

**The SCERTS® Model**  
(Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin, Rydell & Laurent, 2006)

The SCERTS® Model is a comprehensive, team-based, multidisciplinary model for enhancing abilities in Social Communication and Emotional Regulation, and implementing Transactional Supports for children and older individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and their families. SCERTS is not an exclusive approach, in that it provides a framework in which practices and strategies from other approaches may be integrated, such as Positive Behavioral Supports (ABA), visual supports, sensory supports, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), and Social Stories®. The SCERTS model can be used with individuals across a wide range of ages and developmental abilities. It was developed by Barry Prizant, Amy Wetherby, Emily Rubin, Amy Laurent and Patrick Rydell, a multidisciplinary team of clinicians, researchers, and educators who have more than 100 years experience, and have published extensively in the field of autism.

The focus on Social Communication involves developing spontaneous, functional communication and secure, trusting relationships with children and adults. Emotional Regulation involves enhancing the ability to maintain a well-regulated emotional state to be most available for learning and interacting. Transactional Support includes supporting children, their families, and professionals to maximize learning, positive relationships and successful social experiences across home, school and community settings. The SCERTS Model, emphasizes the importance of child initiated communication in natural as well as semi-structured activities for a broad range of purposes such as requesting , greeting, expressing emotions and protesting/refusing. Objectives for the child are developmentally appropriate and may target both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. SCERTS is a collaborative educational model in that families and educators work together to identify and develop strategies to successfully engage the child in meaningful daily activities.

SCERTS differs from the focus of "traditional" ABA that typically targets children's responses in adult directed discrete trials with the use of behavioral techniques to teach language. In contrast, the focus of the SCERTS model is on promoting child-initiated communication in everyday activities. In philosophy and practice, SCERTS is closer to "contemporary" ABA practices such as Pivotal Response Training and Incidental Teaching, which use natural activities in a variety of social situations, as well as semi-structured teaching in social routines. In contrast to most ABA practices, SCERTS relies extensively on visual supports (e.g., photos, picture symbols) for supporting Social Communication and Emotional Regulation. SCERTS is based on child development research and research on the core challenges in autism, in a manner similar to Floortime and RDI.

The SCERTS Model is most concerned with helping persons with autism to achieve “Authentic Progress”, which is defined as the ability to learn and apply functional skills in a variety of settings and with a variety of partners. All of a child's partners, including educators, therapists, parents, siblings and peers potentially play an important role in a SCERTS Model Program, because activities in which goals and objectives are addressed include daily routines at home and school, as well as special therapies and activities that

have the potential to enhance abilities in independent and self-help skills, with a particular emphasis on social communication and emotional regulation. For example, mealtimes across home and school settings may have the same objectives that include using pictures, words and/or gestures to select food items, to observe and imitate partners in order to benefit from their social models, and to respond to a partners' attempts to support a good emotional state that results in sustained attention and active participation. Objectives in play and social skills may also be identified and targeted at school with classmates, as well as at home with siblings or cousins. A plan to support a child's emotional regulation across each day is also developed based on a child's needs. The plan may include regularly scheduled exercise and “regulating” breaks, opportunities for sensory and motor activities, and a plan used by all partners to modify learning environments. Partners also become expert at reading a child's signals of emotional dysregulation and responding with appropriate support as needed to maximize attention and learning and to prevent escalation into more problematic behavior (e.g., offering deep pressure, simplifying difficult tasks. clarifying tasks through the use of visuals – e.g., “ 2 more then we are all done”).

When observing activities in the SCERTS Model, there is always a high priority placed on:

- 1) children initiating as well as responding to partner's verbal and nonverbal communication;
- 2) children actively participating in activities with adults and peers, with an emphasis on joyful, shared positive emotional experience, and the development of trusting relationships,
- 3) partners implementing a range of interpersonal and learning supports to help a child be most available for learning and engaging,
- 4) partners being highly responsive and supportive in a flexible manner that depends on the child's emotional state, distractions in the setting, the child's success in the activity and the need for appropriate levels of support to actively participate.

In SCERTS, there is a great emphasis on child initiation in natural as well as semi-structured activities for a very broad range of communicative functions (e.g., greeting, requesting comfort, protesting/refusing, calling). Objectives are developmentally sequenced, including nonverbal (e.g., gestures) as well as verbal communication and are selected based on a child's functional needs in daily activities as determined by the child's team. Thus, the focus of the SCERTS model on promoting child-initiated communication in everyday activities differs from the focus of "traditional" ABA, that typically targets children's responses in adult directed Discrete Trials with the use of behavioral techniques to teach language. In Philosophy and practice, SCERTS is closer to "contemporary" ABA practices such as Pivotal Response Training and Incidental Teaching, which use natural activities in a variety of social situations with a variety of partners (peers and different adults), as well as semi-structured teaching in social routines. SCERTS also relies on visual supports (e.g., photos, picture symbols) extensively for supporting Social Communication and Emotional Regulation to a greater extent than ABA, and is based on child development research and research on the core challenges in autism, in a manner similar to Floortime and RDI.

For further information, including a detailed list of FAQ's and research support for the SCERTS Model, go to [www.SCERTS.com](http://www.SCERTS.com) .