

Rhythm and Timing of Early Childhood Social Interactions in Typical Development and Autism

Rhythm and timing are essential for successful social communication including during early childhood when rhythmic infant-directed speech and song scaffold caregiver-child interactions. Difficulties with the rhythm and timing of social communication are common in autism; however, highly rhythmic and predictable multimodal communication (such as provided by infant-directed singing) may help scaffold social attention. For example, many autistic children show preferences for and increased responsiveness to musical (including sung) stimuli. Drawing upon recent research into visual and vocal social engagement in infants and toddlers with and without autism, I will discuss rhythm sensitivity and flexibility as potential mechanisms supporting social interaction, as well as consider implications for social communication interventions.