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TEAMING INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS WORKING
WITH CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

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Abstract

For years, research has demonstrated that a positive parent-professional relationship is invaluable for enhancing the educational success for a child with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). However, parents and professionals today face numerous challenges when collaborating with one another. The research that is currently available primarily addresses the parents' perspectives regarding the diagnostic process of a child with ASD. However, the perceptions of professionals working with parents of children with ASD during the diagnostic and treatment process have been minimally examined. This study utilized a qualitative research design to explore the challenges and benefits of working with parents of children with ASD as well as recommendations to maximize this relationship. Eight speech-language pathologists were chosen to participate in order to determine the best practice strategies for including parents in a multi-disciplinary team, and approaches for enhancing their partnership. Participants identified the following four themes when discussing the topic of parent-professional collaboration: communication, equality, mutual trust and respect, and personal qualities. The results indicate that teaming is critical to meeting the needs of children with autism, and parental involvement is essential in education as well as beneficial to both the parents and professionals. Moreover, barriers may often be clarified and/or rectified through addressing problems and concerns in open communication. The results may be utilized to ascertain the experiences and opinions of professionals working with parents of child with ASD. The results may also promote a positive parent-professional relationship by examining the attitudes and skills that compromise a working partnership.

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Chapter 1

Literature Review

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), oftentimes referred to as *Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD)*, are a range of neurological disorders that are characterized by impaired communication and interpersonal relationships as well as restricted and repetitive behavior. ASD is the umbrella to a wide spectrum of disorders and affects each individual in different ways, and to varying degrees (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). In 1943, researchers in the United States began to use the term “autism.” This word was derived from the Greek word “autos,” meaning “self.” Leo Kanner, a physician from Johns Hopkins University, introduced this terminology to describe children with emotional or social impairments. He characterized this group of individuals by their unusual patterns of behavior, social aloofness, and elaborate repetitive routines. The label “early infantile autism” was instituted into the English language, declaring ASD a unique mental disorder (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). During this time period, similar discoveries were originated through the work of Dr. Hans Asperger. His observations were comparable to Kanner’s findings; however the children appeared to have normal language development. Asperger termed these behaviors and abilities as “autistic psychopathy,” meaning autism (self) and psychopathy (personality disease). Children lacked empathy, were unable to form friendships, and had difficulty with motor skills, yet appeared to be higher functioning and illustrated no cognitive impairment (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). The findings of these two disorders were published and described in the Diagnostic and

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR). Today, this manual serves as the most widely used diagnostic reference used by professionals to refer to children with ASD and related disorders (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008).

When first discovered in the 1940s, ASD was considered a rare and unique disorder. However, by the late 1990's, the prevalence of ASD skyrocketed at an exorbitant rate. The marked increase in incidence emphasized the high demand for treatment amongst these affected individuals, and forced medical professionals to improve diagnostic screenings and alter the definition of ASD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). By 1994, major revisions were made to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, updating the criteria for the diagnosis of autism and ASD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008).

Throughout the past decade, the prevalence of ASD continues to be in the forefront of healthcare issues. Today, every 1 in 110 children born have ASD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). ASD affects all races, classes, and ethnicities impacting millions of children, parents, and families around the world. Boys illustrate a significantly higher incidence than girls, accounting for more than 80 percent of the million and a half Americans diagnosed (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). According to the Department of Education and various governmental agencies, the rate of ASD grows 10-17 percent per year (Autism Society of America, 2009). With this increasing trend, the American Speech Association predicts 4 million cases of ASD within the next decade (Autism Society of America, 2009).

Diagnostic Process

Children with ASD do not adhere to typical developmental milestones. In some instances, children are diagnosed by the age of 1 year or younger. For others, an accurate identification may occur between the ages of 18 and 36 months as a child's development stagnates and differences become apparent between the child with ASD and other children of the same age range (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the median age of earliest diagnosis is between 4.5 and 5.5 years of age, with 80% of parents noticing developmental concerns at 24 months. Despite the early recognition of a delay in development, children often do not receive a final diagnosis until later in life. The rising prevalence of ASD reflects the increase in importance for early identification (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). Studies indicate that children who receive services prior to 48 months of age make greater improvements in development than those who begin treatment after 48 months of age (Harris & Weiss, 1998; Sheinkopf & Siegel, 1998). Early intervention programs can significantly impact a child's quality of life and can maximize his/her ability to acquire new skills. The early detection, in conjunction with implementing appropriate services, can result in significant gains in all areas of a child's development (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). Educating pediatricians, parents, day-care providers, and teachers about the early signs of ASD is the cornerstone for improvement.

The initial signs of ASD often go unnoticed or are ignored. A significant gap is present between the time parents report their initial concerns with their child's development and the time of referral and diagnosis. Although the detection of ASD

in a young child can be difficult, early identification and intervention is of paramount importance for improved developmental, behavioral, and adaptive skills (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). Developmental milestones serve as the guide for normal development and illustrate the general age and time when most children should pass through these periods. For parents, it is often difficult to determine whether a child is immature in his or her ability to communicate or if a problem is occurring that requires professional assistance. However, with the proper knowledge of typical stages in development, parents can recognize if their child is struggling through observing noteworthy signs or “red flags.” It is imperative that parents are able to recognize developmental delays and address these problems accordingly. Treating problems early on is the best approach to overcoming any speech and language delay (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). Early intervention services are dependent upon early detection and formal diagnosis, thus at risk behaviors must be referred for a comprehensive evaluation and assessment in a timely and efficient manner. Once diagnosed, a speech-language pathologist can seek the best approach for improving communication and enhancing a child’s overall quality of life (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008).

There is currently no cure for ASD or one specific intervention approach that can remedy each child. Since children learn most effectively and rapidly at a very young age, an early and accurate diagnosis is critical for effective treatment (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008). Research suggests that this early approach to intervention can favorably influence the brain’s development. From birth to five years of age, the brain has the greatest capacity to grow and expand

based on the experiences the child is exposed to (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). Although intervention will not cure ASD, a structured training program can help reduce the challenges associated with the disorder and provide children with some degree of independence. For optimal gains in development, intervention should focus on intense skill-oriented training that is appropriate, consistent, and tailored to the specific child. By recognizing the early symptoms of ASD, parents and professionals can take advantage of this “window of opportunity” in the child’s development process (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008).

Parents oftentimes rely on pediatricians and family physicians to offer support about their child’s development. For many parents, these healthcare providers are their first source of knowledge about ASD. After a brief medical evaluation by a pediatrician, parents are typically referred to a child psychologist or psychiatrist for further assessment. The psychiatrist or psychologist directly observes the child’s behavior and interviews the family to gain deeper insight into the child’s development. Occasionally, a formal test designed to measure ASD-like behaviors is administered as a means of comparison to normally developing children. Through the collaboration of test results and subjective judgments, a diagnosis may be made (Avdi, Griffen, & Brough, 2000). Diagnosing a child with ASD is a life-changing event for a family. Once diagnosed, parent’s hopes and dreams for their child become immediately shattered. Professionals in the field of ASD serve as a guide for parents as they begin their journey of “re-parenting” (Kerrell, 2001). They work towards counseling parents to accept a child’s disabilities and see the world from their child’s perspective, as well as providing techniques that will allow

for communication with their autistic child. With the help of healthcare professionals, the stresses that ASD brings may greatly be reduced as parents learn to successfully manage anxiety about their child's diagnosis (Kerrell, 2001). The findings of Mansell and Morris in 2004 stated that 87% of parents had a greater understanding of their child's behaviors as a result of the diagnosis. A stronger, more constructive working environment between the parent and professional creates positive interpersonal relationships and fosters confidence, encouragement, and mutual trust with one another. In order to build this rapport, parents and professionals must work together to overcome the plethora of obstacles that result from diagnosing a child with ASD (Mansell & Morris, 2004).

For years, the importance of parents and professionals working in partnership has been an effective method for providing services to a child. However, despite the benefits of parental support during the diagnostic process, parents oftentimes face challenges when working with professionals (Dempsey & Dunst, 2004). Research suggests that the majority of the parents who were unsatisfied with the process had wished a diagnosis were made in the earlier years of the child's life (Mansell & Morris, 2004). In many instances, 2 to 3 years have passed before a child is correctly diagnosed. This delay in identification may oftentimes be attributed to a professional's difficulty with relaying the news to a parent or the incorrect diagnosis of the child (Whitaker, 2002). The strong emotional reaction by parents relating to the diagnosis of ASD may potentially delay professionals from accurately diagnosing a child. Many parents fear the negative consequences of labeling a child "autistic" and are suddenly thrown into a world that they know nothing about. However, by

providing parents with an accurate diagnosis, their feelings of guilt and blame may be more easily resolved (Whitaker, 2002). According to Comer and Haynes (1991), professionals must provide parents with information, which will empower them to make decisions about their child's needs. Parents depend on these healthcare providers for advice, guidance, and support and must work together to keep the child on a healthy developmental path. This lack of communication between the parents and professionals however may lead to unbridled negative results causing harm and conflict (Farrow, 1991).

A delay in diagnosis may be the result of a professional ignoring the parent's concerns relating to their child's development. A delay may also occur if a family is referred to health care professionals who don't specialize in developmental disorders (Avdi, Griffen, & Brough, 2000). Healthcare providers oftentimes want to "wait and see" if developmental delays will resolve themselves. It is sometimes believed that children are "late bloomers" and will "grow out of it," without any formal intervention services (Avdi, Griffen, & Brough, 2000). However, according to one national survey of parents with young children, the detection rates in primary care show that 70% of developmental disorders (Palfrey, Singer, Walker & Butler, 1994) and 80% of mental health problems are not caught (Lavigne et al, 1993). An accurate diagnosis for a physician requires a great deal of training and experience. The difficulty recognizing and acknowledging ASD may lead to a lack of intervention services to meet the individual needs of the child (Kerrell, 2001). A false diagnosis can impede a parent's trust and respect for a professional which creates a barrier to their relationship. In order to ensure an effective partnership, it is critical the

professional listens, inquires and elicits information from the parents and provides appropriate feedback (Giarelli, Souders, Pinto-Martin, Bloch, & Levy, 2005). A successful parent-professional partnership depends on interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate effectively. However, if professionals are not open to listen to a parent's concerns and opinions, a child's needs and deficits may go unnoticed (Kerrell, 2001).

