

New app for children with autism

Svetha Venkatesh, professor of computer science & director, Pattern Recognition and Data Analytics (PRaDA), Deakin University, Australia, was in India to launch an education software. She talks to **Malini Sen** about the benefits of the innovation for children with special educational needs



Svetha Venkatesh

You highlight the importance of early intervention for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); which age and what are the signs that parents should be aware of?

Early intervention is critical and starts as young as two years. Typically, the early intervention covers a period of two-eight years in a child's life. To diagnose autism, a proper medical evaluation

is required. Early signs include inability to share, gaze or respond when called by one's name. Once the diagnosis is done, parents are advised to start therapy programme at home, and continue to augment conventional therapy after assessment.

Can you elaborate on TOBY Playpad and how it will help children with ASD and limited expressive communication skills?

Toby is built as an iPad app in which the delivery of stimuli, re-

sponses, prompts and reinforcements are encapsulated in a rigorous learning framework. Early intervention is crucial for children with ASD; however, waiting period from diagnosis to therapy could be lengthy. Our aim is to provide a programme that empowers parents to deliver therapy to their children in this critical period at home.



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