

'Early intervention can help tackle autism'

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Bangalore: "With early intensive behavioural intervention, there are high chances of improvement and recovery of children with autism," said Smitha Awasthi, president of Association for Behaviour Analysis – India.

Speaking to The Hindu on the sidelines of the first international conference in the field of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) here on Saturday, she said that children with autism were suffering due to the lack of trained professionals in the field of ABA.

She added that ABA was the science of behaviour modification using principles and strategies and its application had been accepted across the world as an effective, evidence-based method to work with children with autism.

"The association is now trying to bring the science and set standards for the same within the country. The association is an affiliated chapter of Association for Behaviour Analysis – International, U.S. It is a body of professionals backed and supported by parents of children with autism," she said.

Scientific treatment:

Ms. Awasthi said that ABA was a scientific treatment of autism, which helps measure changes in behaviour. "Autism is a complex disorder and treatments are varied and therapy-based. With a science-based therapy, one can modify behaviour and bring in a lot of changes in autistic children."

Incidence:

She also said that incidence of autism had increased over the past few years. In 1988, the incidence of autism was one in 10,000 children. This had now increased to one in 150 children. "Psychiatrists and researchers do not know the reasons for the increase in number of cases. Autism is a difficult disorder to handle. Doctors believe that parents should spend two per cent of their energy in trying to find out the reason for their child being autistic and 98 per cent on treatment."

She added that awareness had improved a lot over the past four years. "However, the awareness at the level of paediatricians is not much. Still, we now have parents coming to psychiatrists with their children at an early age," she said.