

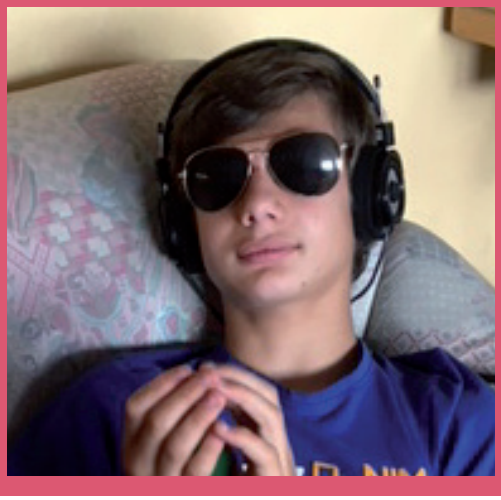

Auditory Integration Training for Autism

People in the Autistic Spectrum perceive the world as overwhelming and distorted.
They have trouble processing and integrate the sensory stimuli that constantly bombard us.
With autistic individuals at least two sensory systems are challenged by this difficulty. Very often it affects the auditory system, resulting in sound sensitivity, a painful and debilitating condition.
(See Miguel Jiron's brilliant short film on youtube.)

Auditory Integration Training not only seems to reduce hypersensitive hearing but experience shows that it also seems to assist sensory integration in general thus making the overwhelming stimuli placed on the sensory systems more bearable.
It can be an important basic building block in the development of an autistic child and may be seen as a bridge builder between the autistic and our world. This bridge can then be use, if they so wish, but it also leaves open the option to withdraw into their own world if and when needed.

Implementation of AIT in Autism

In 1977 Georgina Stehli, a 12 year old American girl with severe autism, came to see Dr Guy Bérard in the south of France to receive AIT.
Having tried everything possible up until that time and desperate to help their child, her parents clung to every straw of hope.
In her book 'The Sound of a Miracle' Annabell Stehli describes their moving story and Georgina's subsequent dramatic recovery from autism through AIT at Dr Guy Bérard's practice.
Enthusiastic about her child's recovery she then went ahead to make AIT popular in the US and managed to engage the prestigious Autism Research Institute - then headed by Dr Bernhard Rimland – to conduct several research studies on the effectiveness of AIT with Autism.
Between the years 1993 – 2001 twenty eight studies were carried out throughout the USA, 23 of them showed positive to significant improvements, the rest showed inconclusive findings.

Research Study 1994 – Western Michigan University

A paper presented at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Conference, New Orleans, 1994, about parental perception of change following AIT for Autism in 40 people shows the following findings. These findings summarise the most frequently listed improvements in the above mentioned 23 studies.

Speech:
79% of parents report an increase in vocabulary and improved articulation, more spontaneous interaction, improved communication.

- **Social interaction:**
  69% of parents report benefits in increased interest in communication with siblings and other children, increased eye-contact, less withdrawn, more engagement in family life, able to better tolerate stressful situations.

- **Behaviour:**
  75% of parents report positive changes such as: reduced aggression and tantrums, better behaviour, disciplinary measures are tolerated more easily, easier compliance with instructions.
- **Sound sensitivity:**
  85% report positive results with less sound sensitivity towards certain specific noises.
- **Attention span:**
  85% report positive changes such as: able to remain longer with a task, able for the first time to play new games, improvement at school, better concentration.

RESEARCH STUDY 1995 at University of North Carolina

In 1995 Jaqueline M Cimorelli and Melanie K Highfill at the University of North Carolina conducted a study with an 8 year old autistic boy with severe mental retardation, using PET Scan imaging.
The aim of this study was to get an objective measure of AIT efficacy.

PET Scan prior to AIT:
Abnormal hypermetabolism in the frontal lobes of the brain.

PET Scan during the 10 days of AIT:
Cognitive and behavioural improvements, although he remained nonverbal he was more attentive and able to follow simple instructions.

PET Scan following 10 days of AIT:
The boy elicited monosyllabic words, working puzzles and scribbling on paper with markers without guidance or assistance.
The PET Scans were consistent with the boy's behaviour, showing decreased hypermetabolism in the frontal lobe and increased activitiy in the primary visual cortex, located in the occipital lobe.

PET Scan 6 months after AIT:
The radiologist reported that the Scan was approaching normal.
During his visit the boy was able to greet the radiologist and remained cooperative during his blood work in the laboratory. Prior to AIT the boy was self-stimulating and difficult to control.
Highfill said: 'Overall you would not expect that rapid a change in language development in individuals with such a severe cognitive disorder.'
In addition the boy's post-AIT IQ score was 54, which improved his diagnosis from severely to moderately mentally retarded.

Results of AIT in Dr Guy Bérard's practice:

In his book 'Hearing equals Behaviour' Dr Guy Bérard lists the following results with AIT on 48 autistic individuals:

- 47 lost their fear of certain noises
- 47 showed improved behaviour
- 31 experienced a gradual improvement in speech
- 18 who prior to AIT had no speech – developed speech
- One case (Georgina Stehli) experienced complete healing from autism

In my own practice I have been fortunate to witness many of the above mentioned improvements.
Particularly moving were the moments when an autistic child would go up to its mother and say for the first time: 'I love you Mummy'.

Katja Kersten
Email: katja.kersten@gmx.at
Mobile: +43 699 12178045
www.katjakersten-hoertraining.info

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