plan (IEP) will be unique, despite its similarities in programming addressing the areas of social communication, emotional regulation, and relevant supports needed to maximize a student's performance.

This document is focused on evidence based approaches, which will positively address "distressed behavior" and anxiety through individual anticipatory support, commonly applied in naturally occurring environments of home and school, developmentally relevant, support positive communication, emotional regulation and engagement in learning, and increase predictability and desirability of day to day life. Ultimately, for a student with ASD to have active engagement, there must be social communication, emotional regulation, and transactional support.

This document will utilize language and terminology from the SCERTS Model to support and organize our district programming, resources, and supports. While it is recommended for use following SCERTS planning and assessment, it can equally be used alongside other approaches to planning. The following terms are defined in the SCERTS Model and the same/similar definitions will be utilized in this document.

For links and other AU Support, please visit our AU EPS Site.

Effective approaches and interventions for those with identified autism are likely to focus on three key target areas:	
Social Communication:	These focus on joint attention, interaction with other people and opportunities to engage socially. The development of spontaneous, functional communication, emotional expression, and secure and trusting relationships with children and adults.
Emotional Regulation:	These target activities or resources that support self or mutual regulation. The development of the ability to maintain a well-regulated emotional state to cope with everyday stress, and to be most available for learning and interacting.
Transactional Supports:	The development and implementation of supports to help partners respond to the individual's needs and interests, modify and adapt the environment, and provide tools to enhance learning (e.g, picture communication, written schedules, and sensory supports). Specific plans are also developed to provide educational and emotional support to families, and to foster teamwork among professionals.

Communication Stages: It is best practice to provide developmentally relevant instruction, content, and support based upon an individual's developmental communication stage. It is imperative to meet an individual at their language level to maximize their engagement and learning. These developmental stages are taken from SCERTS Model and are utilized to roughly describe an individual's level or stage of communication.	
Social Partner:	Individuals who have fewer than 10 meaningful words. The individual is using body language, gestures, and facial expression to communicate.
Language Partner:	Individuals who are using single words and brief phrases to communicate with speech, signs, or pictures.
Conversational Partner:	Individuals who are using creative language to communicate and learning how to succeed in a range of social settings.

Prizant, B. M., Wetherby, A. M., Rubin, E., Laurent, A. C., & C, R. P. (2006a). The SCERTS Model: Assessment. Paul H. Brookes Pub. https://books.google.com/books?id=u8hkRQAACA

Autism (Incorporates social-emotional, behavioral and communication/language skills)

Tier I
Partner District

To support school and classwide communication and emotional regulation through behaviors, routines, environmental supports and clear expectations.

Tier I interventions are in place for every student in the building. Some interventions are administered on an individual student level.

Students that are displaying more intensive concerns may require consistent and explicit teaching/modeling of Tier I supports.

Note: Without foundational tier I implementation, support at Tiers II and III may become over accessed by students who may have otherwise been adequately served by Tier I supports.

Some highlights from above:

Classwide supports:

- Tier I Strategy Checklist
- SSD Universal Checklist

Tier II
See Partner District supports

When Tier I supports are not meeting the needs of the student (students are not making documented gains).

Classroom learning is impacted. Academic progress is impacted and the students' exposure to curriculums and additional learning support is required.

Tier II interventions are required and layered with evidence based practices.

Evidence-Based Practices for AU Interventions
SSD's AU Resource Guide
Social Skills Solutions Checklist (SSSC)

Always remember to check out Goalbook for behavioral, SEL, and language/communication aligned strategies!
Here is a video explaining Goalbook.

Tier III
AU EPS supports at this tier

When highly intensive and individualized academic and behavioral supports provided to students with whom Tier I and Tier II supports are insufficient.

These Tier III evidence-based interventions are layered on and aligned with the supports that students are receiving at Tiers I and II.

The classroom learning of the student and others is impacted.

Academic progress is impacted and the student is being considered for a more restrictive placement.

