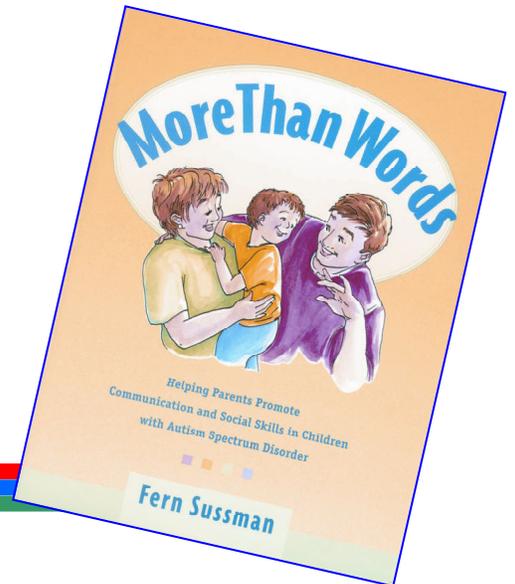


Research Summary

More Than Words: Helping Parents Promote Communication and Social Skills in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder



Background

The *More Than Words* guidebook provides a step-by-step approach that **parents can use to promote their children's social interaction, communication and play skills during everyday activities**. This book was developed to support *More Than Words – The Hanen Program® for Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*, and is also widely used as a stand-alone resource by parents and speech-language professionals who work with young children with ASD.

In the words of Dr. Barry Prizant, a world-renowned expert in the field of autism,

***More Than Words* uses strategies drawn from and based on an empirically validated approach ... and lets children be children and parents be parents.**

The following article discusses some of the research to date that supports the strategies used in *More Than Words*.

Supporting Research for Strategies in *More Than Words*

1. Use the Child's Natural Environment

***More Than Words* advocates using opportunities that occur naturally during the child's day as the context for helping the child learn to communicate.** There is no pre-determined curriculum.

Research

A review of 10 different studies showed that **children with ASD demonstrated better receptive language (e.g., ability to understand what is said, to follow directions, answer**

questions) and speech production in this kind of naturalistic environment than in one where the adult used a more directive approach (Delprato, D., 2001). In addition, studies have reported that naturalistic approaches promote more generalization of language gains to the child's everyday life (Koegel et al., 1998; Koegel et al., 1992; McGee et al., 1985).

2. Create Structure and Predictability in the Child's Life

In *More Than Words*, the necessity for high levels of structure and consistency is reflected in the application of a strategy expressed by a special acronym: **R.O.C.K.** – Repeat what you say and do; Offer opportunities for the child to participate; Cue the child if he needs help; and Keep the activity fun.

Research

The use of routines has been found to foster longer utterances in children with developmental delays (Yoder, P., 1995). Successful early intervention programs for children with ASD in the United States may have different philosophies of intervention; however, **all successful programs emphasize the importance of creating predictability in all aspects of the child's life** (Dawson & Osterling, 1997).

3. Follow the Child's Lead

In *More Than Words*, parents learn to use a facilitative style and to follow their child's lead when interacting with him. **Following the child's lead** is characterized by the adult allowing the child to choose his topic of interest, with the adult responding to the child's topic with comments and developmentally appropriate language models.

Research

In ground-breaking research in the late 1970s, Jerome Bruner showed that **parental sensitivity to the focus of attention of their children** is the precursor to the development of **joint attention** in typically developing children (Bruner, J., 1981). In other words, the child learns to share a common focus when the adult notices his interest and shares that interest by touching, pointing, and verbally interpreting what the child is looking at. **Numerous studies have shown that parents promote language development when using a facilitative rather than a directive style** (Nelson, K. & Camarata, S., et al. 1996).

There is considerable research showing that the same **child-directed approach used successfully with typical children has a similar impact on the communication development of children with ASD**. For children with ASD who are already talking, a facilitative style has been found to result in the child's increased attempts to initiate conversations by asking questions or making comments and the production of longer and more varied language (Mirenda, P., & Donnellan, A., 1986). Facilitative strategies have had the same positive effects on increasing communication attempts in non-verbal children with ASD (Dawson & Adams, 1984; Peck, 1985; Tiegerman & Primavera, 1981, 1984).

4. Say Less, Stress, Go Slow and Show

More Than Words helps parents learn to adjust the way they talk to their child to make it easier for him to understand what they say. They simplify what they say; stress key words and match those words to what their child is paying attention to; speak slowly and use objects, gestures, or pictures to show the meaning of their words. The 4 S acronym – “**Say less, Stress, Go Slow and Show**” tells parents how to put this into practice.

