



UC Davis MIND Institute

ESDM Training Program

ESDM Policy Statement

Using the ESDM in Community Settings

Given the increasing evidence concerning ESDM efficacy and increasing need for effective treatments for early ASD, more and more practitioners in community settings are seeking to implement ESDM practices within their settings. This increased interest is giving rise to many questions about how ESDM can be implemented in settings that differ markedly from the settings in which it was developed. This document is intended to address these questions and clarify the intent and meaning of various roles in ESDM delivery. ESDM was developed in settings in which most of the moment-to-moment delivery was carried out by paraprofessionals, not trained ESDM therapists. This is true in the original Denver site and in the settings at the University of Washington and the MIND Institute that produced the major randomized controlled efficacy research studies. Supervised paraprofessional delivery of ESDM allows for costs to be contained and allows for trained and certified ESDM therapists to develop children's teaching plans, train, and supervise paraprofessionals and parents to deliver the intervention, and oversee the child's progress and needs.

Delivering ESDM in a 1:1 or group setting

It is within typical ESDM practice for one certified ESDM therapist to train and provide ongoing supervision for other therapists and paraprofessionals and oversee the delivery of ESDM in the clinic, preschool, or another setting in which that person works. The expectation is that the certified ESDM therapist is on-site, develops the child's treatment objectives and steps from the ESDM curriculum administration, oversees the progress data regularly, trains and supervises staff members in ESDM practice, regularly observes staff members delivering the intervention, using fidelity checks to assure fidelity of implementation, adapts each child's intervention plan as needed to assure best practice, and holds regular treatment progress meetings to keep plans up to date and to keep all informed. The ESDM certification process described on the ESDM website is the required training for people filling these roles. A site with these features can state that it uses the Early Start Denver Model.

Teaching parents to implement ESDM

The ESDM Parent Coaching approach was developed in response to the need to define best practices when ESDM therapists were coaching parents to be the child's **primary** interventionists: parent-implemented, or P- ESDM. The approach is defined by the P-ESDM Coaching Fidelity of Implementation tool and the P-ESDM parent coaching manual, [Coaching parents of young children with autism](#) (Rogers, Vismara and Dawson, 2021, Guilford Press). The three published ESDM manuals also contain all the written forms and therapist materials that have been used in the US based published studies.

For those therapists who are providing direct ESDM services to young children, they are encouraged (and expected) to help parents learn to support their children's learning via use of ESDM strategies during everyday activities at home. Therapists are free to use whatever parent coaching strategies they already know and prefer. They are also welcomed to use our published tools to learn some aspects of the parent coaching model that we developed in studies at the MIND Institute.



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There is specific training offered at UC Davis MIND Institute on the use of the P-ESDM Parent Coaching Model. Certification in P-ESDM parent coaching is available for controlled research studies of parent-implemented ESDM. Only studies in which a certified ESDM Parent Coach and those trained to fidelity in P-ESDM Parent Coaching and overseen by that person can describe their work as “delivering P-ESDM intervention”.

Certification requirements are not meant to limit other early interventionists from using our published intervention methods to enhance their service delivery. The core ESDM methods and materials have all been published so that providers everywhere have access to them, and we encourage those who are interested in learning our approach to develop a peer supervision group and use each other’s feedback, experiences, fidelity codes, and reflective supervision practices to incorporate some ESDM practices into their own work. For people who wish to describe their ESDM-influenced intervention strategies when learned without formal ESDM training, they should describe their work as **“being influenced by ESDM materials and practices,”** and provide the appropriate references.

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. *Is it necessary to become certified to use the ESDM approach?*** No, it is not. The reason that all the ESDM materials are published and available is to encourage usage. People who read the treatment manuals, practice the techniques in their settings, work with their colleagues to learn ESDM through the online course, published papers, free videos, and suggested training package (available for free through the ESDM training program) can state that their intervention approach is influenced by ESDM practices and materials”.
- 2. *Can an ESDM certified therapist train paraprofessional?*** Yes, for people that they supervise regularly in their own setting.
- 3. *Can an ESDM certified therapist certify those that he or she trains?*** No. Certification in ESDM is awarded only from a certified ESDM Trainer.
- 4. *Do you have to have a graduate degree to become an ESDM therapist?*** No. The requirement for becoming an ESDM therapist, certified or not, is that the person works regularly with children 12-60 months of age with ASD and is credentialed (licensed or certified) in their country to provide professional therapy or education as an independent professional. Typically, this includes the authority to write treatment plans, sign medical or educational legal documents, and independently supervise others but the practices of professionals are defined differently in different countries, and we work within each country’s framework to determine eligibility.
- 5. *Can paraprofessionals - those whose educational backgrounds do not meet the criteria specific in #4 - deliver ESDM?*** Yes, paraprofessionals can certainly deliver ESDM treatment when trained to fidelity and supervised by a certified ESDM therapist.



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6. Can paraprofessionals carry out the curriculum assessment and write the treatment objectives? This is not recommended, but in some settings it may be necessary. If so, it should occur only after sufficient training and supervised practice under a certified ESDM therapist.

7. Is there an official ESDM certification process for paraprofessionals? No. We have not created a specific certification process for paraprofessionals via the MIND-Institute-based ESDM Training Program because paraprofessionals cannot work independently. However, it is certainly appropriate for specific groups to acknowledge the point at which paraprofessionals attain ESDM fidelity and we encourage individual settings to create their own ways of training paraprofessionals. We provide training content ideas for paraprofessional training from the UC Davis ESDM Training Program upon request. In national settings other than the U.S.A., there may be important reasons for creating a specific national or regional ESDM credentialing of some kind for paraprofessionals. We trust the ESDM trainers in other nations to make the decisions that will serve the best interests of their nation's children and families and to take on all the administrative aspects of such a decision.

8. Can people other than certified ESDM Therapists use the slides and other materials they received while doing ESDM training to train or educate people in their own setting or community? No. The ESDM training materials are all under copyright and may only be used by ESDM Certified Trainers for conducting ESDM training. However, those using ESDM practices are encouraged to develop their own training materials from the various materials that are published and available in print and online. The published books on ESDM can also serve as a resource for training and education but materials cannot be copied and used in any way that results in financial gain for those using them.

9. How do families and others find ESDM-certified therapists and trainers? The ESDM training website at the MIND Institute lists by nationality every person who has received certification as a therapist, a trainer, or a parent coach. This is a comprehensive list, and we keep it up to date as a community service.

10. Does our staff have to be trained at the MIND Institute to be certified? No. Anyone is free to contact any certified ESDM trainer and request a training at a specific site. All contact information for each trainer is published on our website.

11. Do settings have to deliver ESDM 1:1 for 20 hours per week to say that they provide it? No. As the ESDM literature demonstrates, there are many ways to deliver the treatment. There are papers that describe 1:1 delivery by a professional for a few hours per week, papers that describe a one hour per week contact focused on teaching parents the techniques, and papers that describe incorporating ESDM into preschool group programs, both those for children with developmental disabilities and in typical community settings. There are papers that describe telehealth parent coaching, telehealth professional training, and other variations are being developed regularly. The core elements of ESDM are described in the three ESDM manuals published by Guilford Press (Rogers and Dawson, 2010; Rogers, Dawson, and Vismara, 2014; and Rogers, Vismara and Dawson, 2021).



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Three elements define ESDM treatment procedures: the use of the curriculum tool to develop objectives and teaching steps, the use of session-gathered data to examine progress, and the use of the ESDM Fidelity tool with its integration of developmental and behavioral practices, to define ESDM treatment procedures of staff and parents.