During the diagnosis of a child, many parents may question the knowledge, expertise and authority of professionals. Parents felt that they were equally knowledgeable, if not more knowledgeable, than professionals in regards to the field of ASD (Avdi, Griffen, & Brough, 2000). Parents reported that professionals showed a lack of commitment and support relating to their issues, and lack appropriate concerns regarding their child's development. Oftentimes, a parent's suspicions were ignored and not treated in a serious manner (Kerrell, 2001). Parents felt scrutinized, judged, and belittled by professionals in an attempt to receive an accurate diagnosis. Information was provided to parents to help cope with these stressful times (Avdi, Griffen & Brough, 2000) and learn of potential treatment plans, however, materials were filled with language that was difficult to understand (Pena, 2000). Parents experienced a disconnect from the professionals and in fact felt working with professionals created more stress and anxiety to their already complicated and compromised lives (Mansell & Morris, 2004). One parent even described her experience with the diagnostic process as "cold and calculating" (Osborne & Read, 2008, p.314). Facilitating parent-professional collaboration at all levels of care and service will greatly influence a child's development. Professionals

are required to involve parents in “every aspect of the setting’s work” (Donahue-Kilburg, 1992). In order to enhance communication and interaction, a parent-professional partnership is critical.

Treatment Services

The parent-professional relationship continues through the intervention process. Mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (Pub. L. 108-446), individuals with ASD are eligible for speech-language pathology services regardless of age, social communication impairment, cognitive abilities, or performance on standardized testing (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1999). After a child is diagnosed with ASD, therapy and treatment should immediately follow (Charman and Stone, 2006).

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), a speech-language pathologist plays a critical role in enhancing the communication skills, social skills, interaction, and reasoning for a child with ASD (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1999). Since characteristics of ASD include a broad range of cognitive, social, communication, motor, and adaptive abilities, the benefits of working with a speech-language pathologist are significant (Simpson, 2005). During the intervention process, a speech-language pathologist supports the individual with ASD, the environment, and the individual who interacts with the child. The therapist helps maximize opportunities for interaction and fosters communication skills to potentially overcome barriers that may lead to social isolation. (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1999). Speech-language pathologists must adapt to different families, cultures, languages, and resources in

order to meet the specific needs of the child. Moreover, speech-language pathologists must form partnerships with families of children with ASD during the assessment and intervention process because active family involvement is essential for education (Simpson, 2005). Speech-Language Pathologists must provide counseling, education and training, coordination of services, and advocacy for families. In order to identify priorities and build consensus for the best service plan and functional outcomes, speech-language pathologists must collaborate with families, individuals with ASD, other healthcare professionals, support personnel and peers (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1999). It is essential that they serve as trainers and trainees for continuing education to enhance the knowledge and education of professionals who provide services for individuals with ASD (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1999). Furthermore, speech-language pathologists act as advocates for individuals with ASD to help facilitate communication skills that may lead to greater independence in home, school, work and greater participation in social networks (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1999). Research shows that children who undergo speech-language therapy make significant gains in all areas of development (Simpson, 2005.)

It is critical that parents are accepting of their child's condition and work towards determining an appropriate intervention plan. Parents, both mom and dad where applicable, serve as active participants in all aspects of the child's ongoing assessment and intervention process. As one parent said, "We need respect, we need to have our contribution valued. We need to participate, not merely be involved. It is, after all, the parent who knew the child first and who knows the child best. Our

relationship with our sons and daughters is personal and spans a lifetime" (Moore, 2003, p. 49). A family's involvement will provide unique insight for treatment services and help the child achieve greater maintenance and generalization of skills. Through parental involvement, families are ensured that their values and priorities are included in the intervention plans (Donahue-Kilburg, 1992). It is important that professionals work directly with the child in order to gain greater understanding of the parent's philosophies and why each specific goal was chosen to be included in treatment (Mansell & Morris, 2004). The role of family members in the intervention process creates a positive relationship between parents, siblings and professionals. Joint evaluations and working together to develop goals and carry out intervention assures the best possible outcomes for the child with ASD (Renty & Roeyers, 2006). Although the development of a parent-professional partnership may be challenging at times, this relationship will create an intervention process that works best for the child and his or her family.

It is imperative that parents and professionals value the opinions of one another and strive to build a positive teaming relationship. This collaboration will ensure that resources, services, and supports are shared equally amongst both parties (Renty & Roeyers, 2006). Families must provide professionals with confidential information regarding the child's strengths and weaknesses in addition to the knowledge about the family's morals and value system. Subsequently, professionals are obligated to provide families with an understanding of the field of speech-language pathology: medical, educational, therapeutic, rehabilitative, and vocational (Donahue-Kilburg, 1992). In order to gain a full picture of the child's

abilities and needs, professionals also rely on the child's extended family, friends and neighbors of the family, and other healthcare professionals. Professionals also use the knowledge and training acquired from their previous experiences working with children with ASD as a source of information for parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). To foster this collaboration, professionals can no longer serve as the "expert," but rather as a mentor and avid listener. It is the duty of the speech pathologist to collect the proper resources and cater intervention based on the wants and needs of the family and child.

Family-professional collaboration must occur at all levels of care and service. This relationship commences once a professional recognizes that the family is the constant in the child's life. As services and intervention plans continue to vary throughout the child's treatment process, the family is actively involved each step of the way (Dunst, Trivette, Davis, & Cornwell, 1988). In order to promote a positive working environment, professionals must honor the racial, ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic diversity of the family. They must recognize the family's strengths, while providing coping methods to overcome the weaknesses (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Professionals can serve as the parent's support system through sharing complete and unbiased information on a continuing basis. Encouraging communication with other families who are coping with the hardships of this disorder will also give parents an additional source of guidance and support (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). For some, the cost of treatment services can be devastating. This can leave many families in financial crisis. In order to provide the services and resources necessary to benefit the family and child, a professional must

guide families to the appropriate emotional and financial programs (Furney & Salembier, 2000). This support will help improve the educational outcomes for children with ASD as they continue into their school-aged years.

In 2006, Renty and Roeyers concluded that parents appeared to be more satisfied with special education schools than general education schools. Parents experienced a stronger bridge of communication with teachers from special education schools regarding the daily functioning and progress of the child. Professionals valued the contributions that parents brought to the table and were respectful of their decisions (Renty & Roeyers, 2006). Many parents concluded that the developmental needs of the child were clearly understood by the professionals and were included into the child's individualized program. The special education schools were passionate about seeking the best intervention plan that would maximize the child's abilities and were enthusiastic about working with parents during this journey to treatment (Renty & Roeyers, 2006).

Several studies have also reported that parents did not characterize their relationship with professionals as collaborative. Parents felt that professionals lacked sensitivity, used educational jargon, and were ineffective in solving problems and generating solutions (Furney & Salembier, 2000). Many were unsatisfied with the professional's lack of knowledge about ASD as well as the inadequate communication channel with other healthcare professionals (Furney & Salembier, 2000). Professionals were described as unsupportive, oftentimes dismissing the parent's concerns or opinions. In many instances, a great deal of time had passed before a child received referrals and were provided the appropriate education

(Brotherson, Turnbull, Bronicki, Houghton, Roeder-Gordon, & Summers, 1998). In a 1992 survey conducted by the National Parent Teacher Association, 27,000 parents were questioned about the barriers they experience from the school team. The majority of family members concluded that they oftentimes feel intimidated, unwelcome at the school, and was never properly guided by professionals to become involved in a meaningful way. Parents also reported that they feel they don't have information to contribute, don't understand the planning process or the service system, and felt meetings weren't "family friendly". A small percentage of the parents stated that language and cultural differences have negatively impacted their relationship with professionals. The barriers present between parents and professionals can lead to the lack of participation from families in regards to their child's education and future planning. It is imperative that professionals recognize these challenges and strive to overcome the obstacles that may impede this rapport (Furney & Salembier, 2000).

Working as a group oftentimes results in diversified thinking and positions, which can be beneficial if harnessed correctly, but may also lead to unbridled negative results causing harm and conflict. Inevitably, a group may struggle to reach its objectives; many times it fails and blame becomes the operative protocol. However, there are steps that will help build a sense of belonging, self worth and confidence for the team. Ultimately, if introduced properly and embraced accordingly, a homogeneous group will be born. Parents appreciate professionals who are committed, understanding and communicate effectively. Schools can increase parent and family involvement in an abundance of ways: providing

teachers with information about how to properly communicate and involve families, allotting a significant amount of time for teachers to converse with families either through face-to-face conversations or by phone, developing a network of families who can communicate with one another, inviting families into the classroom to feel comfortable with their child's environment, creating family centers within the school in order to share educational and parenting materials as well as communicate with other families and school personnel, opening the school for families to partake in after-school events, providing a suggestion box for families who are uncomfortable in discussing a personal concern, and developing surveys for parents to complete as a way to provide feedback to the school and offer suggestions about upcoming events and activities (National Parent Teacher Association, 1992). It is critical that at all times the parents feel apart of the process. They should feel in control, rather than dictated to. Although conflicts or disproportionate involvement is sometimes inevitable, determining the root cause of the conflict and then communicating through creative solutions will help solidify this parent-professional relationship.

Present Study

The research currently available regarding the professional's relationship with parents of children with ASD during the diagnostic and treatment processes is limited. For research that is available, findings are somewhat limited to studies conducted in Europe. In North America, there exists a limited amount of research based on the professional's perspective of working with parents (National Institute of Mental Health, 2010). For parents, the first encounter with professionals in

relation to their child with ASD is often at the point of diagnosis. Subsequently, parents embark on a journey that involves the formation of many relationships with professionals working in the field of ASD. Although relationships have the potential to facilitate child and family outcomes, relationships may also jeopardize these outcomes. For decades, developing a positive relationship between parents and professionals has shown to be of utmost importance and beneficial to the overall development of a child. In the past, professionals were viewed as having the necessary expertise to make decisions for the best interests of the child. Parents were often replaced by trained professionals to ensure that a child's educational needs were met (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986). However, contemporary conceptualizations have adopted a family's perspective on the views of their child with ASD and professionals have come to acknowledge the needs of all family members. As indicated in a 2004 publication *Parents, Families and Partnership: Issues and Consideration*, an article written by Deb Keen, "Beliefs about how to best foster the growth and development of children with disabilities have changed radically in the past 50 years and these changes are no more evident than in the nature of the parent-professional relationship." According to Keen (2004), the best practice advocates a family-centered approach in which professional's foster true partnership with families. As such, there is a predominance of available data demonstrating parents' perspectives working with professionals as opposed to professional's views where there is a dearth of available data. Important to this conceptualization has been the formation of relationships between parents and professionals that is underscored by communication, equality, and mutual trust and

respect. Although disagreement or disparity between team members may fan the flame of conflict, it is imperative that parents and professionals recognize the root cause of conflicts in order to prevent teaming challenges. Through this research study, the perspectives of speech-language pathologists are explicitly analyzed in order to gain an understanding of their relationship with parents of children with ASD. These findings will help determine the best practice strategies for improving parent-professional relationships and recognize how professionals may form meaningful and productive partnerships.

