Theiss Early Autism Program

Our Mission

The Mission of the Theiss Early Autism Program (TEAP) is to serve young children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in a small, preschool-age group setting while providing an intense level of behavior support that allows each child to achieve his or her individual potential. The program is committed to providing the highest quality behavior analytic treatment available to young children ages 2 to 5 who can effectively learn in a small group environment. The highly specialized treatment team is committed to approaching each child uniquely and individualizing intervention to best meet his or her needs. The goal for each child is to build essential skills to allow for future placements in less restrictive early education or school-age settings.

Services

Early intensive intervention can have profound and long-term effects on child development. The Theiss Early Autism Program provides intensive, evidence-based treatment in a preschool (BHRS Exception) setting for children, ages 2 to 5, and is aimed at enhancing language and communication, social/play, pre-academic and age appropriate adaptive skills of young children, so that they may take better advantage of opportunities in their communities and may require less restrictive settings as they grow older. A full-day, theme-based preschool schedule serves as the backdrop for daily intervention and is located at the Hill House Association in the Hill District area of the city of Pittsburgh at 1835 Centre Avenue.

The program emphasizes a positive and systematic way of teaching skills and reducing behavioral problems. Treatment teams focus on creativity and flexibility, and work with available resources to develop a plan for each child. The program uses applied behavior analysis principles to determine a young child’s behavioral deficits and excesses.

The clinical team makes every effort to create a setting that maximizes each child’s successes and minimizes barriers to learning. To help accomplish this, clinicians provide an optimal level of structure, simplify requests, prompt the child to make correct responses, utilize a wide variety of visual and other environmental supports, and provide ample reinforcement for appropriate behaviors. Emphasis is placed on identifying, capturing, and contriving motivation for each child in order to maximize individual response to treatment.

Treatment

The program uses applied behavioral analysis within a daily preschool schedule and one-on-one intensive teaching strategies. Activities are individualized to meet each child’s needs and may include:

- Functional Behavior Assessment and Positive Behavior Support Plans to optimize desired behavior change
- Individualized treatment programs to address a child’s cognitive development, language development, self-care and adaptive behavior, and social-emotional development
- Theme-based preschool activities including circle time, centers, gross motor, pretend play, arts & crafts, music & movement, gross motor play, story time, fine motor activities, and sensory play
- Applied Behavior Analysis methods including Discrete Trial Training, an analysis of verbal behavior, and Natural Environment Teaching which allow for individualizing and optimizing instruction to enhance a child’s learning rate
- Systematic re-evaluation to monitor a child’s developmental and behavioral needs and to measure progress including the Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment & Placement Program (VBMAPP)
- Enhancing social competence by teaching social skills and play repertoires to support a child to interact appropriately with peers
- An early focus on generalization of each targeted area
- Parent support and an education program through family meetings every 6 weeks that helps parents to enhance their child’s development in targeted areas and support transfer of skills to the home and community.
- A referral system linking families to various community services
- Meal time opportunities to target adaptive skills, food selectivity issues, and socialization during morning snack and lunch.

**Child Eligibility**

TEAP offers rolling admission. Up to seven children are enrolled in the program at a time. Length of stay is dependent on each child’s progress but typically ranges from 1-2 years. Children ages 2 to 5 years of age (5th birthday must occur after Sept 1st) who have been diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder and who qualify for Medical Assistance are eligible. A psychiatric/psychological evaluation recommending an intensive level of behavioral intervention is medically necessary. Services are contingent upon agreement by all involved parties at the periodic interagency meetings. Referrals are individually evaluated for acceptance into the program. Several factors are considered including, but not limited to, the following which may preclude eligibility for the program:

- Emergence of beginning skills in imitation, receptive language, and task completion. Because 1:1 intervention is not available for each child throughout the day at TEAP, children who are able to learn in a small setting without the need for ongoing, individual support benefit most from our center-based program. Children who have recently turned 2 or are just beginning to learn fundamental skills can often benefit more from community-based services such as BHRS Wraparound Services. Children who already demonstrate strong language skills and several learning readiness skills may be better served through other, less restrictive settings in the area which include ongoing access to typically developing peers. TEAP’s clinical team will work closely with referring families to help determine appropriate treatment options for each child.

- TEAP currently serves as a full-time BHRS Exception Program. Families must be committed to full-day treatment, each weekday in order to enroll. Parent participation during family meetings every 6 weeks is required and home visits every other month are highly recommended.

**Referral and Acceptance**

All referrals will need to complete and submit an application. The program’s Licensed Social Worker (LSW) will coordinate a family tour, an on site observation with the referred child, and a subsequent home evaluation if necessary. Acceptance into the program is determined prior to intake and includes the following:

- Eligibility criteria
- A clinical match for the child
- Open slot to provide treatment for the child
- A Best Practice evaluation prescribed by a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist as medically necessary
- Medical Assistance (MA)
Contact
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