



DIR/Floortime Approach to Learning and Social Emotional Growth for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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LEND

What is DIR/ Floortime?

Developmental
Individual Difference
Relationship-based



- A framework designed for parents, clinicians, and educators to conduct a comprehensive assessment and develop an intervention program tailored to the unique challenges and strengths of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and other developmental challenges.
- Nicknamed “Floortime” because playing with young children often happens on the floor.
- Developed by Dr. Stanley Greenspan and Dr. Serena Wieder

DIR focuses on:

- The relationship between parents and child
- Building healthy foundations for:
 - Social capacities
 - Emotional capacities
 - Intellectual capacities
- Underlying meaning that behaviors represent, rather than eliminating behavioral symptoms



Theoretical Foundations

- Underlying biology and neurological differences lead to social deficits
- Assumption that primary difficulty in ASD is in connecting emotion to motor actions, symbols, and language.
- Without emotional linkage, cognitive, motor, social, and language difficulties ensue.

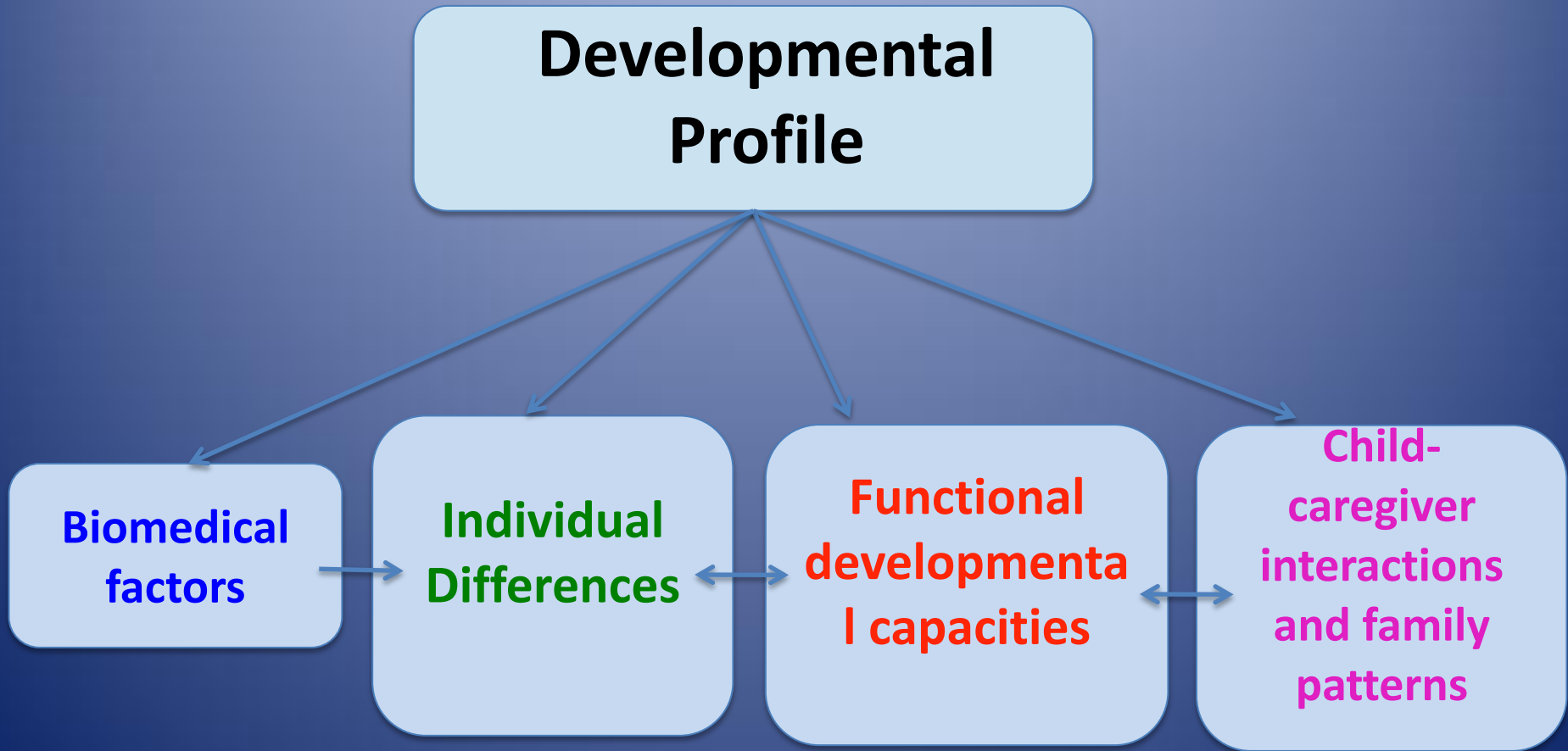
Role of Affect in Early Brain Development