Chapter 2

Method

Design

A semi-structured, qualitative interview method was conducted with the speech-language pathologists. The interview served as the source of knowledge for understanding a professional's perceptions and recommendations towards their relationship with parents of children with autism spectrum disorder. The semi-structured interview design allowed for a flexible dialogue between the interviewers and speech-language pathologists, formulating subsequent questions to be asked by the researcher. Questions were broad, open-ended, and followed a general framework of themes to be explored. This systematic design encouraged speech-language pathologists to share their personal experiences and assessment of their relationship with parents. Data directly reflected the parent-professional rapport ranging from the initial stages of diagnosing a child with autism to the related intervention and services that followed. Professionals were not limited to respond to questions with a single word or phrase or by choosing from a limited range of options, but rather, invited speech-language pathologists to contemplate their responses and elaborate on their thoughts. As a result, the knowledge and experience of professionals was more comprehensive and helped build a stronger bond between the interviewer and interviewee.

The qualitative research method was designed to obtain culturally specific information about the participants. Understanding the *why* and *how* of decision-making was of paramount importance in order to uncover the values, opinions, and

behaviors of this particular population. These kinds of questions are answered by utilizing a qualitative approach to research. The subjective data helped identify the informant's true character, while gaining insight about a specific topic. Qualitative research served as the key to "attempting to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Patton, 1987, p. 112). Questions relating to *what*, *where* and *when* were less of a focus throughout the interview as the evaluator aimed for individualized outcomes where participants interpreted the questions however they intended. *What*, *where* and *when* questions would restrict informants to predetermined categories. As a result of the qualitative methods approach, researchers extract meaning from the data and classify information into organized themes. The most salient categories are brought to the surface, "the process of data analysis is like a funnel: Things are open at the beginning (or top) and more directed and specific at the bottom. The qualitative researcher plans to use part of the study to learn what the important questions are" (Bogan & Biklen, 1998, p. 197).

Participants

The participants in this study were speech-language pathologists with experience working with children with autism spectrum disorder. The information for the current research project targets the interviews with eight participants from a larger study. A majority of the professionals lived in the Pennsylvania area with the exception of two speech-language pathologists from New Jersey, and one from West Virginia. The sole criterion for participation in this study included experience with

school-aged children with autism. The speech-language pathologists that lacked informed consent and/or were unwilling to participate in the interview process were excluded from the research.

Materials

Telephone interviews were recorded using a RadioShack mini-recorder control (model 43-1237) and a Sony TCM-200DV hand-held cassette recorder. Interviews were recorded on Maxwell Professional Communicator Series (C-120) cassette tapes. A Panasonic Desktop Cassette Transcriber/Recorder (model RR-830) was used to listen and transcribe the telephone interviews. The interviews were transcribed through the word processing program, Microsoft Office Word. Appendix A illustrates the framework of questions used to guide the interviews with the speech-language pathologists.

Procedures

The primary investigators recruited participants for this research study. Informants were selected in one of four ways: a) speech-language pathologists who were acquainted with the primary investigators, either personally or professionally, b) speech-language pathologists who were acquainted with the primary investigators recommended individuals who may be interested in participating in the research study, c) speech-language pathologists from local autism support classrooms were contacted, and d) speech-language pathologists were contacted through an autism list serves via the Internet.

Prior to participating in the interview, researchers acquired informed consent from each of the informants. Approval was gained by providing verbal

consent via audio-recorded telephone communication between the investigator and participant. A copy of the consent form was mailed to each speech-language pathologist when an agreement to participate in the research study had been reached after the interview was completed.

A semi-structured, qualitative interview method was conducted with each of the participants. Data were collected via telephone. Each interview began with questions addressing the professional's experience working with autistic children. The researcher led the conversation by steering the professional with prepared interview questions, but allowed room for elaborate expanding on specific topics. Speech-language pathologists were given the appropriate amount of time to accurately respond to each of the interview questions. The informant's responses elicited subsequent questions by the researcher, tailoring the interview to the specific participant. The duration of each interview was approximately one hour long.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis consisted of identifying, coding, and categorizing specific patterns that were found in the data. Through the work of research assistants, interviews were precisely transcribed, with all indentifying information removed. The analysis processes adapted by McNaughton, Light, and Groszyk (2001) was used to analyze the data in the interviews. The process involved Utilizing the Data, Coding the Data, and Negotiating Agreement. First, information was broken down into the smallest, meaningful units that expressed a complete thought. Thought-units were then reviewed to identify reoccurring topics present

throughout the transcripts. A coding schema was implemented for each transcript, attaching labels to the text where similarities were evident. Finally, the coded information was combined from each interview and themes were developed. Each main theme was also explored in greater depth, identifying sub-themes that were comparative amongst the transcripts.

Reliability

Inter-rater reliability was determined for the coded transcripts. The number of coded agreements was divided by the total number of agreements and disagreements. This number was then multiplied by 100 to yield a percent. Inter-rater reliability was calculated to be at 83%.

Table 1*Speech-Language Pathologist Demographic Information*

Code	Age	State Licensed	State Practice	Level of Edu and Degree	Years in Practice	# of children with ASD
SLP-02-01	46	PA	PA	MS	8	35
SLP-05-02	35	PA	PA	MS plus 30 graduate credits and a special education Supervisory certificate	10	77
SLP-06-03	52	PA	PA	BS + 27 level II	14	75
SLP-08-04	29	PA	PA	MS	6	45
SLP-11-05	29	NJ	NJ	MS	5 ½	21
SLP-14-06	30	WV	WV	MS	6 ½	35
SLP-18-07	33	PA	PA	MS + 33 continuing education credits	10	13
SLP-20-08	43	PA	PA	MS + 30 continuing education credits	21	30

Chapter 3

Results

Eight transcripts were analyzed to determine the professional's perceptions and recommendations towards their relationship with parents of children with ASD spectrum disorder. Three themes emerged from the analysis: (a) parent-child interactions; (b) parent-professional interactions; and (c) dreams/goals. For parent-child interactions and parent-professional interactions, the support and barriers of parents and professionals working in partnership were identified, as well as recommendations for improving relationships between parents, professionals and children. A total of fifteen sub-themes emerged. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 2.

Parent-Child Interactions

Four of the eight speech-language pathologists discussed the relationship parents have with their child after receiving a diagnosis of ASD. The majority of the participants thoroughly explained how parents working with their child on a continual basis experience encouraging results and positive gains in the parent-child relationship. However, speech-language pathologists also discussed the various barriers that may impede a parent's relationship with their child. Three main sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the transcripts: (a) importance of parent-child interactions; (b) lack of knowledge and training; and (c) family pressures.

Importance of parent-child interactions

Support

Four speech-language pathologists indicated that a child's relationship with his or her parents is critical to the child's development. According to one speech-language pathologist, "The children that seem to do the best, that seem to thrive, are the ones whose parents love them the way they are and are not always pushing for what they are going to be". She proceeds by stating that although ASD is difficult to manage, the only way to really help a child is by accepting the course of their life. "I think if you're always constantly wanting for more, pushing for more, and not satisfied with where you are now, I believe your child picks up on that. So, you have to celebrate today's successes."

The role of parenting becomes even more crucial and complicated caring for a child with ASD. As stated by one particular speech-language pathologist, "Not that they don't love the child, you know, they still care, but they're working really hard." The speech-language pathologist continued this topic of conversation by discussing the school system. Schools are a great resource for parents to help focus the child on learning new concepts and skills. "We've had some Halloween and Valentines Day socials where the parents will bring them to that...it'll be like an after-school activity for them so the parents have been good with that." The importance of parent-child interactions to help encourage a child's independence was further illustrated, "I feel like the parents do take their kids out into the community, cause that's a really important thing. We want them to be as independent as possible." In regards to working with the child in the home, the speech-language pathologist stated, "A lot of my parents do work with the kids on homework. So, that's been good."

According to a third speech-language pathologist, parents are eager to find solutions and are desperate for techniques that will help impact their child's well being,

Well, not all of them, but I would say the majority do, just because most of them are so frustrated at home that, you know, they want to try things, that are hopefully going to work for them, so that they can get the child talking, or whatever the need is.

The speech-language pathologist advanced to the importance of learning various techniques through the support of therapists and other healthcare professionals. By providing assistance to parents who may not have the expertise or experience to work with a child with ASD, parents will be able to appropriately interact with their child and aim to target behavioral goals.

From experience working with parents of children with ASD, a fourth speech-language pathologist illustrated the significance of parent-child interactions. This relationship proves to be essential for optimal child development. She stated, "I view that they're really the first, best observers of their child. They know them in several different environments. We know them in the school environment, with school rules."

Lack of knowledge and training

Barriers

Two speech-language pathologists concluded that the lack of knowledge and training of parents about ASD could negatively impact parent-child interactions. One particular speech-language pathologist suggested, "So they may not know...they may not recognize all the opportunities to use that, so that would be one thing, maybe a little more training from them." The second speech-language pathologist

elaborated on a parent's lack of knowledge and experience with intervention approaches, which could result in the inability to provide the level of support and guidance necessary for the child. She continued, "I don't think they realize that they make them prompt dependent, that the kids begin to just be always the responder and never the initiator and that's one thing that those kids need to learn, is to be the initiator." Upon describing how this lack of knowledge and training affects a child's performance, the speech-language pathologist concluded, "A lot of times when they initiate it with behavior and so the parent just totally ignores the behavior to make it decrease and then you've got a vicious cycle going."

