

**Families of Children with
Autism: What Educational
Professionals Should Know**

National Smart Start Conference 2011

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WHO WE ARE

Why We Are Here



Introduction and Overview

- Brief history of parents and professionals
- Importance of working together
- Need to understand parent and professional perspectives
- Steps toward enhancing the working relationship

Understanding Families

- Changes after the diagnosis
 - Day to day life
 - Dreams
 - Priorities
 - Relationships
 - The way they think of themselves and their child

Balancing Emotions

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| ■ Fear | ■ Confusion |
| ■ Sadness | ■ Desperation |
| ■ Inadequacy | ■ Isolation |
| ■ Guilt | ■ Hopefulness |
| ■ Protectiveness | ■ Anger |

Other Stressors

- Diagnostic confusion
- Uneven and unusual course of development
- “Can’t versus Won’t” dilemma
- Attractive appearance
- Behavior in public
- Professional turfism
- Fads and unproven therapies

Barriers to Building a Collaborative Relationship

- Parent suddenly an advocate for their child
- Complicated and challenging children
- Building collaborative relationships takes time and effort
- Each party brings their own stressors into the relationship

What the Parent Brings to the Relationship

- Past history with professionals
 - May have had negative experiences- misdiagnosis, rejection of concerns, rejection of child
 - May feel mistrustful, defensive, not willing to reach out for help
- Physical impact of parenting
 - Sleep deprivation and physical exhaustion
 - No time to relax, always on alert
 - Cumulative effect of stress

What the Professional Brings to the Relationship

- Past history with parents
 - May have had negative experiences- defensive, non-communicative
- Controversies about causes/treatment
- System demands- documentation, testing, federal and state standards
- Juggling needs of all
- Limitations on the system- increased numbers, financial issues

How to Help Overcome the Barriers

- Get to know the family
 - Step into the family's world
 - Ask about family's experience with "system"
 - Put family behavior in context
 - Use information you learn to prevent problems and set goals
- Connect the family with resources
- Listen

Principles of Parent-Professional Collaboration

- Parent-professional collaboration
- Understanding autism as a developmental disability
- Individualization and flexibility
- Importance of structure
- The developmental continuum
- Competencies and coping
- Professional as guide, not expert
- Consideration of total family needs

Developmental Stages for Families

- Early childhood
- Elementary school years
- Adolescence
- Adulthood

Tips for Professionals

- Realize that parents are grateful
- Parents have an emotional bond that needs to be understood
- Anger as a smokescreen
- Importance of ongoing communication
- Partner, do not compete with parents
- Be a good listener
- See child as person, not a label

Tips for Parents

- Communicate your concerns, questions
- Appreciate the professional's work
- Remember you are a team and keep the focus on the child
- Understand their stressors and the limitations
- Listen
- Our children are life-long learners