- Affect is the foundation of development
 - “Human connections actually shape the neural connections from which the mind emerges” -Daniel Siegel
- Relationships help organize and regulate growing infants and children.
 - Attachment theory- healthy and secure attachment leads to optimal social-emotional and cognitive growth in children
- Emotionally salient learning → more integrated learning

Overview of Floortime model

- Who does floortime?
 - Parents, occupational therapists, speech therapists, feeding therapists, teachers, psychologists, students
- Dosage:
 - Recommended eight 20-30 minute sessions per day/ 25 hours per week
 - Multiple natural settings
 - Home, school, park, grocery store, in the car, etc.

Major elements



Functional Emotional Developmental Levels

1. Shared attention/ Regulation and interest in the world
2. Mutual Engagement
3. Intentional two-way communication
4. Social problem solving, mood regulation, and development of sense of self
5. Creating symbolic ideas
6. Emotional thinking, logic, and a sense of reality

- DIR sees all development (motor, speech, cognitive, social emotional) under umbrella of core developmental competencies.
- Developmental levels mediated by affect and relationships
- Focus on meeting child where they are developmentally and scaffolding up developmental ladder.



Individual Differences

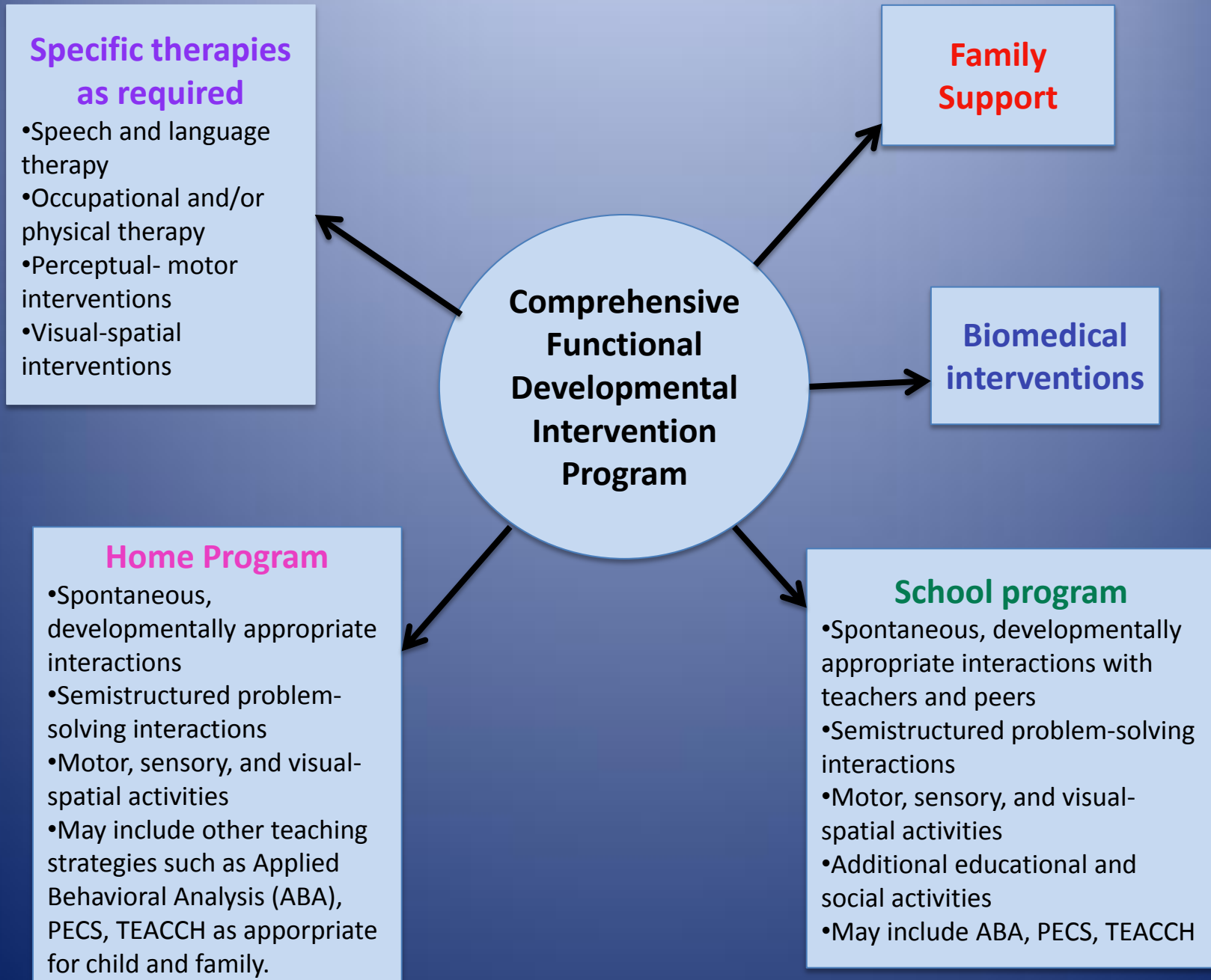
- Sensory processing differences:
 - Auditory-Verbal (receptive and expressive)
 - Visual-Spatial
 - Motor planning
 - Sensory modulation
 - Praxis (ideation, planning, sequencing, execution, adaptation)
 - Reactivity (hypo, hyper, both)
- Focus on how to work with a child's unique sensory profile to promote engagement. Promotes parental mindfulness of a child's unique needs.
- Temperament

