

OPINION

Video insights

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'Behavioral intervention' is one of those broad terms that I suspect many people recognize but don't really understand. I'm one of them.

The high-level definition: It's a common and time-intensive treatment for autism, often based on applied behavioral analysis, an approach in which bad behaviors are discouraged and positive behaviors reinforced.

But it's not that simple. Behavioral interventions take many forms — discrete trial training, pivotal response training and the Picture Exchange Communication System, to name just a few. The differences among these are subtle and not easy to describe.

Happily, a new online resource of definitions and short video clips helps distinguish them.

Earlier this month, the autism science and advocacy organization **Autism Speaks**, along with nonprofit **First Signs** and Florida State University, launched the treatment section of a resource called the **ASD Video Glossary**. The new section compiles more than 100 video clips showing 22 kinds of treatments for the disorder.

The clips help distinguish among different kinds of behavioral intervention — just about the only thing **proven to improve** some symptoms of autism.

For example, in an approach called discrete trial training, the therapist rewards a child for imitating an action, such as raising his or her arms straight up. Pivotal response training, by contrast, is more natural: The child initiates what to do or play with, and the therapist directs imitation and sharing tasks from there.

The resource isn't limited to behavioral interventions. It also has videos of art and music therapy, reciprocal conversations and sensory integration therapy — in which, for example, a child learns to walk on a balance beam and play hopscotch.

This has obvious practical use for parents and clinicians who are trying to choose the therapies that would be best for a particular child. But it has a broader message, too.

The exercises are extremely repetitive and require daily practice, and the child's progress is typically slow. After watching even a few minutes of these videos, the challenges in applying these autism therapies — each and every one of them — are immediately apparent.