

# About the Course — Autism Navigator® for Early Intervention Providers



## Why is Autism Navigator® Needed?

Effective early intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) beginning by age three can increase the number of children who learn to talk and attend regular kindergarten up to 40%. This can reduce the cost of education by over \$10,000 per child per year compared to those who do not receive early intervention, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Children and adults with ASD who do not have good language skills are more likely to exhibit severe behavioral challenges, the most significant contributor to the estimated lifetime societal cost of \$ 3.2 million per child with autism. Investment in early intervention can not only reduce the lifelong cost of providing services, but can also increase the number of adults with ASD who can successfully go on to college, be employed, pay taxes, and lead healthy, productive, satisfying lives.

There is strong scientific evidence from studies of developmental neuroplasticity indicating the considerable positive impact of early intervention for children under 3 years of age. The national priority for early detection and early intervention is evident in the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics for universal screening for ASD at 18 and 24 months of age and the federal mandate for early intervention. And yet, most children are not diagnosed in the U.S. until at least 5 years of age or much older. Furthermore, lower income, African American, and rural families receive a diagnosis up to a year and a half later. This means that most children with ASD miss the window of opportunity for early intervention, which translates to significantly greater costs for the family and society. Advances in research show that ASD can be diagnosed by experienced clinicians at 18 to 24 months of age. There is a pressing need to build the capacity of communities to improve early detection of ASD so families have the opportunity for effective early intervention during the toddler years.

## Potential Impact of Autism Navigator®

Early diagnosis and intervention has lifetime consequences for children with ASD and their families. The overarching aim of Autism Navigator is to offer the infrastructure that helps to build capacity to transform community-based systems of healthcare delivery and education for toddlers with ASD and their families, which could impact dramatically on existing health disparities. By interfacing the professional development of primary care physicians and early intervention providers with information and support for families, our collection of tools and courses can create a synergy that will result in greater impact on healthcare practices. By engaging the community and using technology-supported learning, the potential for sustaining system-wide changes in early detection and early intervention practices are unlimited. The Autism Navigator platform has the potential to advance



## Snapshot of Autism Navigator®

Autism Navigator is a unique collection of web-based tools and courses developed to bridge the gap between science and community practice. Each tool is designed to increase the capacity of healthcare providers, early intervention providers, educators, and families to improve outcomes of young children with ASD. We have integrated the most current research into a highly interactive web platform with extensive video footage to illustrate effective evidence-based practice. The video clips come from the unparalleled library of video footage collected from federally-funded research projects at the Autism Institute at Florida State University and collaborators at First Signs, the Autism Neighborhood, and the Marcus Autism Center. Our video player allows the user to be guided first by an introduction, next the video clip itself, and then to hear commentary describing what the user should have observed in the video clip. If a picture is worth a thousand words, imagine what a video is worth. The best way to impact community practice is to demonstrate the potential and offer practical, achievable strategies to improve practice.

science by providing a practical, achievable mechanism for identifying ASD at very young ages through community-based screening. This will enable genetic, biomedical, and intervention research to study younger children than is now possible, given the usual age of diagnosis.

## Description of the Course

### Autism Navigator® for Early Intervention Providers

Through sustained collaboration among the Autism Institute, the Marcus Autism Center, and four founding states — Florida, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Georgia — we are developing Autism Navigator for Early Intervention Providers, an interactive web-based professional development course designed to increase the capacity of early intervention providers to better serve infants and toddlers with or at risk for ASD and their families. The instructional content integrates the most current research with real world examples of children and families participating in the early identification and early intervention process under the guidelines of Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The web-based professional development course is designed to support a mentoring/coaching model for delivering instructional content at 3 levels—**Knowledge, Skill, and Mastery**.

The 30-hour course is a self-tutorial at the Knowledge and Skill levels and covers five content units presented through a set of questions that are answered through interactive media containing audio narration, closed caption, extensive illustrative video clips, research briefs, checklists, and materials to support learning and to share with families. Each question ends with a brief *Check your Knowledge* activity before proceeding to the next question and each unit ends with a learning assessment. A certificate of completion and specified continuing education units are available upon completion of each unit.