Relationship



- “Family first”- goal is to emphasize and support primary role of parents in children’s development.
- Early child-caregiver interactions are essential for healthy social, emotional, and intellectual development and such interactions and positive parenting can lessen the degree of developmental delay.

- Floortime can be done anytime, anywhere!
- Can be spontaneous and unstructured as well as use of more structured sessions.
- Learning in naturalistic settings → generalization to other settings.



Floortime Interaction Strategies

- Tune into child's individual differences and set stage for sensitive engagement.
- Follow the child's lead
- Go for the gleam in the eye, use high affect
- Playful obstruction
- Making actions meaningful



Empirical Support

- Greenspan & Weider (1997)
 - Chart review of 200 children on Autism spectrum who received comprehensive Floortime program with monthly consultation for 2 years.
 - 58% of clients had very good outcomes evidenced by developmental and relational gains, and rated in non-autistic range on the Childhood Autism Rating Scale.
- Solomon, Necheles, Ferch & Bruckman (2007)
 - PLAY project- DIR inspired pilot program in Michigan geared towards early intervention.
 - Offers home consultation, parent training, coaching, modeling of Floortime strategies, video tape feedback, and requires parents to engage in 15 hours of reciprocal interaction with their child per week.
 - After 14 months of intervention, 66% of participants made increases of 1.5 levels on Functional Developmental Levels
 - 45.5 % made statistically significant gains on the FEAS (functional emotional assessment scale).
- PLAY project now funded by National Institute of Mental Health for a 3 year study.

Recommendations

- More clinical trials done by independent researchers
- Better ways of taking data and charting changes
- Make it affordable and accessible to families!
- Research on how to make this model approachable across cultural and ethnic groups.

Resources

- www.floortime.org
- www.icdl.com- The Interdisciplinary Council on Learning and Developmental Disorders: This is the body that holds the rights to DIR and are only group qualified to train and certify DIR clinicians.
- Greenspan & Weider (2006) Engaging Autism. Cambridge, MA. Da Capo Press

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