Family Pressures

Barriers

Three speech-language pathologists focused their attention on a parent's high level of stress and frustration within the home. The first speech-language pathologist targeted a parent's lack of time and attention towards the child with ASD due to additional children in the family. "They have other siblings at home sometimes, and just not a lot of time, it's just hard for them, to work with their child all the time on skills." In an attempt to split parental attention evenly and address the needs of the rest of the family, a parent's interactions with their child with ASD may be compromised. Noted by a second speech-language pathologist,

Some of the parents, their priority is not the children's education. There's a lot of pressure at home. As far as economics go, it's a poorer area. So that's kind of more on their minds a lot of times than the child's education.

Through the discussion of family pressures at home, a third speech-language pathologist commented on a parent's stress regarding the child's future;

Like I know that some of them, it's hard for them to even think about, 'what am I going to do when he turns 21?' And so, if there was just something that was just so they could feel good about where their child is. Like our one parent who's a really great parent, she said, 'you know, when you have a kid with special needs, you feel guilty all the time.'

Recommendations to Parents

Teaching an autistic child can be a very challenging experience, leaving parents confused and frustrated. However, with the proper education and support systems, families can learn to thrive. One speech-language pathologist provided suggestions for parents regarding how to improve the relationship with their child. She recommended the importance of parents understanding how things appear to their child and how the child is interpreting things. With this advice, parents can cope much better and help to manage the child's future. "It's really a growth process for them once the student hits school age. It's very different and their kids are maturing and trying out new things and sometimes I think they just need time to grow along with their child."

Parent-Professional Interactions

All eight speech-language pathologists described their perceptions and recommendations towards their relationship with parents of children with ASD during the diagnostic and treatment process. Each speech-language pathologist expressed their personal challenges and benefits to the teaming interactions that they have encountered. Four sub-themes emerged from the transcripts: (a) communication; (b) equality; (c) trust and respect; and (d) personal qualities.

Communication

Supports

Through the findings of this study, each speech-language pathologist indicated that communication is an important factor in developing strong teaming interactions. The professionals specified that communication with parents was frequent, influential, honest, and comprehensible. One speech-language pathologist enumerated several communication approaches used to converse with parents, “I usually e-mail or talk to parents between our IEP meetings. There are also communication books. Some parents want to have a daily communication log, and sometimes I do that.” Upon speaking with an additional speech-language pathologist, she described additional methods of communication that are effective for family involvement,

We have notebooks that go back and forth. If something big happens, then I really let the parents know. I’ll write in the communication book, or make sure they practice this. The kids also have speech folders, so the homework goes home and they know exactly what to work on and how to do it.

In response to the use communication books and e-mails, another speech-language pathologist noted, “Yeah, I like this a lot. I think it’s really good and simple. It allows for stuff to be carried over into the home.” Communication regarding a child’s performance at school was also achieved through sending home activities for the parents to follow, “I send home a little sheet with the student and they say ‘today in speech we practiced this...’ and you know, I can try this at home. Just give some little thing they can find relevance in what you’re doing.” In the case of one particular speech-language pathologist, most of her experiences working with parents have proved that they are uninvolved. In an attempt to seek as much parental involvement as possible, she allowed parents to choose which communication approach they would prefer;

I have asked parents if they'd prefer e-mail or the book and I've used that and I will write to them at least once a week saying this is what we have worked on in speech and give them suggestions on how they can do it at home. And you know, I'm always open to their questions and if they have any questions, e-mail me and I'll write back.

Two speech-language pathologists commented on their use of telephone conversations in order to maintain contact with parents. One speech-language pathologist commented, "I wouldn't say I call too much, unless there, you know, there's an issue and they need a phone call." However, a second speech-language pathologist noted that she particularly prefers phone conversations,

They're always allowed to call me. Or if they want me to call them they can just drop, can you give me a call or vice versa. And I'll call them. I'll say what's a good time and I'll call within a day or two. So then that is quicker and more effective than the writing. Things can be explained more.

One speech-language pathologist specified the occasional use of recorded videos to communicate with parents,

Usually I try to do a pre-video. Like, here's where they are. And then kind of go along and see where they are with the intervention and then say wow, look how this really changed, let's video tape that and show what he's doing now. And, those probably don't get sent home until, more like the end of the marking period. You know I don't think we really do that unless we think something is really earth shattering. So that varies.

The speech-language pathologist further elaborated on the use of recorded videos when parents are unable to maintain daily communication with the speech-language pathologist. "Sometimes parents have a hard time getting away from work and things like that during the day. So that's a good way to do that." The professional may stress to a parent, "You might not have to come in for this, but if you watch this video you can see what I am doing."

Frequent communication with parents will help lessen many parental concerns. Professionals can provide the appropriate level of communication necessary for children to receive the additional help that they may need at home.

One speech-language pathologist affirmed,

I try to do a weekly communication journal, weekly emails to parents and the days that I'm down there, I'm down there for two full days and so typically I see the parents either when they drop the child off or pick the child up and we kind of touch base with them at that time.

A second speech-language pathologist agreed with the amount of communication with parents, "Well a lot of the time we send books, notebooks home everyday. So there is that everyday little contact. Here's a list of five words that he really knows well. Talk about those a lot, get him to use those." Another speech-language pathologist specified frequent communication with parents to be primarily during the acquisition and mastery period of a new skill. She revealed, "At least for me it's when we're working on something new, they can kind of carry it over at home. And then once he has kind of learned that new skill, then I'll also say something that, you know, in the classroom he has pretty much mastered this skill, so now we're going to work on the next one." For children in particular with low-functioning ASD, another speech-language pathologist illustrated the need for frequent communication with parents;

Whereas the children who are probably on the lower end of the spectrum that maybe are...their needs are much greater, they're more highly involved. We meet monthly with the parents and even more so. E-mail is a great thing in that we can, you know, correspond daily.

According to this speech-language pathologist, parents of children with low-functioning ASD are “usually pretty direct” in the amount of daily communication they hope to achieve from professionals.

Three speech-language pathologists referred to an open channel of communication that allows professionals to learn more about the students’ needs and home environment. According to the first professional, this information can help maximize the child’s abilities, “Communicate what’s going on. If this was a tough morning, communicate that to the teacher. You know, the ups and downs of the day. He did really well here, but we want to still work on such and such.” A second speech-language pathologist furthered these findings by commenting on a parent’s dedication to keep professionals abreast of what’s occurring at home.

He draws a really neat picture at home or something, she’ll send it in and say, ‘This is what he said this was-isn’t that neat?’ or she’ll just write down what he had for breakfast because he has some aversions to food too.

As for the third speech-language pathologist, parents served as the primary informants for selecting the vocabulary for their child’s AAC system,

And I’m like here fill it out, just to get me a starting point. But I kind of tell them, you need to let me know because I’m not a walking dictionary/thesaurus and I can’t be like they are going to Sesame Place, let me think of everything they need. I’ll do my best, you’ll tell me what you need and hopefully we’ll come up with most of it.

In order to implement parent participation in educating their child, one speech-language pathologist noted,

I use some checklists where they can check off ‘these are things we see at home’ or ‘this is what he likes to be involved in at home’ and ‘this is what he plays with and doesn’t play with’ or ‘who he plays with.’

To further this subject, a speech-language pathologist mentioned an alternative method of communication in order to gain insight about the child's home environment, "I tell the parents at the beginning of the year that they can call me at any time with any special requests."

Regardless of the communication approach, professionals found that tapping into the support of parents creates a positive parent-professional environment and can greatly benefit the development of the child. Content with the parent's participation in communicating with professionals, one speech-language pathologist exclaimed, "I appreciate when the parents write in, call me, email me and say hey he's doing this cool thing at home, see if he does it at school because a lot of the times that generalization piece is most difficult." The speech-language pathologist further responded, "If he's not getting it here yet, I know what to expect. I know that he's capable, he just needs extra opportunities and extra practice." The statement elicited by this speech-language pathologist coincided with the response from a different speech-language pathologist. A parent's constant communication with professionals to provide insight about the child's behavior at home can help facilitate the parent's concerns and determine target areas for the child. "If he's having trouble at home with something, we can bring that up. And write a social story and, you know, we can help them out if there are some troubles at home."

In order to effectively communicate with parents, three speech-language pathologists documented the importance of relaying information that is explicable by the parents involved. In an attempt to ensure that parents completely understand

the professional's reasoning for implementing target goals, the first speech-language pathologist declared,

I also have a section in there for notes on things that I want to probe and check, and future directions. And anytime that I see that there's a need that we're missing that would be more important, we meet again with the parents and add that.

Still another speech-language pathologist described the use of graphs to monitor weekly data and progress. She illustrated her use of graphically presented information by stating,

These are often shared at the meetings. If a parent has a question then you can very easily take those out and kind of explain, well look this has been working really well, pretty gradual or maybe wow he really liked that approach and he went real fast.

According to a third speech-language pathologist, communicating with parents during each step of a child's progression will allow for parents to gain a clearer understanding of the child's abilities and see eye-to-eye with the professionals. The speech-language pathologist explained, "If they can kind of see the rhyme and reason as you go along it kind of helps them follow 'oh yeah, I see' or 'oh yeah, that sounds, like you're on the right track.'"

Overall, two of the speech-language pathologists thoroughly explained the benefits of the open channel of communication with parents and the positive teaming environment that had resulted. The first speech-language pathologist uttered, "And maybe it's because we really do work as a team and we do communicate constantly with the parents. So...we have good experience there. Because I've heard, you know, horror stories." A second speech-language pathologist commented on a variety of parents satisfied with the communication

tools and sufficient contact, “We have some parents who you know, write letters about how great the classroom is and how happy they are.”

Communication

Barriers

The responses provided by the majority of the speech-language pathologists illustrated various approaches for building a strong partnership with parents through active communication, however five of the speech-language pathologists highlighted barriers that affect this communication channel. Three speech-language pathologists recognized parents’ personal backgrounds and characteristics that were obstacles to appropriate and effective communication. One particular speech-language pathologist recognized cultural differences to be a significant communication challenge. “We have a couple parents who don’t speak English. Or maybe one parent does and the other parent doesn’t. But the parents that come in, you know, we might have to get an interpreter. So that can sometimes be difficult.” In addition to this barrier, a second speech-language pathologist documented economic constraints to be a primary obstacle for successful communication. She states, “We have a lot of low-income families and families that don’t understand their diagnosis and don’t understand why their child is acting the way that they’re acting or what it even means to have autism.” A third speech-language pathologist expanded on this barrier by stating,

The parents that are uneducated or in a sense lower class, which sounds awful, but I guess they tend to go hand in hand where they don’t understand it. So to them they don’t see the big picture of what’s wrong with their child or how or what they do really impact their child’s future. They really don’t get that big picture.