Autism Quality Indicators (AQI)
Social Skills Solutions Checklist (SSSC)
Essential Elements Checklist (EEC)
Evidence-Based Practices for AU Interventions
SSD's AU Resource Guide
SCERTS Framework

Practices and Procedures: The following practices and procedures are defined for use with any individuals with autism, whether educationally or medically identified. Some of the following will be defined for use in AU programming, which is defined as programs or rooms that educate a population of students where 50% or more individuals are identified with autism.				
Practice/Procedure	Tool	Where/Indications?	By Whom?	How often?
Ensure Equity and Access to High Quality AU Programming	AQI Walkthrough Tool	Required in programs or rooms that educate a population of students 50% or more students are identified with AU	AU EPS ideally in collaboration with Partner district/SSD school admin	Twice Yearly: Beginning of Year (Fall), Spring
Ensure Equity and Access to High Quality AU Programming	Autism Quality Indicator Teacher Self Reflection Tool	Required in programs or rooms that educate a population of students 50% or more students are identified with AU Recommended to be completed by staff who educate any individuals with autism and have a need to dive deeper into quality of programming.	Teacher/team of the program/room Teachers who are educating students with autism who want to troubleshoot best practices beyond universals.	Ideally three times a year: Beginning of Year (Fall), Middle (Winter), End of year (Spring)
Regular Student Progress Monitoring	SCERTS or Social Skills Solutions Checklist AND	^For progress monitoring all students with ASD/autism eligibility in the area of Social Communication and Emotional Regulation ~For progress	Teacher/team	Three times a year: Beginning of Year (Fall), Middle (Winter), End of year (Spring)

	Essential Elements Checklists	monitoring of students whose developmental social skills level is developmentally below a 3rd grade level *For students who are not accessing progress monitoring through FASTBridge		
Regular Team meetings	Agenda to focus on possible program goals, student specific concerns, consistency in implementation of supports, training	In programs or rooms that educate a population of students 50% or more students are identified with AU	Teacher, Paras Optional Attendees: SPED Admin, AU EPS, ABA Staff	Ideally weekly, a minimum of twice a month - 30-45 mins is recommended
Regular Data Teams or Case Reviews	Data to review student and/or program performance and	In programs or rooms that educate a population of students 50% or more students are identified with AU	SPED Admin, Teacher Optional: AU EPS	Once a month to every 6 weeks
Consult with AU EPS	PDSA	In situations where consultation or support for best practice is needed for teacher support, student specific support, IEP team support. This could be determined by lack of student progress, high levels of student behavior, or	Sped Admin, Teacher	Per request as needed

		lack of implementation of AQIs.		
Utilizing Evidence Based Practices	AU Intervention Guide	Provide an overview of the effective structures and practices that are found in instructional settings that serve students on the Autism Spectrum to maximize their outcomes.	Teacher/team	Ideally: EBPs are utilized consistently throughout the student's day and provided with continuity between various team members and locations where the student will interact and participate The tool will be utilized as needed
Utilizing research-based Resources recommended and supported by the AU EPS team	AU Resource Guide	The following resources will provide students with a continuum of essential social communication and emotional regulation skills, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and making safe and responsible decisions across multiple settings. Each teaching resource will align with one or more Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs). This tool will support lesson planning	Instructional Admin, Teacher/team	Ideally: research based resources are utilized consistently throughout the student's day during times of instruction The tool will be utilized as needed as needed

Progress Monitoring: Autism is a social communication disorder. Individuals who are identified for autism eligibility should be progress monitored in the areas identified as areas of need. The following tools are recommended to be utilized for all students with the autism eligibility. All of the following tools are included in the SSD District-wide Recommendations for Progress Monitoring.

