



# Institute for Complementary Practices

## Fact Sheets

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### The Higashi Method

The late Dr. Kiyo Kitahara of Tokyo, Japan developed the Higashi Method, also known as Daily Life Therapy (DLT). She developed the method through what she learned from teaching a child with autism in her general education kindergarten class. Her main purpose was to develop the self-esteem of the child and help the child establish security in his/her emotions. The method provides children with autism with a systematic education involving group dynamics, the use of modeling, physical activity, art, music, academics, and vocational training. The goal is to help children develop as close to “normal” as possible physically, emotionally, and mentally, and to be able to achieve independence and have a good quality of life. Currently, residential programs based on the Higashi Method are available at the Musashino Higashi Gakuen School in Tokyo, Japan (opened in 1964) and at the Boston Higashi School, founded in 1987. The program in Boston serves 134 students in residential and day programs. In all programs, students are mainstreamed into typical education classrooms. This method has sparked the interest of parents of children with autism around the world with its unique approach.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

#### What is the Higashi Method?

The Higashi Method emphasizes developing harmony in all aspects of life for children with autism. It involves a wide variety of activities in many different areas. The academic curriculum is compatible with that offered in a typical school. Upon entering high school, all students begin vocational training and are placed in paid employment. Peer interaction and social development is emphasized.

#### Who can be educated using the Method?

This method is designed to educate people with autism, autism-like characteristics, Asperger’s syndrome, pervasive development disorder (PDD), or pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) between the ages of 3 and 22.

#### How does the Method work?

Practitioners of the Higashi Method claim that it works by using a combination of methods to help people with autism develop self-esteem and learn to regulate themselves. Physical exercise helps with this, as does an individualized academic curriculum that challenges the student at their level of capability and builds on the child’s interests.

#### What role does physical exercise play in this method?

Vigorous physical activity is emphasized to reduce anxiety, improve stamina, and establish routines and an overall “rhythm of life”. Practitioners believe that through exercise, students will learn to control their body and through this learn to control their behavior as well. Exercises used are founded on the principles of sensory integration and vestibular stimulation. Empirical research has proven the effectiveness of antecedent exercise like that used in the Higashi program in solving a variety of problems experienced by children with autism (see Boston Higashi School web page for a variety of studies).



**How are problem behaviors addressed?**

Problem behaviors are dealt with through encouraging more adaptive and appropriate behaviors. Aversives and physical punishment are not used. Students tend to develop more appropriate behavior through peer modeling.

**Has there been any research on the effectiveness on the method?**

Limited research exists. However, research conducted at the Boston Higashi School has shown the effectiveness of physical activities in alleviating some of the problems experienced by people with autism such as wakefulness, hyperactivity, and off-task behavior. In addition, the Higashi School in Japan claims very good life outcomes for the people it has educated (i.e. 51% are working in typical work environments). The typically developing students involved have also experienced positive outcomes.

**What are the qualifications of Higashi teachers?**

The Boston Higashi School states that "most teachers have at least a Master's degree in special education and are certified by the Massachusetts Department of Education. There are no "teacher's aides" or "assistants" teaching the students. Specialist teachers have certification in their area of expertise."

**How long does education using the Higashi Method take and how much does it cost?**

No cost information available. It is the intention that this Method will be used throughout the child's school years.

**Do insurance providers pay for this?**

Information was not available. However, it is unlikely that insurers would pay for treatment using the Higashi Method, as it is not a medical treatment. However, it might be possible to obtain school district support as an alternative school placement if requirements were met.

**How can the method fit in with the IEP services a child receives?**

The Higashi Method is designed to be carried out in a special school setting. Therefore, children being educated using this method would not attend public schools or be served under an IEP in the typical manner. The Boston Higashi School certifies that they are able to provide services stated in the IEP. For more information on this, visit their website.

**How is this approach unique in its approach to educating children with autism?**

The Higashi method focuses on all aspects of the child's life, both in and out of school; similar to that of other educational approaches. Its use of intensive physical exercise is a unique approach not found in other traditional methods. In addition, it stresses replacement behaviors to reduce the presence of problem behaviors in students with autism.

**Information adapted from:**

*Approaches to Autism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (1997)  
London: The National Autistic Society.

**Helpful links on the Higashi Method:**

- ▶ [www.bostonhigashi.org](http://www.bostonhigashi.org) This is the website of the Higashi School located in Boston, MA and explains their methods and philosophy. 800 North Main Street, Randolph, MA 02368. Phone: (781) 961-0800.
- ▶ <http://www.musashino-higashi.org/english.htm> This is the website for the Musashino Higashi Gakuen School in Tokyo, where the Higashi Method was originally used. This school is comprised mostly of students without disabilities, with 50 students with autism who are educated using the Higashi Method. 3-25-3 Nishikubo, Musashino, Tokyo 180-0013, Japan. Phone: 0422-54-8611.

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