Two speech-language pathologists noted that some parents demonstrated characteristics that were similar to their autistic child. This genetic component had proved to impede a professional's ability to interact with parents. One speech-language pathologist stated, "We have one parent who seems to be autistic herself. So I feel like that's a barrier, because I feel like her social skills are not so great. She says some things that are inappropriate." The speech-language pathologist further elaborated on this issue by conferring, "In fact, her vocabulary is just way over our heads. So that was a barrier, 'cause I feel like she's way...she kind of doesn't get it, you know?" The experiences of a second speech-language pathologist correlated with the obstacles faced by the first speech-language pathologist as she explains,

It's been my experience that the genetic component that sometimes communicating with the parent and interacting with the parent is difficult because sometimes, but not all the time, they do have some not really impairments but some of the same types of characteristics. So whether they recognize it or not, it can be very challenging to try and interact and make them understand that we're all on the same team and trying to work for their child.

Three speech-language pathologists emphasized that a parents' work schedule and other commitments have prevented the communication necessary to meet the child's needs. One speech-language pathologist expressed her frustration with attempting to communicate with working parents;

When you have some parents who are at work the whole time, and they won't take calls at work, they're never there, they're never available, and you just have no idea. You know, maybe they're not eating, maybe something is going on. I'd love to say something, but you don't get to talk to them at all, so that's stressful.

A second speech-language pathologist found that resorting to recorded videos of the child was the only means of communication with parents who worked full-time.

“Sometimes parents have a hard time getting away from work and things like that during the day. So that’s a good way to do that.” The third speech-language pathologist recalled her stressful experience working with one particular father who disregarded the professional’s request for developing the child’s skills;

We did a unit where we really wanted to find a way to bring him into the forefront. Something he was into and he’s interested in. And he was Irish. I’m obviously Irish. I met his dad; I saw them at an Irish fair one weekend. I said you know, he’s Irish, let’s study Ireland and we’ll have the kids do reports and we’ll do this whole thing on Ireland and they kept him home that day. And he was so interested in it that we called and we said can he just come in for the tea this afternoon and his father was like ‘no, I have to pick up so and so...’ And it just was really frustrating.

Three speech-language pathologists emphasized the lack of two-way communication on behalf of the parents. One speech-language pathologist noted, “We have one parent out of 15 who sends something in. She’ll write in what he ate that day, or something like that but, that’s pretty much the only one.” A second speech-language pathologist illustrated the parent’s lack of communication following frequent communication attempts by the professional,

I think it’s one of the biggest things. I think the open communication. Its as simple as I keep a notebook with every parent, and we write back and forth, or we e-mail back and forth, or we call back and forth because like I said, what I am sending home does not make sense to you or you’re not able to implement it at home, and I don’t know that, I’m going to keep sending things home and assuming that its working.

Recommendations

Communication between parents and professionals can make a tremendous difference in the effectiveness of collaboration. A total of four speech-language pathologists recommended that communicating with one another is essential to building a positive working relationship.

Recommendations to Speech-Language Pathologists

One speech-language pathologist advised other professionals to create opportunities to give family members their full cooperation and serve as active listeners;

Say, you know, he has really bad sleeping patterns, you can call and say 'What happened last night?' you know, 'Has he been up since 4 in the morning-okay, I can see why this happened.' And you know, so talking to the parents, and that's really good when you have a parent who you can call and talk to...

A second speech-language pathologist expressed the importance of professionals avoiding the use of terms and acronyms that are unfamiliar to families. In many instances, parents may be reluctant to ask a professional to define a term and thus, it is the professional's responsibility to provide clear communication,

We need to talk down to their level. That would be more appropriate. We just start you know, talking, talking, talking, because we're so used to – we really understand what we're saying but it really is foreign language to a lot of people and we forget that. And we forget that it's not as common as saying, you know, hey the tree is green. They don't understand the jargon that we use sometimes and we forget that.

Recommendations to Parents

Two speech-language pathologists recommended to parents the importance of two-way communication, where the parent not only gives information, but also receives information. One speech-language pathologist suggested keeping open communication with the professional in order to share information and feelings;

What's going on at home has a huge impact on what I'm seeing at school. Maybe mom and dad are getting separated, now that's none of my business, but it becomes my business when Tommy starts shutting down and starts going backwards. So, trying to keep an open communication at a comfortable level is going to help me understand and is going to help me help you.

The speech-language pathologist also recommended the need for communication on follow through. She states, "Maybe what I'm suggesting is impossible for your life so you need to tell me that so I can give you more tips that you can try at home." A second speech-language pathologist also recommended an open channel of communication with parents in order to have a firm understanding of the child's development;

I think just like being in, like, talking to us, like communication-that's the biggest thing-that they could just communicate with us. Like when you prompt the kid to answer like, 'Do you have a dog?' it's nice to know if they do, you know? You're trying to build up some social information; you kind of need to know a little bit about their lives? So, that just helps-if they just have some communication with us.

Equality

Supports

All eight speech-language pathologists discussed strategies for effective parental involvement and various approaches to encourage an equal partnership. For the majority, results indicated that parents and professionals worked together as equal partners. However, findings also reflected a variety of barriers that inhibited the equal status required for the partnership to function optimally. Six professionals emphasized the importance of sharing knowledge with parents about ASD programs, sources of information, and techniques that may be appropriate while working with the child. One speech-language pathologist specified that educating parents about various methodologies that have worked for children with ASD was most beneficial. "I try to give them information on that technique and then give them information on a lot of other techniques so hopefully they have a basis of comparison. Because it may just be that, they don't have all that information." A

second speech-language pathologist identified educating parents through articles written by other parents of children with ASD. She indicated, "Maybe I find a couple articles or something that are written by a parent that support what you're looking for and I share those." A third speech-language pathologist also believed that gaining information from trained and experienced parents of children with ASD was advantageous;

When we had parent trainings in the evening, we kind of thought about which parents would be good to meet each other. So we invited them to come over and just kind of introduce some of the new parents to the older parents, so they could say like, 'this is what it was like at the preschool.' You just can't make them have a relationship with each other, but you try.

As for the methods used to educate parents, a fourth speech-language pathologist stated, "We've sent home a video that they can watch on their own time, which helps, and we send home some information about the program that they can read over to." Eager to provide knowledge and data to parents, an additional speech-language pathologist noted,

We send home a lot of information. We always send home information about autism support and conferences, or if we see something in the newspaper we'll go and get it approved to see if we're allowed to send them to parents, but it's always approved. Our supervisor's always really good about letting us send home information and stuff.

According to the sixth speech-language pathologist, she stated,

I don't send home much autism related stuff, as it is more language development. I send more like speech reading things. So if I do speech development or like how to get your child to talk, how to get your child to use, elicit a sentence or developing a communicative technique, which is not so much autism specific as it is to just language development.

Aside from sharing information with parents, this speech-language pathologist also had recommended specific conferences that she felt would be of use; "We told

parents. We've had parents who went to it. Obviously some did and some didn't. But I thought it was really beneficial to parents and any professionals involved."

In addition to the speech-language pathologists sharing their knowledge about techniques and methodologies to parents, parents also served as the educators for speech-language pathologists regarding new discoveries and findings. Two professionals described the parental influence on acquiring knowledge about techniques that were unfamiliar to them. For one speech-language pathologist;

And the parent said they used the verbal behavior approach. And I had a short little 20-minute, 30-minute session about verbal behavior so I learned a little bit about it. But I definitely need to look into it further. I'm like; I better make sure I know what I'm doing.

A second speech-language pathologist also acquired new information through the help of a parent;

One parent actually found RDI and introduced it to me. In terms of oh my gosh, what is that? Then I started reading up on it. On the Internet and then I would talk to people I work with and they would be like oh yeah and come up with an article and so forth.

All eight speech-language pathologists documented numerous approaches to increase parental involvement. Three professionals focused on the importance of including parents in conferences and IEP meetings. In an attempt for a productive and successful IEP meeting with full parent participation, one speech-language pathologist stated, "We have conferences in our school twice a year, but then we also have IEP meetings, and you know, anytime there's an issue, we consult the parents and have them come in and sit down." A second speech-language pathologist also revealed the frequent attendance of parents to meetings, "The parents are always there. We're not allowed to invite anyone else, but the parents

will invite the TSS or the behavior specialist or someone to come if they have somebody.” In regards to parent-professional collaboration during these IEP meetings, an additional speech-language pathologist stated, “Primarily it’s always been the speech pathologist and the parent coming to the table with the most information.”

Six speech-language pathologists explained that inviting families to visit the school and creating a classroom environment that welcomes parents helps them to feel comfortable. One professional exclaimed,

We have the parent come in before school begins. So like, in August. Invite them in, and, you know, here’s our school, here’s where we have lunch. And just kind of get them acclimated ‘cause there is a lot of time and they’re more nervous than the child. It’s really some handholding I think.

A second speech-language pathologist also verbalized when parents are invited to visit the school;

We try to schedule them to come on a speech day because then they can hear from both of us and a lot of times they want to hear about speech. We invite them the days before school starts, setting up and stuff. We usually invite them to come in with the kids. We also invite our parents along on field trips.

A third speech-language pathologist added, “We have two parent trainings a year and um, we have one at the beginning of the year and then one usually like in February, like in the winter months.”

Four of the speech-language pathologists specially indicated that many parents are actively involved in observing their child in the projected placement. One of the speech-language pathologists indicated that the school oftentimes requests parental observations;

We have them come in to observe the program and what we’re doing with the kids with autism. They’ll come in and observe so that they can see what

teachers do, what the personal care aides do, what the assistants do, and then hopefully that'll help them when they actually see it carry over, and plus, they can see all the progress they're making and then maybe they will be motivated to do it.