Practice/Procedure	Tool	Where/Indications?	By Whom?	How often?
Regular Student Progress Monitoring to inform instruction and report progress in the area of social communication and emotional regulation	SCERTS	For progress monitoring all students with ASD/autism eligibility in the area of Social Communication and Emotional Regulation	Teacher/team	Three times a year: Early Fall (September), Mid-year, April
Regular Student Progress Monitoring to inform instruction and report progress in the area of social communicative competence	Social Skills Solutions Checklist	For progress monitoring of students whose developmental social skills level is developmentally below a 3rd grade level	Teacher/team	Three times a year: Early Fall (September), Mid-year, April
Regular Student Progress Monitoring to inform instruction and report progress in the areas of academics when on alternative curriculum, MAP-A, and when FASTBridge and/or other progress tools are not sensitive enough to inform progress	Essential Elements Checklists	For students who are not accessing progress monitoring through FASTBridge and/or other progress tools are not sensitive enough to inform progress	Teacher/team	Three times a year: Early Fall (September), Mid-year, April
Regular Data Teams or Case Reviews	Data to review student and/or program performance and	In programs or rooms that educate a population of students 50% or more students are identified with AU	SPED Admin, Teacher Optional: AU EPS	Once a month to every 6 weeks

Core Values and Practices Principles (taken from SCERTS Model; Prizant, Rubin, Laurent, et al 2006): The core values and practice principles should be utilized to guide decision-making, goal making, program planning, and implementation of supports. The environment and attitude of the staff should be student-centered, strength-focused, and communication-based. It is imperative to utilize and reference appropriate, developmental sequences when taking data, making decisions, and implementing programming for students with ASD.
1. The development of spontaneous, functional communication abilities and emotional regulatory capacities are of the highest priority in educational efforts.
2. Principles and research on child development frame assessment and educational efforts. Goals and activities are developmentally appropriate and functional, relative to the individual's adaptive abilities and the necessary skills for maximizing enjoyment, success, and independence in daily experiences.
3. All domains of an individual's development (e.g. communicative, socio-emotional, cognitive, motor) are interrelated and interdependent. Assessment and educational efforts must address these relationships.
4. All behavior is viewed as purposeful. Functions of behavior may include communication, emotional regulation and engagement in adaptive skills. For individuals who display unconventional or problem behaviors, there is an emphasis on determining the function of the behavior and supporting the development of more appropriate ways to accomplish those functions
5. An individual's unique learning profile of strengths and weaknesses plays a critical role in determining appropriate accommodations for facilitating competence in the domains of social-communication and emotional regulation.
6. Natural routines across home, school, and community environments provide the educational and treatment contexts for learning, and for the development of positive relationships. Progress is measured in reference to increasing competence and active participation in daily experiences and routines.
7. It is the primary responsibility of professionals to establish positive relationships with children and with family members. All family members are treated with dignity and respect.
8. Family members are considered experts about the individual. Assessment and educational efforts are viewed as collaborative processes with family members, and principles of family-centered practice are advocated to build consensus with the family and enhance the collaborative process.

Evidence Based Practices: An evidence-based practice is an instructional/intervention procedure or set of procedures for which researchers have provided an acceptable level of research that shows the practice produces positive outcomes for children, youth, and/or adults with ASD. (National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, website, 2023)

Here is a link to the NCAEP EBP Report 2020 that can be found on their website HERE.

Selecting an Evidence-Based Practice for Autism: Selecting an evidence-based practice can be difficult with so many to choose from, different domains that each is researched for, as well as the learner's and team's needs. With a number of potential EBPs to choose from, it is important to follow a process to select the most appropriate practice for your learner. Before beginning any new practice or intervention with a learner, it is important to follow four general planning steps. The four-step process includes:

1. Identifying the behavior
2. Establishing an observable and measurable goal or outcome
3. Identifying potential EBPs based on research (NCAEP Domain Matrix), and
4. Choosing a specific EBP (consider learner and family characteristics, team characteristics, clues on the goal/outcome, and other resources)

Here is a link to AFIRM's resources for Domain Matrixes and EBP Descriptions.

If you are familiar with selecting an evidence-based practice process and just need guidance with choosing an EBP, please use the *IEP to EBP Tool* (button located below). The *IEP to EBP Tool* assists with selecting an evidence-based practice (EBP) to use with a learner. The tool guides you through National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP) Domain Matrix to identify a list of potential EBPs to use and then to choose one EBP by considering:

1. learner/family priorities, preferences and characteristics,
2. teacher/team characteristics,
3. clues found in the target goal/skill/behavior, and
4. other resources available.