### Unique Features of Autism Navigator

- Specially designed **media player**—to view multiple video clips to compare and contrast behaviors across children or contexts. First, each video clip is introduced with narration that guides the viewer on what to observe. Next, the clip is viewed, followed by a commentary that draws attention to behaviors and recaps key points.
- Two ways to navigate easily to specific slides — a **slide index** with a list of the slide titles or key content, and a **slide viewer** with thumbnails of the slides in the unit.
- **Ideas**— a section inspired by TED to see brief mini-documentaries or short talks that offer information and inspiration about autism. You can narrow your selection by choosing from a list of themes.
- **Tools**— a section for easy access to print materials for all units with more details and definitions for providers, research briefs, materials to share with families, and links to websites and e-documents related to ASD.

### Mastery Level — Under Development

Building on the five content units in the 30-hour course, the Mastery level is under development to support ongoing learning and expert proficiency organized into two primary themes—Early Detection and Evidence-based Intervention. The mastery level will be designed to build the capacity of autism specialists or selected early intervention coaches who can provide mentorship and support the coaching of early intervention teams in their region. The Mastery level will incorporate an interactive database of video clips to illustrate content for each theme so that the user can filter to select exemplars that relate to their specification (e.g., particular age, severity, language level, type of activity). Instruction at the mastery level will use a problem-based guided design approach to support the learner in applying newly learned concepts to practice application. Tools within the mastery level will support ongoing learning and integration of new knowledge to build the capacity of providers to serve very diverse infants and toddlers with ASD and their families. It will include a large variety of video exploration experiences to compare and contrast concepts and hone the learners' observation and clinical decision-making skills. Practical instructional activities will be offered to help learners generate new ideas and creative solutions to real world challenges faced by families. The integration of multiple e-learning tools fosters the creation of a versatile online learning community that invites interaction between specialists who support the learning of others to impact the transactions of children, families, and their social environments.

Enrollment in Autism Navigator® Courses is limited to our founding states for now. Individual and group subscriptions will be available to your community in the near future. Proceeds from the courses will be used to expand development and availability of our Collection of Tools so they can be available free to the public.

### Course Content Units and Key Questions

- 1) Improving Early Detection
  - Why is early detection important?
  - What are the core features of autism?
  - Why is the prevalence of autism increasing?
  - What causes autism?
  - What red flags of autism can we detect in infants and toddlers?
  - How do red flags of autism change in infants and toddlers?
- 2) Collaborating with Families
  - How can EI providers build relationships and support families who have children with ASD?
  - What are family-centered services and supports for young children with ASD and their families?
  - What communication practices help build consensus with family members?
  - How can EI providers develop a relationship that facilitates a collaborative coaching approach to intervention?
- 3) Developmental Perspectives
  - How does the natural environment support learning and development?
  - How do children learn and make connections with the physical world through exploration and play?
  - How do children develop communication from sounds and gestures to first words?
  - How does communication develop from word combinations to the ability to use complex language?
  - How does emotional regulation develop and impact learning?
  - How do critical thinking, creativity, and self-directed learning develop in young children?
- 4) Evidence-based Intervention Strategies
  - What are priority intervention outcomes to address core deficits of ASD?
  - What are the active ingredients of effective intervention practices for young children with ASD and their families?
  - What are evidence-based intervention strategies for parent-implemented embedded intervention for young children with ASD?
  - Within a collaborative consultation model, how does the early intervention provider coach the parent?
  - How do you monitor meaningful progress in intervention?
- 5) Addressing Challenging Behaviors
  - Why do children with autism have challenging behaviors?
  - How do you understand the function of their challenging behaviors?
  - How do you develop individualized behavior support plans in partnership with families?
  - How do you support families to implement and monitor the plan?