

# Where do I start?

*It's 2:30 in the morning, I'm bleary-eyed and headachy in front of the computer, anxiously looking for solutions to the problems faced by my loved one with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)—and overwhelmed by the amount of information out there! Where do I start?*

The National Autism Center in Randolph, Mass., published its *National Standards Report* in 2009 to address the growing number of unproven treatment methods at the time and create “universally accepted standards that promote evidence-based treatment approaches for autism” (<http://www.nationalautismcenter.org/about/national.php>). In other words, information about which autism treatments have been shown to work.

The *National Standards Report* categorized the broad range of autism interventions and therapies into three basic categories:

- established treatments
- emerging treatments
- unestablished treatments

“I think it’s important to note here,” says Heidi Mizell, Autism Delaware’s resource coordinator and a parent mentor, “that this report came out four years ago and a lot more has been published since then. We’re offering the NAC’s standard and language as a basis for families to start their research. As the parent or guardian of a child with an ASD, you must research each available treatment as completely as possible and consider its appropriateness because each child responds to treatments differently.

“I also recommend,” adds Mizell, “that you consider the preferences of the child, the capabilities of the staff delivering the treatment, and what your family can manage.”

## Established treatments

The *National Standards Report* defines “established treatments” as those with scientific evidence showing they are effective for people with ASDs. Despite the benefits produced in the well-controlled studies, though, not everyone on the spectrum can expect the same results (*National Standards Report*: p.43).

“Some examples of established treatments,” notes Mizell, “are parent-child interaction training, joint attention intervention, and applied behavior analysis.” Called ABA for short, applied behavior analysis includes such treatments as

- discrete trial training (DTT),
- early intensive behavioral intervention (EIBI),
- pivotal response training (PRT), and
- verbal behavior intervention (VBI).

## Emerging treatments

As defined by the *National Standards Report*, “emerging treatments” are those that produce favorable outcomes in one or more studies. Considering this minimal evidence, the report’s authors admit the possibility that emerging treatments may not be effective and propose more high-quality studies to consistently show effectiveness for individuals with ASDs. And because a large number of studies are considered “emerging,” the areas needing further research are extensive (*National Standards Report*, p.57).

“Some examples of emerging treatments,” continues Mizell, “are augmentative and alternative communication devices, cognitive behavioral intervention, PECS [picture exchange communication system], and developmental relationship-based treatment, which we also know as Floortime™.”

## Unestablished treatments

Defined by the *National Standards Report*, “unestablished treatments” are those with little or no evidence in the scientific literature. As a result, no firm conclusions could be made about either their effectiveness or the possibility that they are ineffective or harmful to people with ASDs (*National Standards Report*: p.70).

“Examples of unestablished treatments,” notes Mizell, “include gluten-free/casein-free [GFCF] diets, sensory integrative packages, facilitated communication, and academic intervention.” Defined as the use of traditional teaching methods to improve academic performance, academic intervention includes picture-to-text matching, answering pre-reading questions, and handwriting training.

## For a copy of the report

Download a digital copy of the NAC’s *National Standards Report* at [http://www.nationalautismcenter.org/pdf/NAC\\_Standards\\_Report.pdf](http://www.nationalautismcenter.org/pdf/NAC_Standards_Report.pdf).

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**Main office:**

924 Old Harmony Rd., Suite 201, Newark DE 19713  
(302) 224-6020

**Southern Delaware office:**

16394 Samuel Paynter Blvd., Unit 201, Milton DE 19968  
(302) 644-3410