

The Impact of an ASD Diagnosis on the Family: Building Supportive Relationships with Extended Family, Friends, and Professionals

Program Description

The presenter is a parent of a 38-year-old son with autism and a professional who has worked with families for more than 20 years. This workshop is based on the presenter's books, *A Friend's, and Relative's Guide to Supporting the Family with Autism: How Can I Help?* and *Families of Children with Autism: What Educational Professionals Should Know*, coauthored with Dr. Lee Marcus. After receiving a diagnosis for their child, the parents' everyday life can change dramatically. They often find themselves taking their child to numerous therapies and doctors and working with school supports they never thought they would need. The parent may also be struggling to balance all the emotions from this experience such as sadness, fear, confusion, frustration, and hope.

Their extended family and friends may also be struggling following the diagnosis and may not know what to say or do to help the parents. Initial reactions to the diagnosis can vary and can put a strain on the relationship between the parents and their family members and friends. Using personal quotes from parents, extended family members, and friends, the presenter will discuss some of the obstacles that can get in the way of developing supportive relationships. The workshop will also cover some of the negative reactions to the diagnosis that can occur and what parents, family members, and friends can do to build more supportive relationships.

The parent/professional relationship is also important to providing the support a family needs, especially during the initial time following a diagnosis. The presenter will discuss the stressors that both the parents of children with ASD and the professionals who work with them may bring to a relationship and the importance of understanding the perspective of each party. She will describe the best qualities of parents and professionals and suggestions on how to prevent problems from occurring. The presentation also includes strategies for developing and maintaining a good working relationship between professionals and parents.

Program Objectives

Upon completion of this workshop, participants should be able to:

1. Explain the changes that occur for the parents when they receive an ASD diagnosis for their child.
2. Describe the emotions that a parent may be experiencing following a diagnosis.
3. Examine the barriers that get in the way of developing supportive relationships between parents and the extended family members and friends.
4. List the stressors that parents and professionals may bring with them into a relationship.
5. Outline strategies for promoting supportive relationships with family members and with professionals serving the family.

Target Audience

Human Service Professionals, school personnel, parents or caregivers, and anyone interested in this topic.

Contact Hours

3.0 – 6.0 hours

Program Agenda

Impact of a Diagnosis on the Parent's Daily Life

Balancing the Emotions following the diagnosis

Complications Related to an ASD Diagnosis

Importance of Family Support and the Complicated Nature of Families

Obstacles to Developing a Supportive Relationship

Negative Reactions to a Diagnosis

What can Parents do to Build Supportive Relationships?

What can Extended Family Members and Friends do to Build Supportive Relationships?

Break

Understanding the Stressors, a Parent may bring to the Parent/Professional Relationship

Understanding the Stressors, a Professional may bring to a Relationship with a Family

Qualities of the Best Professional

Qualities of the Best Parent

Preventing Problems between Parents and Professionals

Strategies to Improve Relationships

Faculty

Ann Palmer is a parent of a 38-year-old son with autism, an author and presenter, and a professional having worked with families for close to 30 years. She was the Parent Support Coordinator at the UNC TEACCH Program and the Director of Advocacy and Chapters at the Autism Society of North Carolina. Ann is recently retired from being a faculty member at the Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities (CIDD) at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. She is the author of four books published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Her book, *Realizing the College Dream with Autism or Asperger Syndrome: A Parent's Guide to Student Success* was written about her son's college experience. *Parenting Across the Autism Spectrum: Unexpected Lessons We Have Learned*, was co-authored with Maureen Morrell and was the Autism Society of America's Literary Work of the Year. She is also the author of *A Friend's and Relative's Guide to Supporting the Family with Autism: How Can I Help?* and co-author of her newest book, *Drinking, Drug Use and Addiction in the Autism Community*.