The purpose of this research study was to examine the effects of Family Implemented TEACCH for Toddlers on toddlers with ASD and their caregivers.

This preliminary efficacy study demonstrated strong, positive effects of the FITT intervention approach on parents’ stress as well as their mental well-being; in addition, modest effects were found for toddler social communication outcomes as found on the PIA-CV total score. Further, families from rural and non-rural communities in the state of North Carolina found the intervention socially acceptable.

**Intervention Goals**

Family Implemented TEACCH for Toddlers (FITT) was developed for parents who have recently learned their toddler has a diagnosis of ASD to (1) understand the disorder and how its symptoms affect their child, and (2) learn strategies to support their child’s development.

FITT was developed to respond to the noted gaps in the early intervention literature on supporting toddlers with ASD and their parents. It was designed as an early intervention model that has potential for implementation within the Part C service model (e.g., limited intensity, occurs in home setting, parent-mediated approach, applicable in underserved communities and with toddlers at all levels of functioning, emphasizes foundational skills across a wide range of developmental domains that parents may be able to implement with high adherence) and targets the needs of toddlers with ASD and their parents specifically. An additional focus of FITT was the development of an intervention that would be feasible to implement across rural and non-rural communities.

This 6-month in-home intervention to support parents and promote skill development incorporated structured teaching and naturalistic strategies to promote communication, play, social skills, engagement, and flexibility in very young children with ASD.

**Study Participants and Procedures**

Participants included 50 children with ASD under 3 and their parents who were randomly assigned to participate in a 6-month intervention, Family Implemented TEACCH for Toddlers (FITT) or 6 months of community services as usual (SAU group).

FITT included 90-min in-home sessions ($n = 20$) and parent group sessions ($n = 4$). The FITT interventionists were licensed clinical social workers with

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autism experience who were trained by the study leaders in areas related to domains and strategies targeted by FITT.

**Toddler Goals**

- Communicating with others
- Interacting with others
- Playing with toys
- Playing with people
- Sharing interests w/people
- Paying attention to people
- Problem solving
- Understanding language
- Understanding people
- Behavior problems
- Motor skills
- Dressing
- Eating
- Self-care (toileting, dressing)
- Participating in home routines
- Transitions

**Results**

There were significant treatment effects on parent stress and well-being, with families in the FITT group showing decreased stress and improved well-being over time.

While no treatment effects were found for global child measures, there were significant treatment effects on social communication skills.

Parents in the FITT group (rural and urban participants) reported satisfaction with FITT along several domains: general satisfaction with the program, satisfaction with the goals targeted, satisfaction with intervention procedures, and satisfaction with outcomes for their toddler and themselves. The FITT Study focused on families in rural communities and found the intervention to be feasible and acceptable to those families.

**Conclusion**

This preliminary efficacy study of FITT supports its use for parents and their toddlers with ASD. In particular, the improvements in parents’ mental and physical well-being suggest that FITT may provide needed social support to families as they are still coping with their child’s diagnosis and searching for information to support their child’s development. While the child outcomes are less robust, it is possible that changes in parent behavior or outlook (e.g., increasing parent responsivity, lowering stress) must be achieved first in order to produce downstream effects on child behavior. Yet, the emphasis within FITT on embedding the intervention within existing family routines and its low-intensity may better support transportability to federally-based Part C, early intervention services, which are legally mandated to be family-centered.

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**FITT Training Information**

Family Implemented TEACCH for Toddler Training Workshops are available through the UNC TEACCH Autism Program.

http://teacch.com/trainings/teacch-calendar

This manualized parent coaching program is designed for early intervention providers and preschool teachers who serve children with Autism Spectrum Disorders ages 3 and under.