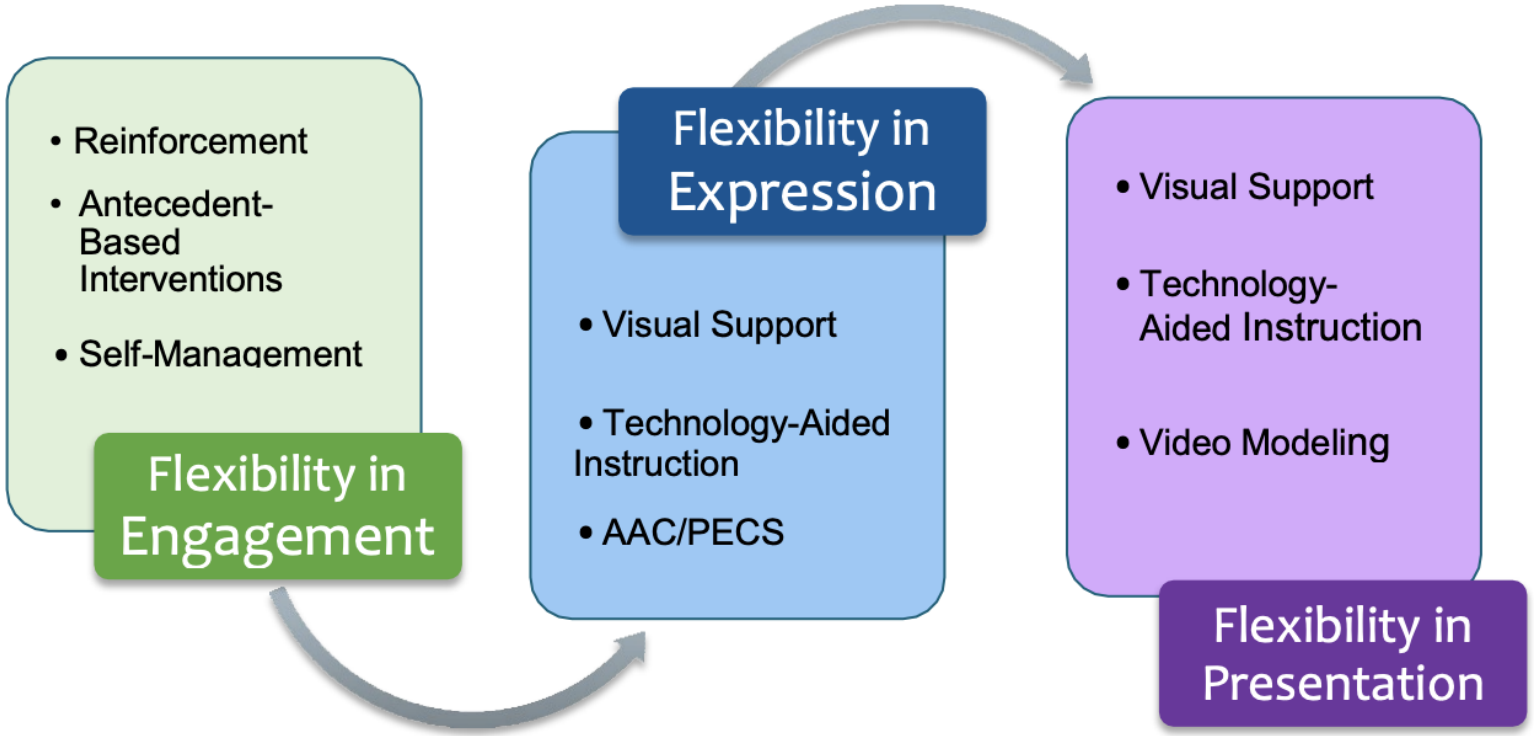
Resources to use along with this tool:

- NCAEP Domain Matrix & EBP Descriptions
- Outcomes
- Key Considerations

Use *IEP to EBP Tool* ←← CLICK HERE FOR LINK

Waters, V., Sam, A., Dees, R., & AFIRM Team. (2022). *IEP to EBP Tool*. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules. https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/selecting-ebp