Research

The single most important factor in helping children with any language disorder to make sense of what a person is saying is the way the person speaks to the child (Harris, M. et al., 1986). Spoken words are most meaningful for children with ASD when the adult labels the action or object in which their child shows interest *right* at the moment that he’s interested in it (Siller & Sigman, 2002).

The Importance of the Role of the Family

Both the *More Than Words* guidebook and the 11-week *More Than Words* parent training program are based on the belief that **parents are their children’s best teachers**.

Research

Research has shown that **family variables are considered to be one of the best predictors of outcome for children with a wide range of disabilities** (Shonkoff et al., 1992). In the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, April 2002, M. Siller and M. Sigman found that the same parental behaviour shown to promote language in typically developing children and those with other language disorders resulted in children with autism who developed superior language skills at ages 10 and 16 years (Siller & Sigman, 2002).

Early and Intensive Intervention

More Than Words is designed to give parents the skills they need to promote their children’s communication development through the first six years of life during all daily activities, whether that involves eating lunch, going down a slide or playing a game of hide-and-seek.

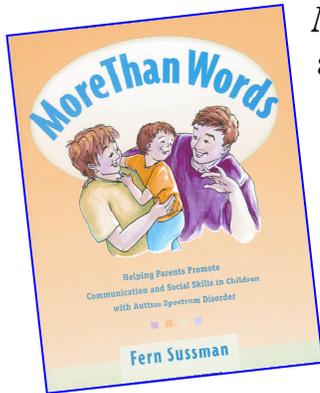
Research

All of the U.S. early intervention program models deemed to have successful outcomes report that children receive **intensive intervention**. (Dawson & Osterling, 1997).

Research on *More Than Words* – The Hanen Program® for Parents of Children with ASD

Based on its popularity with both parents and professionals, researchers in England and Canada are currently conducting outcome studies of the program (Le Couteur, 2002; Girolametto, 2003; Tidmarsh, 2003). Preliminary results look promising (Le Couteur, 2002).

Resources for *More Than Words*



More Than Words: Helping Parents Promote Communication and Social Skills in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder
(Sussman, 1999) ISBN: 0-921145-14-4

Since its publication in 1999, more than 20,000 copies of the *More Than Words* guidebook have been sold around the world. More than 1,000 speech-language pathologists have been trained to run the *More Than Words* Program, and thousands of parents have participated in the program in their respective communities. As a result, scores of children with ASD have learned to communicate to the best of their abilities.

Related Resources:

- ***More Than Words* Introductory Videotape** (20 minutes)
- ***More Than Words* Teaching Videotape** (120 minutes)
- ***More Than Words* Posters** (set of 5)

Visit www.hanen.org for information about these and other Hanen resources.

About the Author

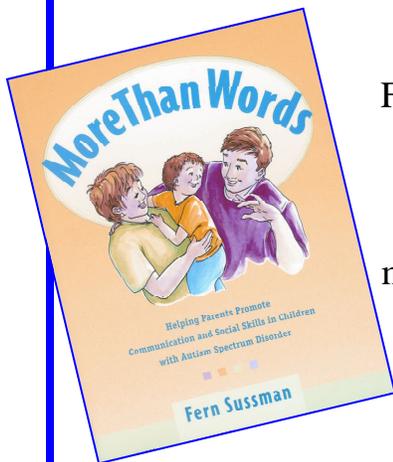
Fern Sussman is a speech-language pathologist and The Hanen Centre's program manager for *More Than Words* – The Hanen Program® for Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. With more than 25 years' experience working with families with young children who have communication challenges, Ms Sussman lectures widely on ASD and naturalistic approaches to intervention, and trains speech-language pathologists to run the *More Than Words* Program worldwide. She developed the *More Than Words* Program at The Hanen Centre, to teach parents how to structure everyday routines and activities in ways that help children with ASD communicate and interact. In addition to the *More Than Words* parent guidebook, Ms Sussman has developed videotapes and other resources to support the program.



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The following reference list presents research studies that have informed and support the Hanen approach to autism spectrum disorder presented in *More Than Words – The Hanen Program®* for Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and in the *More Than Words* guidebook by Fern Sussman.

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For more information, contact The Hanen Centre or visit us online at www.hanen.org

The *More Than Words* guidebook and other Hanen materials are available from The Hanen Centre and from fine booksellers worldwide.



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