**<http://raising-teaching-children.blogspot.de/2015/10/robots-help-teach-social-skills-to-kids.html>**

**Robots Help Teach Social Skills to Kids with Autism**

[](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-c6pzJdWQb7c/ViEuOdJ6aFI/AAAAAAAAE5Y/mVFf0sSClBY/s1600/NMC_18miloINSIDE02.jpg)Researchers believe robots hold the key to early diagnosis, as well as teaching social skills. What can they do that humans can’t?

It is well known that individuals with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) often have social anxiety. Experts explain that learning social interactions via a less threatening interface, a robot, may help individuals with autism better identify emotions and use specific social skills with humans, like holding a conversation.   
  
  
Children with autism often have a hard time talking with or even looking at human therapists, but experts say they light up when interacting with robots. It’s not to replace therapy with humans, but you can deliver a social skills lesson in a less threatening way, and the robot can deliver the same lesson multiple times, the same way.

According to autism advocacy group [Autism Speaks](http://www.autismspeaks.org/), as children with ASD develop, they may have varying degrees of difficulties in engaging in normal social situations. Although they may share a connection with a person, such as a parent, they don’t show the normal behaviors that would demonstrate this affection, like hugging or smiling at them. This difficulty in demonstrating accepted social norms can continue into their adult lives. Robots4Autism when used in conjunction with traditional therapies, may improve social behaviors and interactions for children with ASD.

Dr. Pamela Rollins, associate professor in the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences, is working with autism experts and robotics designers to create a program that uses an artificially intelligent robot with a full range of facial expressions to interact with children who have Autism Spectrum Disorder. She says that some preliminary data has shown that individuals with autism start talking to the robots when they don’t talk to other people.

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More specifically,  Pamela Rollins, who has studied communication disorders for years, worked with a company called Robokind to develop a robot named “Milo”. Milo is  made partially of plastic and is 2 feet tall. He’s programmed to teach kids about a wide range of social interactions. Some experts say he’s proving more successful than humans in helping children with autism.

"All children with autism have problems with social interactions,” she said. “But they're really good at technology, and so Milo creates that bridge, where he is humanoid, has a human face, but is cartoonish so children in the spectrum are engaged with him."

"We found that especially with the fluent children, they were engaged with Milo 87 percent of the time,” Rollins said. “We also looked at how much they were engaged with the therapist when she tried to talk to them. It was about 3% ."

The robot speaks 20% slower than an average human and has a broad, but still limited, range of facial expressions. He is less likely to display emotions that get in the way of learning.

“If you don't get it, he can repeat it over and over and over and over and over and never get frustrated,” Rollins said.

The CDC said one out of every 68 children born in the USA has some form of autism, and Dr Rollins is convinced that many of them could benefit from a friend like Milo.

During a lesson, the robot explains a social situation to the child with ASD. They then watch a video of the described social situation together, during which the robot comments on the appropriate behaviors displayed by the actors, reinforcing the previous explanation. As a final test, the child watches short videos of the correctly modeled behavior or one with errors, and then discusses.

The robot can sense when a child begins to get frustrated or agitated and can react accordingly. There is even a module designed to teach children how to calm themselves down when they’re agitated. It can also progress children through lessons as they master modules focusing on different social situations, such as how to greet someone or how to interact at a birthday party.