EBPs for ASD in the UDL Guidelines:



Gent-Vincent, A. (n.d.). *Captain cadre tools and resources*. CAPTAIN. https://www.captain.ca.gov/cadre-resources.html

How do Evidence-Based Practices align with HLPs:

High Leverage Practices (HLPs)	Evidence-based Practices for ASD
HLP 1: Collaborate with Professionals to Increase Student Success	While there is not an EBP aligned, the SCERTS Model supports this high leverage practice.
HLP 2: Lead Effective Meetings with Professionals and Families	While there is not an EBP aligned, the SCERTS Model supports this high leverage practice.
HLP 3: Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services.	Parent-Implemented Intervention.
HLP 7: Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment.	Visual Supports and Structure, Antecedent-Based Interventions, Reinforcement.
HLP 8: Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior.	Reinforcement, Differential Reinforcement, Response Interruption and Redirection.
HLP 9: Teach social behaviors.	Reinforcement, Differential Reinforcement, Response Interruption and Redirection.
HLP 10: Conduct functional behavioral assessments to develop Individual student behavior support plans.	Functional Behavior Assessment, Functional Communication Training, Antecedent-Based Interventions, Reinforcement, Differential Reinforcement
HLP 11: Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals.	Task Analysis, Goal Attainment Scaling
HLP 12: Systematically design instruction toward specific learning goals.	Task Analysis, Goal Attainment Scaling.
HLP 13: Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals.	Antecedent-Based Interventions, Technology-Aided Instruction and Intervention, Visual Supports
HLP 14: Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to	Self-Management, Visual Supports, Cognitive

support learning and independence.	Behavioral/Instructional Strategies.
HLP 15: Provide scaffolded supports.	Self-Management, Visual Supports, Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies
HLP 16: Use explicit instruction.	Discrete Trial Training, Direct Instruction, Modeling, Video Modeling.
HLP 17: Use flexible grouping.	Peer-Based Instruction and Intervention, Antecedent-Based Interventions.
HLP 18: Use strategies to promote active student engagement.	Pivotal Response Training, Antecedent-Based Interventions, Peer-Based Instruction and Intervention, Behavioral Momentum, Self-Management, TechnologyAided Instruction and Intervention, Reinforcement, Exercise and Movement, Music Mediated Intervention
HLP 19: Use assistive and instructional technologies.	Technology-Aided Instruction and Intervention, Functional Communication Training, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Picture Exchange Communication System**.**
HLP 20: Provide intensive instruction.	Discrete Trial Training, Direct Instruction.
HLP 21: Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings	Naturalistic Intervention, Pivotal Response Training, Differential Reinforcement.
HLP 22: Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior.	Reinforcement, Differential Reinforcement, Self -Management, Response Interruption and Redirection
High Leverage Practices: https://highleveragepractices.org	**EBPs for Autism: https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules**

For more information regarding the alignment of best practices, here is a link to SSD's AU Crosswalk Tool which connects AQIs, Universals, HLPs, and EES to provide administrators and teachers with the parallels and overlap of our systems of best practice to serve as a guide when choosing Educator Growth plans and to see the correlation for those interested in an AU focus.

ASD Interventions and Supports Map: Supports relevant to each communication stage					
	Intervention or approach	**Social partner**	**Language partner**	**Conversation partner**	**Key target areas**
EBP 1	ABI - Antecedent Based Intervention				Self-injury, repetitive/stereotypical behaviors, promoting engagement & on-task behaviors
EBP 2	AAC - Augmentative & Assistive Communication				Variety of communication skills including initiating, expressive language, joint attention, gestures, conversation skills, modeling
EBP 3	CBI - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy				Interpersonal, communication, social, cognitive, behavior
EBP 4	DR - Differential Reinforcement				Decreasing challenging behavior, increase desired behaviors, increase communication skills, part of self-management system
EBP 5	DTT - Discrete Trial Training				Skills in the areas of academics & cognition, behavior, communication, play, social
EBP 6	ECE - Exercise				Increase desired behaviors, such as academic engagement, time on task, correct responding, and task completion
EBP 7	EXT - Extinction				Decrease challenging behaviors (in conjunction with strategies to teach replacement behaviors)
EBP 8	FBA - Functional Behavior Assessment				Decrease challenging behaviors and teach replacement behaviors/skills