For those parents who are eager to observe their child at school, three speech-language pathologists responded that they permitted parents to visit. One professional stated, "They do come in sometimes and spend an hour just to observe or just to watch you know, how the speech trial training kind of stuff goes or just, you know, articulation therapy." A second speech-language pathologist noted, "We have parents who like to come in to observe a session or to do some training. That happens mostly in the beginning of the year." As for the third speech-language pathologist, "We uh, we do, we spend time, they come in for the parties, we let them come in and visit a lot whenever they want to."

Four speech-language pathologists recognized the significance of training parents in order to reinforce at home what the child is learning in school. According to one speech-language pathologist, who aimed to train parents on effectively working with their child, "I really, I really try to include them and train them when they are having trouble with something that they see all the time at home and they're at their wits end, and sort of give up at that point." Although the speech-language pathologist believed that parents are a vital source of information for professionals, she still believed that parents must be trained to take on the many roles in their child's education;

I kind of view them as really good information people, but the people we probably need to train the most sometimes because you know, home environment, sometimes you have to kind of let things slide to have sanity in your house, and you're trying to come up with really good strategies that won't make them feel like they are doing this double duty.

In order to enforce this parental training, the speech-language pathologist stated, “So, just really trying to get them to follow the same strategies, use the same language, you know, that kind of thing.” In order to develop ways of training and assisting parents, another speech-language pathologist noted,

I send a note home with the parent and say this is what we’ve read and this is what I did, it might be puppets or sensory activity; let’s try this at home and then I give three or four easy activities... activities to try at home or at the grocery store that sort of thing. And I found that that helps with generalization and it helps the parents to feel more involved in what happened during the child’s day.

In regards to the effectiveness of in-school training sessions, another speech-language pathologist recalled,

We keep having them because we have the nicest group of 5 to 10 people show up and, so those have been positive and those are nice. Parents have really had a lot to say about that. They were really happy. Then they know what their kid did all day, and what he asked for, and things like that.

One speech-language pathologist described the use of home visits to train parents about the methods and strategies to teach their child;

So we will go to their home and show them what we’ve been doing, how they can carry over to the house to get the progress we get at school to carry over to their home environment, and everyday life. So we do that... we have every Friday open to do that and we do that with each family up to twice a month.

The speech-language pathologist found home visits to be a hands-on training experience for parents. “We are doing activities with the children and then showing the parents what to do; and then they try to do it and see how well they can do it and what we can tweak.” Furthermore, the speech-language pathologist used home visits as an opportunity to support parents and model problem-solving skills;

And then there’s sometimes that some of the home visits are more conference like where discussions of what can I do. Like I have this behavior

at home, and I don't know what to do about it. Or I want to potty train them. That's not the speech role, obviously, but we'll talk about some things that they can do with that and setting up behavioral programs, or reward systems, or token economy systems and so forth.

Two speech-language pathologists pinpointed the importance of working collaboratively to help build upon the strengths and possibilities of the child. According to the experiences of one particular professional, "The parents have been great. I feel like they are very supportive and we just really work as a team. It's not like one person against the other." To facilitate this partnership, the speech-language pathologist advised parents, "Not being afraid of other services, 'cause sometimes we get the social worker involved and maybe there are some outside community agencies that can help, and not being afraid of that." A second speech-language pathologist advocates the significance of solidarity with parents. "From the early intervention piece, I really try to enforce that we're on the same team, the school wants it to work just as well as you do because we have them during the day. We don't want them miserable." This same professional also recalled past experiences of working to gain parental support. "Once the education is there and we are able to share what we are doing is helping all students and not just students with ASD, usually they welcome us with open arms and get a lot of team communication going." She further explained the role of parents as they strive to be supportive of the professionals working with their child;

They are our advocates for administration as far as they need more help. They need extra hands in there, or they need a bigger room, or they need more training because they feel like they need some more of this. We're seeing good results and we don't want this to go by the wayside. They are our advocates for the administrative point of view.

Three speech-language pathologists discussed the strengths of participating in joint decision-making. In order to encourage input and support from parents, one speech-language pathologist voiced, "If we all sit down and look at a strategy that we know we can kind of teach in the classroom and then teach the student to generalize it. If we have the parent supporting that, it happens really fast." In order for the parent and professional to share a similar focus for the child's individuality and needs, a second speech-language pathologist also stated,

We come up with goals together to meet the needs of the students. And then it'll be discussed with the parents and things will be added. If there's a concern that a parent has that they want worked on with their child that we haven't talked about yet, then we'll add that.

The professional continued, "Make sure that parents are OK with what the teacher has, her ideas, and if they want something changed, then it'll be changed." A third speech-language pathologist recognized parents as the most active individual in planning a child's education and care;

The role of the parent is largely contingent upon how involved the parent wants to be. The parents are always the ultimate decision maker when it comes down to it, and if they don't agree to our recommendations, they don't agree.

Parents are constantly reminded at each meeting that they are the decision-makers for their child and that their input is valued. According to the professional, if a parent is not completely satisfied with the professional's plan of action, "...we are very open minded to showing them other programs in the area, other programs in the district. We will show them programs that are available to them." If a collaborative resolution continues to be a challenge, "We present our best case reasoning and kind of go from there." However, with a constant open channel of

communication with parents, "It's never really much of a surprise if they don't agree with something or if they want something done a different way."

Equality

Barriers

Through the responses of four speech-language pathologists, it was indicated that some parents are uneducated about the treatment of ASD and do not know how to advocate for their child. Professionals also specified that this lack of knowledge had resulted in parents becoming fixated on implementing one specific treatment approach. According to one speech-language pathologist,

They've just decided that, you know what, this is the technique they think is gonna work and that's all they want to do. Because a lot of times, the media, or fancy packages, you know, they promise a lot and you see the best of the best where, yeah, that technique worked. It's very hard. It's very hard sometimes to say, I just don't think this is the best idea."

The professional further discussed the negative consequences that may result if a parent is unwilling to adjust treatment for their child's needs;

And you know...for your child, I think pieces of it are great. But I think, I think we would be doing them a disservice. Think of all the...If we spend all this time doing this technique, what have they missed with all that time that we haven't been covering something else?

A second speech-language pathologist continued by illustrating her challenging experiences working with untrained parents. "The parents, like I said, they may have been trained a little bit, ya know, specifically trained in things, but not as much as the teachers' assistants and personal care aides and the teachers and speech therapists." Another speech-language pathologist further added,

I guess my biggest difficulty would probably be that they have some knowledge, they've read about a technique and it sounds really glowing and, you know, um, but there is not necessarily a study that has shown that it's

really efficacious. Um, so it's almost like a little knowledge isn't always a good thing.

Complications arose with the lack of parental knowledge as she proceeded,

So sometimes you come into the meeting and you have something that you know is tried and true and works well with many students, and you present it and then they just say 'no, no, no. I just read about this and this sounds like it would work.'

With the professional's experience working with these parents, she concluded,

I think they think they're doing their best, but these parents don't think that they know. I don't think they've been to a workshop and we've sent a billion home. They don't go to workshops, they don't go to trainings, they don't go to you know free things that are provided offers so that they can learn more about their child.

A fourth speech-language pathologist illustrated that this lack of knowledge had oftentimes resulted in parents who were close-minded and unwilling to participate. "We'll have kids at the level of independence in the classroom and you'll tell their parents and they'll be like no, he can't do that. And you're like, but he can."

Whereas many speech-language pathologists noted the challenges that arise from a parent's lack of knowledge and training, three professionals reported that too much knowledge and experience had created complications as well. One particular speech-language pathologist commented on the negative teaming interactions that result from parents who are too knowledgeable. "So a lot of times if the parents come in very educated about their child and about the diagnosis the team often gets fits and are like they are demanding and nothing is going to make them happy." Another speech-language pathologist further implied, "So I think that's been the biggest challenge because there is so much information out there, and parent support groups out there that it can be a negative." In contrasting the

differences between parents 20 years ago with parents today, the professional added,

Now I find that parents are bringing it to the table and you better be able to deliver what they're bringing or what they're asking for, and if not, find me somebody else. There is a level of respect that you just don't get anymore.

However, upon discussing the role of parents in the past years, the professional's perspective of parents was drastically different;

Teachers were revered. The parents I was meeting at that time were desperate. They didn't know what autism was. They didn't have a lot of options. They didn't think they had any options. And you were still the expert. You still had something to bring to the table.

The professional concluded by stating, "I think the Internet has been both a blessing and a curse. There are just so many websites and so much misinformation." A third speech-language pathologist concurred,

There is just too much out there for them to find, and they find it all, and they keep on picking things, and don't give one thing enough time to see if it actually works. Like they say okay, he's been doing this for a month or two months and it's not working, and I've read about RDI so let's do that. And okay, RDI isn't working but you know I hear putting them into a typical preschool with a shadow works. And it's like oh my goodness, make up your mind. There is almost too much out there in a sense to a parent where it's almost overwhelming.

Four speech-language pathologists expressed their frustration for the lack of parental involvement and carryover of skills into the home. One professional briefly stated, "The big challenge is they just don't follow what you have established in school." She proceeded by mentioning that parents oftentimes throw up their hands and want to give up. This attitude becomes extremely detrimental to the child's development.

I really try to include them and train them when they are having trouble with something that they see all the time at home and they're at their wits end,

and sort of give up and that point. And which becomes a very negative thing for the child because they just decide that this isn't ever going to change.

This lack of participation from parents appeared to be an ongoing issue as a second speech-language pathologist noted,

We do have the trainings, but honestly we raffled off a TV two years ago to try to get people to come, and it's just very difficult to get people to come. We do get like 25 people to come, because we raffled off a TV, but we can't do that every parent training-we just can't. So, I'm a little negative about parents-sorry.

In reference to an average parent training meeting where no TV was raffled off, the professional added, "We've only had like 5 or 10 people show up, but I think those work good. You know, you felt bad because you didn't get like 30 to 40 people show up, but I mean, we keep having them." As for a third speech-language pathologist, the amount of parents attending training sessions becomes greatly reduced as the school year progresses. She conveyed her feelings;

We have parents who would like to come in to observe a session or to do some training. That happens more in the beginning of the year and then the parents tend to fade away from that about this time. I don't know if they've just had enough by the end of the school year or they're more eager in the beginning to come in and observe a session so they can see what I'm doing.

