



Study on More Than Words® Program Provides Encouraging Results for Parents of Toddlers with Autism

A new study has demonstrated that toddlers with autism who play with a limited number of toys show greater improvement in their communication skills if they participated in Hanen's More Than Words® Program than if they received other community-based treatments. This outcome is reported in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (online March 22 2011) in an article describing a study which evaluated the *More Than Words* Program for parents of toddlers with autism spectrum disorder. This is an exciting finding and provides welcome news for parents of toddlers who want to know how best to help their young child with autism. As co-author Wendy Stone, director of the University of Washington Autism Center stated, "Our ultimate goal is to catch the symptoms early and find effective preventive interventions so that these children can attain their full potential."

The study

Sixty-two children under age two (51 boys and 11 girls), who met the criteria for autism disorders participated in the study with their parents. These children were randomly assigned either to the *More Than Words* Program or to a "treatment-as-usual" control condition. The researchers measured the children's social and communication skills before the program started and then again when the program ended, and four months later.

The More Than Words® Program

Hanen Programs® are designed to help parents become their child's best language teacher. In the *More Than Words* Program, a Hanen Certified speech-language pathologist teaches parents to use strategies that help their child communicate. Using a combination of group sessions for parents and individual parent-child videotaping and feedback sessions in the home, parents learned a variety of strategies known to foster children's social and communications skills. Strategies included: get face to face; follow the child's lead and make a simple comment on the child's focus of interest; create play routines that make it easier for the child to take turns and communicate; and use toys to increase the child's frequency of communication. Parents learn to apply these strategies to any daily situation or interaction, such as mealtime, bath time, playing indoors or outdoors. The *More Than Words* Program enables parents to create predictable, enjoyable language-learning environments and encourage social interaction, which is a major difficulty for children with autism.

The Study's Impact on Toddlers Who Played With a Limited Number of Toys

The toddlers who played with fewer toys before the *More Than Words* Program showed more improvement in their communication skills after the *More Than Words* Program than those who received “treatment as usual” (the control group).

The researchers found that the *More Than Words* group initiated communication and reached and pointed to objects more frequently. They made more eye contact and showed or gave the experimenter a toy more often. All of these are important communication skills, providing a critical foundation for the development of more advanced communication. An important aspect of the child's improvement was the ability to transfer the skills learned during interactions with their parents, who provided support as needed, to the experimenter, who was a stranger and provided no support. In addition, follow-up testing four months after the program revealed that the effect of the *More Than Words* Program continued.

Future Plans for the More Than Words® Program

The recent research also demonstrated that, within the experimental group, there was a group of children who did not show greater improvement in communication skills than the control group. These were children who showed a greater interest in toys before the program started.

“This provides The Hanen Centre with valuable information on the *More Than Words* Program,” said Elaine Weitzman, Executive Director. “We welcome these results since we're committed to offering evidence-based programs that reflect the latest research. With the help of this study, we've identified the changes we can make to ensure that the program is even more helpful to parents, and we're already in the process of implementing those changes”.

About The Hanen Centre

Founded in 1975, The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization with a global reach. Its mission is to provide parents, caregivers, early childhood educators and speech-language pathologists with the knowledge and training they need to help young children develop the best possible language, social and literacy skills. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically.

For more information, please visit www.hanen.org.

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