EBP 9	FCT - Functional Communication Training				Communication skills, decrease interfering behaviors, teach clear forms of communication
EBP 10	MD - Modeling				Modeling can be used as a prompt to provide extra support to the learner after the direction has been provided and the child is trying to use the behavior.
EBP 11	NI - Naturalistic Intervention				Communication and social skills, (i.e., expressive vocals, intelligibility, use of gestures, shared attention, turn taking, initiation, etc.)
EBP 12	PII - Parent Initiated Intervention				Social Communication, conversation skills, spontaneous language, use of communication devices, joint attention, interactions in peer interactions, compliance, decrease in challenging behaviors
EBP 13	PMII - Peer Mediated Instruction and Intervention				Social skills including: responding to others, reciprocity, understanding others, interaction in a group
EBP 14	PECS - Picture Exchange Communication				Increase in desired behaviors, communication initiations, conversation skills, etc
EBP 15	PRT - Pivotal Response Training				Pivotal behaviors: motivation, responding to multiple self management, self-initiations; promote: communication play, joint attention, decrease challenging behavior
EBP 16	PP - Prompting				Variety including: seeking information, pointing to objects, identifying numbers/objects, promote “on-task” behavior

EBP 17	RIR - Response Interruption and Redirection				Reduction of severe repetitive and stereotypical behaviors which interfere with daily living, engagement, or attention; Includes: vocal stereotypy
EBP 18	R+ - Reinforcement				Variety including: speech production, increasing desired behaviors, decreasing challenging behaviors
EBP 19	SC - Scripting				Capitalizes upon the strengths of learners with ASD by providing specific, models for language and/or social behavior in a structured way that will support the learner in engaging in a communicative interaction with a partner
EBP 20	SM - Self-Management				Decrease disruptive classroom behaviors, difficulty finishing work independently or efficiently, giving compliments to others, response sharing, increase engagement, initiating, daily living skills, play skills, conversation skills
EBP 21	SN - Social Narrative				Challenging behaviors, teach social skills, implicit communication skills, explain upcoming events that may be new or different
EBP 22	SST - Social Skills Training				Joint attention, perspective-taking, self-awareness, conversation skills, friendship skills, problem-solving competence, emotion recognition, giving compliments, greetings, sharing, asking for help, offering assistance
EBP 23	SPG - Structured Play Group				Friendship skills, social communication competency, turn taking, imitation and following

EBP 24	Structured Work Systems				Adaptive skills: on-task, task completion, transitions, increasing response chain length, independent performance across areas (play, self-help, academics)
EBP 25	TA - Task Analysis				Any skill that can be broken down into small steps (i.e. teeth brushing, hand washing, projects, writing a paper, etc.)
EBP 26	TAII - Technology Aided Instruction and Intervention				Technology is defined as “any electronic item, equipment, application, or virtual network that is used intentionally to increase/maintain, and/or improve daily living, work/productivity, and recreation/leisure capabilities of children with autism spectrum disorders.”
EBP 27	TD - Time Delay				Variety of skills within the domains Academics and Cognition, Communication, Play, and Social
EBP 28	VM - Video Modeling				Social, adaptive, play, communication skills
EBP 29	VS - Visual Supports				Task engagement, independent performance, transitions, increasing response chain length, social initiations, reduction of challenging behaviors
**Click on the above links to access the EBP’s Brief Packet from the AFIRM website.					

Table 3.7 Matrix of evidence-based practices, outcomes, and age categories

Evidence-Based Practices See Table 3.1 to link abbreviations to EBPs	Academic/ Pre-academic			Adaptive/ Self-help			Challenging/ Interfering behavior			Cognitive			Communi-cation			Joint attention			Mental health			Motor			Play			School readiness			Self-determination			Social			Vocational		
	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years	0-5 years	6-14 years	15-22 years
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The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder. https://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/

The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice. https://ncaep.fpg.unc.edu/