

# Special Play Time:

## Using Play to Encourage a Child's Development



Developed by Michael Siller, Ph.D.  
Hunter College, CUNY

If you have a family who may be interested in our free 12 week home-based intervention, they may contact Dr. Michael Siller at (212) 772-5630.

Please see page 7-8 for a parent brochure. If you would like a printed copy of the brochure to distribute to families, please email [playlab@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:playlab@hunter.cuny.edu).

# Toddler Treatment Network

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Dr. Michael Siller's early intervention study is one of seven research projects taken on by the collaborative team of researchers in the Toddler Treatment Network , funded by Autism Speaks. ([http://www.autismspeaks.org/science/research/initiatives/toddler\\_treatment\\_network.php](http://www.autismspeaks.org/science/research/initiatives/toddler_treatment_network.php))

“While evidence thus far has suggested that ‘earlier is better,’ there is little evidence of what therapies and what intervention strategies are the most effective, if at all. The goal of this initiative was to develop the earliest potential diagnosis and to identify evidence-based interventions that can be evaluated in broader-scale clinical trials.”

-Autismspeaks.org

Each research project within the Toddler Treatment Network consists of a multi-site study to combine the ideas and resources of more than one researcher. Hunter College's research is partnered with the University of California at Los Angeles.

Each treatment method utilizes a parent-delivered intervention.

**“The cohesiveness of the network would not be possible without the leaders of the group, Sally Rogers and Michael Siller, and the support of Autism Speaks.” -autismspeaks.org**

# Building on Previous Research

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- ❑ The rate of language growth in young children with autism is independently predicted by:
  - ❑ Joint Attention (RJA; Sigman & Ruskin, 1999)
  - ❑ Maternal synchronization (Siller & Sigman, 2002)
  - ❑ Both predictive relations could not be explained by variation in initial child characteristics such as language age, mental age or IQ
- ❑ Results suggest that maternal synchronization accounts for ~3 months of annual language gain.
  - ❑ Similar effect sizes have been reported for intense behavioral interventions (Smith et al., 2000, 2001)
- ❑ Maternal synchronization is a promising target for early intervention
- ❑ Our current experimental study evaluating the effectiveness of an intervention targeting maternal synchronization provides a test of causation.

## Goals for Our Current Research

- ❑ To determine whether the quality of mother-child play interactions can be modified using an experimental parent training
- ❑ To evaluate whether such a parent training effectively improves child outcomes as well as parental cognitions and well being.

# “Special Play Time”

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- ❑ Children with communication delays often find it difficult to include their parents when playing with a toy. This is troublesome because successful play interactions provide virtually endless opportunities for learning – particularly about social relationships and communication. As part of this parent education program, we will take a close look at the child's behavior and find out what the caregiver can do to make play interactions more successful and gratifying.
  
- ❑ Our current early intervention study:
  - By targeting core social and communication delays that occur in most children with autism at an early age, we hope to impact a child's development
  - Intervention includes twelve in-home training sessions
  - Sessions are held by a team of two interventionists
  - Intervention techniques include conventional teaching, an illustrated workbook for parents, video feedback, modeling and coaching



# Program Characteristics

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- The program is individualized
  - Identifies strengths and weaknesses in the child's communication profile
  - Identifies which techniques do/do not work for the child
- The format is interactive, rather than lecture based
  - The parent's direct participation in recognizing and applying goals will allow for generalization of skills
- The program is based on research findings about developmental milestones, maternal and child responsiveness during play, and parent-directed interventions

## Typical Session Format

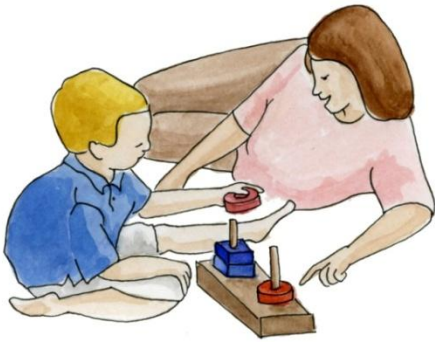
- Introduce topic goal in workbook format
- Videotape mother playing with child
- Videotape interventionist modeling communication strategies
- Video-feedback portion: While watching the videos, the interventionist encourages the mother to identify certain social and communication behaviors and strategies to improve behaviors
- Concluding discussion:
  - Interventionist ties play interactions back to topic goals
  - Provides discussion on how to approach future play sessions
  - Discusses how the topic goals will look in the family's home