Another speech-language pathologist emphasized the frustration with parents when rejected from in-home training sessions;

Some parents have said no thanks, I don't want that. I don't think it's necessary. And we can't force ourselves into their home. Sometimes they'll come to the school instead and do some work, but that doesn't seem to be as effective as being in the house.

The professional's irritation continued as she stated,

It's frustrating because it's kind of like, we always say we are not miracle workers, and you know, I'm a speech therapist, I'm a human, and I see your child, and I can provide them with the foundation and the skills to implement them. You're with them you know, all day, I'm with them 30 minutes or

something. Or they are in class for this chunk of the day, but you're with them on the weekends. You're with them on all the days off, you're with them when they leave school and if it's not enforced at home, they almost unlearn it each time they go home.

Aside from lack of parental involvement, three speech-language pathologists also reported that too much parental involvement oftentimes resulted in parents who were extremely demanding and who set their expectations too high. When inquired about particular barriers that may impede a positive parent-professional relationship, one speech-language pathologist uttered,

The expectations. I found that there are no other parents and special needs children that are like the parents and children with autism that band together and I think that's wonderful but it's also challenging because we all know there are no two children alike on the spectrum and there is a lot of comparisons.

A second professional spoke of parental involvement being highly contingent upon how involved a parent wants to be. According to the experiences of another speech-language pathologist, she explained, "We have had parents who have been extremely involved almost to a fault where you're just like oh my gosh, they have to be more relaxed and not so obsessed or so controlling." The professional further added that these high demands are dependent upon what the parent reads; "Some parents are really discrete trial, discrete trial, discrete trial – do it, do it, do it and they just want it from when the kid wakes up until the kid goes to sleep." Although some parents may be overly eager to participate, the speech-language pathologist indicated, "We won't send them away, but we just have to draw our boundaries." In regards to implementing regulations to parents, she stated,

The parents can't, it is not a program where the parents can...it's not a walk in program where they can just walk in and observe any time they want. If

they want to observe the child, they have to call a case manager and they need to set up a day and time, and the case manager will accompany them.

As noted by another speech-language pathologist, limitations were also implemented to control the overabundance of parental involvement. The professional states,

We did have to limit observations to like an hour because we had parents that wanted to come constantly, and it was getting to be very difficult. It was just getting to where they were coming in and actually like observing other people's kids, and then calling families, and then it was, you know...getting very, very like confidentiality.

In order for parents to be as active as they pleased, the speech-language pathologist commented, "I wish almost that we had one of those mirror windows at times because it would just make it so much easier."

Two speech-language pathologists discussed the difficulties of working as a collaborative team. One professional recalled her previous experiences with parents who were uncompromising and inconsiderate to their point of view. "Some parents don't want as much input, and that's, you know, I really go with what the parent wants although I really do want them to be as informed as possible." As for another speech-language pathologist with similar experiences,

It's a big challenge when the parents come in prepped and almost ready for a fight. And it's too bad because they've already experienced that and had to be that way or someone else has told them that.

The speech-language pathologist orchestrated that her experiences with these uncooperative parents were frequent;

I've been in quite a few meetings with some lawyers and some advocates. And I feel bad for the parents because they must feel so intimidated with 10 members from the school sitting on one side of the table and them on the other, but I think that a lawyer, family friend, or advocate is invited to the

meeting, then the school team gets in defense mode and really just goes from there.

Recommendations

Recommendations to Speech-Language Pathologists

One speech-language pathologist revealed the significance of empowering parents to help them facilitate their child's social communication and behavior. The professional stated, "I think trying to be positive with them, and give them hope in that, you know, you CAN do something to help, um, I think that's important." In order to stress this idea, the speech-language pathologist further stated, "Yea, and then also making sure that they, ya know, get the opportunity to see the progress and to see the kinds of things they can do at home."

In order to increase parental involvement and strive for equal partnership, one speech-language pathologist recommended continual questioning of parents for advice and suggestions. She states,

I always say I will never know everything and I will never hesitate to ask people questions. I always ask questions. With parents, what do you need? What do you want? What are your concerns? I mean you tell me. It makes my job easier if you tell me what you're hoping I can give to you or what I can do for you. So...asking questions.

Furthermore, a second speech-language pathologist suggested,

I think maybe we need to work at making them part of the team—like when the child accomplished something saying like, 'Look what *you* did—you helped him learn how to do this' and you know, maybe they think like we take all the credit for everything the child learns how to do.

A speech-language pathologist with another perspective insisted that professionals must continue to communicate with parents in order to improve this parent-professional relationship;

I would just keep sending notes home, or give a little activity, or a check-list that they could refocus on what we're trying to accomplish, um, to you know not have to say you know if you just do this...um, but rather, well let's see, how do you go about this?

As the primary resource for parents who have children with ASD, two speech-language pathologists recommended the importance of informing and educating parents about the ASD community. According to one speech-language pathologist,

I think providing info and education to parents is a big thing. I mean, I went to the Stanley Greenspan Conference a couple weeks ago and some of these kids I thought yep this is going to work, it validates what I'm doing with them, but on the flip side, where I thought the parents are dying to hear about it and I thought you know what, here's what I gained from it for your child. So, trying to keep them up to date on what you're doing and show them that you're making the effort is a big thing.

A second speech-language pathologist also recommended educating parents throughout the entire developmental process of the child;

Professionally, one of the hugest things we can do is provide them with more information about the process, at the beginning of the process as it moves along because I think it's a scary time for them, and they sort of, they've just been told okay you're leaving early intervention, go call your district for paper work that needs to be submitted for evaluation, or they're told by the pediatrician, I'm concerned with this, go look at your district.

The professional continued by discussing why educating parents and caregivers on best practices for supporting individuals with ASD is critical;

So I think kind of more education, some people just don't know it's out there. They don't know it's available to them, especially at such a young age. So I think kind of providing the community what's available to them and the process.

One speech-language pathologist focused on increasing the knowledge and expertise of upcoming speech-language pathologists in order to improve the health and well being of children. The limited amount of schooling for speech-language

pathologists new to the field can impede the quality of life for individuals with ASD and their families;

I mean training of SLP's is so critical, and I mean, I know it's going to be a challenge because cramming everything in 2 years is just insane anyway. But autism is just through the roof, and it's so scary, and I think it needs to be a priority.

In order to increase professional expertise and awareness, a speech-language pathologist suggested,

I really think that we need to just setting up camps. I would really like to have it as, if they have these SLP's in training, they aren't going to be uncomfortable, and say I'm going to this camp because this is what I've heard about. They can really have a broad sense of what's out there.

Recommendations to Parents

Parents play a variety of important roles in providing invaluable information to help determine placement options and other related services for the child. This active participation will allow for closer communication between the home and school and ensure that parents are satisfied with educational decisions. Five speech-language pathologists recommended that more parental participation would provide helpful information about the child. In order to increase parental involvement, one speech-language pathologist suggested, "I think coming in and being in the school setting to see what we're doing and the understanding to know, I'm not here to look over your shoulder and criticize you, but just to see..." As for a second speech-language pathologist, it is critical that parents advocate for their child and share their expectations about the child's future participation in school, at home, and within the community;

Yeah, like, I mean just like completing the parent-input sheets, you know, like participating in the IEP, like actually participating, and wanting to be part of

the team, not feeling like we're in charge, you know? I wish like they could be like more empowered or something, I don't know. I think they sit there and think we're in charge, you know?

In order for parents to feel that the evaluation is an accurate reflection of their child, another speech-language pathologist further suggested, "I wish they would participate, be more involved in the team." Another speech-language pathologist also illustrated the need for parents to play more of an active role when working with the child;

Some parents too could make more of an effort in terms of following through with suggestions would be a big one. Not just giving the 'yeah okay, yeah' because you can tell when the kid comes in, after a while, if it's really being followed through with or not'

The last speech-language pathologist suggested that a follow-up evaluation with other healthcare providers would help create a full picture of the child's abilities and needs. She stated,

Well, I don't know if it would make it a lot better, but I wish they would take their child like back to a specialist every now and then for like follow-ups. Like, I have students who, they went to like Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh and got their diagnosis when they were like, 2½ and they've never been back there—and I don't know if that would tell me a whole lot, but I would just like love to read an evaluation by another person, you know? Like, and I don't know if that would make everything better, but it just, sometimes it would be nice to see that. It's nice that they trust the schools and they're going just with what we say, but sometimes I'd like more information too.

The speech-language pathologist also believed that follow-up services would provide parents with a better understanding of their child's current skills;

I have some kids that I think are doing really, really well and I think like, I wonder if they would still like even be this diagnosis, you know? Like, if these kids maybe could get into learning support or something, I don't know. Like, I just would maybe if they got more follow-up like outside information you know, is kinda nice too

Trust and Respect

Supports

Five speech-language pathologists described the importance of acknowledging the parent's expertise and ability to make decisions that will enhance the child's development. According to one speech-language pathologist, "I've had parents that really seem to understand their child, understand what's known about ASD, and, and, be pretty realistic about directions, future directions." A second speech-language pathologist also described her reliance on parent's knowledge;

I mean the parent is involved. They put their input in. They're the ones that bring them in for the evaluation. It's just sort of like getting them in, you know, qualifying them, and getting as much as you can get from the parents.

Three speech-language pathologists illustrated that importance of listening to what parents ask for and being willing to respond to their requests. One speech-language pathologist noted,

In one situation we had, the parent was very um, adamant and we said okay let's sit down and let's work out how we're going to write these goals together. So, we really put the hones on the parent then to decide how they wanted this program to proceed.

A second speech-language pathologist also commented on respecting a parent's wishes;

One parent came in and said, I really want this-my son to be mainstream next year. So um, in order to do that, we're kind of starting him this year and seeing how he does and then go from there.

A different speech-language pathologist spoke of a similar situation where a family's suggestions and opinions were valued. "I'll say if you're having trouble with the food

and you'd like to try and introduce it or if you want us to try and introduce it at school, we'll do that."

Although parents know their child in ways that others do not and professionals can benefit from their expertise, professionals have a tremendous amount of information in specific areas that could be advantageous to parents. Five speech-language pathologists emphasized the significance of parents acknowledging and respecting their opinions and advice in order to maximize a child's abilities. One speech-language pathologist stated,

Um, several of the parents have, um, agreed to have their children in a, something we call rockin' reader's program. So, um, and one parent, we really had to kind of push, push, push. We really wanted her child to do this rockin' reader's program. So she did agree, so, 'cause we really like to see them doing activities over the summer instead of watching TV and playing video games which they really like to do.