# How to Approach Parents

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- You may be the first to notice a child is not meeting specific developmental milestones
  - **The children do not need to have a diagnosis of autism, but may show some early markers for autism.**
  - **We are recruiting children between 16 and 30 months in age.**
  - Here is a helpful developmental milestone chart:  
[http://www.autismspeaks.org/docs/talking\\_to\\_parents/Autism\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.autismspeaks.org/docs/talking_to_parents/Autism_brochure.pdf)
- Helping parents become more informed and access resources can be an important way to help children who are currently receiving your services.
- When presenting the option of participating in our early intervention study, parents should not feel pressured to participate
- Our Communication & Play Lab will support your effort to be sensitive to parents. During conversations with parents during the intervention sessions, we speak about the child's social and communication behaviors, rather than the specific label of autism.



**The following two slides include an electronic brochure for interested families. If you would like printed copies to distribute, please email [playlab@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:playlab@hunter.cuny.edu).**

## What kind of early intervention will be offered?

Children with communication delays often find it difficult to include their parents when playing with a toy. This is troublesome because successful play interactions provide virtually endless opportunities for learning – particularly about social relationships and communication. As part of this Parent Education Program, we will take a close look at your child's behavior and find out what you can do to make play interactions more successful and gratifying.

Together, we will discover ways of helping your child:

- ... to take interest in a variety of different toys;
- ... to be responsive to new suggestions;
- ... to include you when playing with a toy;
- .... to communicate with you about the toys; and
- ... to learn that playing with other people is fun.



### Michael Siller, Ph.D.

Principal Investigator,  
Hunter College: *Early Intervention Study*

Dr. Siller is an Assistant Professor in the Psychology Department at Hunter College. His previous research has focused on the development of social and communication skills in typically developing children and children with autism. Dr. Siller is affiliated with the Autism Center at Hunter College .

### Hunter College: Early Intervention Study

**Dr. Michael Siller**

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## Hunter College: Early Intervention Study



### A Free Experimental Intervention for Toddlers with Communication Delays

This study is part of a research collaboration between Hunter College, the Columbia University Medical Center, and the University of California at Los Angeles.

# Free Early Intervention Study for Toddlers with Communication Delays



## What is involved?

### ✓ Initial Screening:

We will ask you to complete a questionnaire, participate in a phone interview, and take part in one assessment session.

### ✓ Four Visits to Hunter College:

Visits will be scheduled over a period of 12 months. During each visit, we will evaluate your child's developmental progress in terms of play, social interaction, and language.

### ✓ Four Home Visits:

Home visits will be scheduled about 6 months apart and used to conduct interviews with you.

### ✓ Early Intervention Program:

About half of the children and their mothers will be invited to participate in 12 in-home intervention sessions of an experimental parent education program. The other half will be invited to participate in four in-home training sessions on increasing social and emotional development.



## Who can participate?

This study is designed for toddlers between 16 and 30 months who:

... show early signs of autism

OR

... show specific delays in communication.

Your child may be eligible to participate if you answer 'no' to several of the following questions:

- ✓ Does your child take an interest in other children?
- ✓ Does your child ever use his/her index finger to point, to indicate interest in something?
- ✓ Does your child ever bring objects over to you (parent) to show you something?
- ✓ Does your child imitate you? (e.g., you make a face-will your child imitate it?)
- ✓ Does your child respond to his/her name when you call?
- ✓ If you point at a toy across the room, does your child look at it?



## How can I get involved in this study?

If you would like to learn more about this study, please contact the office of Dr. Michael Siller at:

Phone: (212) 772-5630

You may also send us an email at:

Email: [msiller@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:msiller@hunter.cuny.edu)

After all of your questions have been answered, we will invite you to complete our screening questionnaire.

HUNTER COLLEGE OF C.U.N.Y.  
COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION  
OF HUMAN SUBJECTS  
APPROVED:  
FROM 3/19/10 TO 3/18/10