Still another professional also described her experience working with parents who acknowledged their skills and services;

Ultimately, hmm...I would say probably the, the teacher, the classroom teacher who, probably is the most...she is the most experienced, she will come up with the best ideas and everything and then give those to the parents, and usually they are, they go along with it.

She proceeded by stating, "The parents are really open to doing whatever is best. So um, overall I think most of the experiences have been good in that most parents are willing to try things and, ya know, hear what we have to say." A third speech-language pathologist expressed her happiness with one particular family when they attended school to observe their child. She stated, "And both parents decided that on speech day, they were allowed to try whatever. Which I found extremely

supportive.” She further spoke of this parental support and how respecting the decisions of one another had created a positive teaming environment;

In fact, they had given me a gift at Christmas that, and it was a book, and it was from a regular book store, and it was food feelings, and I just felt rewarded at the time like she gets it. She’s on board with me. She knows I’m working on social skills, she knows I’m working on the eating and it’s a lovely, gorgeous book, and the kids love it, and I just felt a lot of support for that.

As for a fourth speech-language pathologist, it is important to work with parents in order to make them more willing to trust the professionals in charge of supporting their child. She stated,

Um, a couple parents have been afraid to let the kids, um, let their children ride the bus. And we find that, um, that the bus is really good for them. Like, it’s kind of like an independent, you know, kind of fostering independence. And, you know, you can just take baby steps towards it, like, maybe just take them, let them take the bus in the morning and not in the afternoon. You know, and, and kind of like they can take baby steps too.

Another speech-language pathologist illustrated that a number parents were moving into her school district because they were pleased with the work of the professionals;

And we talked to them about how if they wanted to keep their family together, they could look at programs in Connecticut, and she was like no we have to be here, we have to be in Jersey, we have to be here.

Six speech-language pathologists made note of making parents feel connected with the school and understanding that their child’s needs are equally as important to them. According to one speech-language pathologist,

Um, to be honest, I think, well with some of the parents...well some of the parents I think have had bad experiences. And, um, their children, I don’t think were placed appropriately. And then once we started these classes and they, we really are focusing on what the kids really need. I think they’re really happy that they’re there and that we’re, and that the school is kind of a

community, and we just accept them. And, you know, I think that's helped. I think that's really helps.

A second speech-language pathologist also expressed a parent's appreciation for the school team and services provided;

I just had a little boy last week, who we talked to the mom, and she was just so relieved that there was this program available for him because she was so frustrated at home, and she knew something was wrong too, and she just didn't know what to do.

As for a third speech-language pathologist, she illustrated that one specific parent was thankful for the dedication and diligence of the professionals at school. "She said, 'When I drop him off at school, that is the only time I don't feel guilty for 6 hours.' So I was like, oh my god that is like the nicest thing anybody has ever said." A fourth speech-language pathologist indicated that in order to make parents feel more comfortable in his/her child's school, she sought additional professional assistance;

I called my supervisor in and said can you just watch me work with him and let me know if I'm on the right track. And when I let the parent know that I invited my supervisor in, then she felt like oh well, good somebody else above me was kind of, you know, keeping an eye on things, so that really relaxed her a lot more.

Five speech-language pathologists revealed that parents have acknowledged this mutual respect and trust and were determined to cooperate with the professionals. Upon describing a parent's satisfaction with the professional's commitment to the child's needs, one speech-language pathologist stated,

Many of them are very grateful for the help that you give them and they're willing to listen to anything. They are helpless to a degree like tell me what to do; I don't know what to do. I'll try anything you tell me to try.

In order to immediately establish this level of trust and understanding, another speech-language pathologist recognized, "If I'm in the house, a few parents I work with privately, that trust comes a lot quicker." She continued by stating, "But once they trust, they establish, most parents are actually very appreciative of anything you can give them to help them and what you're doing for them actually." As for a third speech-language pathologist, she expressed that a parent's trust in professionals may be a growing process;

Initially with the young ones too, there tends to be a lot of crying involved. It's kind of like, oh gosh you're crying. I'm not trying to make your kid cry but I would say after the first, after they establish trust, there's probably, well with some parents, it takes longer than others, but it probably takes a good month or so.

A fourth speech-language pathologist also illustrated that building this mutual trust requires time and effort;

So I'm always like buying you know, the weird toys, the fish with the bubbles, you know, the kids, when you see a teacher that works with children with autism, they know exactly which aisle in Wal-Mart has the weird Koosh ball and all that stuff. So you know, just, I think that's what I just did. I just got all the stuff they like, and you just make yourself like a good person, and then they want to be around, slowly...

Another speech-language pathologist demonstrated relaying information to parents that is clear, direct, and sensitive. She elaborated;

I kind of give them a really good idea of what I think so that when they come back for the meeting. We have a meeting where we cover all the testing, at least speech wise they aren't going to be surprised. Because I think it can be brutal especially with parents who think their kid is almost fine, come in and then all of a sudden get below average, below average, typically below average, you know, delayed this, delayed that, and I think it can be a shock.

The speech-language pathologist further explained,

So, like I try at least at the evaluation, give them a heads up as to what I saw and what I think. Where I think their child falls...and if they have questions,

answer any at that point. I always tell them if they have any questions before we meet again for the eligibility meeting, but if they have questions in the mean time, to pick up the phone and call me and to not wait until the meeting. Like if you're concerned about something or you're not understanding something that I said, or that happened in the test, you know, call.

Equality

Barriers

According to the perception of six speech-language pathologists, a trusting relationship between parents and professionals is critical when working with a child with ASD. However, professionals oftentimes find that building this positive relationship and engendering this trust is a challenge. From previous experiences working with parents, one speech-language pathologist recalled,

Why is it so difficult to establish trust with some people? And maybe that's a personality thing but it seems like more so with parents with children with autism. We think we have this great relationship, and we have done so many things, and their child has made incredible progress, yet... We just... it's like they don't trust us. They expect us to pull the rug out from under them. And we think, you know, why would you, why are we at this point after a couple of years? What have we done differently?

According to the findings of a second speech-language pathologist who was also interested in uncovering why establishing a trustful relationship was challenging, she stated,

I don't know, parents sometimes think maybe they do need to trust us more. Um, we have studied a lot to kind of respect that and know that what we're recommending isn't just something we're pulling out of a hat, you know, and ask questions about it, that's fine, and let us answer the question, but um... I don't know.

One professional noted that this lack of mutual trust and respect is sometimes a result of a parent's lack of expertise and knowledge;

It's just lack of education on their part in terms of not being able to understand the whole picture. You know, or maybe they don't lack education, or a different education like the way their brain functions; they don't approach things maybe the way I approach it or they don't approach it in terms of the five approach or more like, behaviorally, and you know developmentally where they might approach it more businesslike or you know, black and white kind of stuff. Where, I feel like speech is more of a coal grey area.

Four speech-language pathologists indicated that parents were extremely demanding and overly involved which oftentimes would interfere with developing this level of trust. One speech-language pathologist stated, "The parents are working hard but they're, they kind of are, you know, more aggressive and you know a little bit more, um, what's the word... (Sighs) Kind of demanding." As for the experiences of a second speech-language pathologist, parents become defensive and impatient and may even challenge the school system in order to get what they want. The professional stated,

I've never had to go to court for mediation but there has been one or two that have been, well they presented that difficulty where they wanted a lot more than the district is willing to give, and then it goes to court. They try to avoid the mediation and the court, which, I know, the school district, pretty much no one wants to do that but I think they've been there once or twice.

For those parents who demand specific services and techniques, they oftentimes do not take responsibility if the plan becomes ineffective or useless. Parents appear to rarely admit to their wrongdoings, but rather, blame the professionals. One professional commented,

It's a double-edged sword. It might work out, um but if it doesn't work out then, you know, you're either pointing the finger at them to say this is what you asked for, and I don't always think that's the greatest way to go but, pretty much we try it and then try and keep data that will support, you know, one way or the other, um and just strictly, okay we're doing, this is what we all decided to do based on, you know this program that you asked for, and

this is where we are, and these are the results we're seeing. Do you want to go ahead and do this?

As for a fourth speech-language pathologist, she stated that parents oftentimes become defensive if professionals did not convey information on a continual bases about their child's development. Even if communicating with parents involves a "difficult" conversation, parents become alarmed at all times. The professional stated,

And I think that puts parents on the defensive pretty quick. Where they think their kid is fine and all this testing is going on, and they haven't been told anything, and then they walk in to this meeting with, I don't know, eight different adults around the table, different professionals that tested their child, and they say their child is below average, your child isn't functioning normally, your child lacks this skill, your child lacks this skill.

Vague information or "sugar-coating" a child's difficulty is not helpful. The speech-language pathologist added,

I think that is a reason why a lot of parents are put on the defensive and then it takes a long time to get them to where you want them in terms of trusting you, and being able to work with you because they kind of hate you right now.

One speech-language pathologist described her experiences where parents did not acknowledge the skills of the professionals or recognize their commitment to meeting their child's needs. She stressed,

Hm. Well, I had a student who was in a language support class who was very much on the Aspergers, on the continuum. I think he was really he had a lot of challenges. That teacher and I, that was several years ago, and that teacher and I worked really hard with him to try and get him to fit in and do different things, and I felt that that family sabotaged everything we did.

In order to further emphasize this issue, the speech-language pathologist provided an example of how this family was challenging and uncooperative;

He had obsessions. He was obsessed at the time with Godzilla. He had a t-shirt that had Godzilla on it and it was like three sizes too small for him, and they would still allow him to wear it. So we would talk to them and say you know, he really can't wear that t-shirt to school anymore...but it's his favorite shirt... It just felt like it every turn.

Oftentimes, parents have priorities for their child that does not always mirror the goals and objectives of the professionals. One speech-language pathologist stated,

Another big barrier I have currently is um, like, how I guess dealing with, I shouldn't say, but behaviors. Behaviors at school, and why you know, I had a talk with the parent so and so and the behaviors they had, and I was trying to explain to them that my concern was not the behavior, but what is causing the behavior, and what's causing it is that they can't communicate.

However regardless of the advice that the professional had provided to the parents, the family was not on the same page with the professional, and the professional's concerns were minimized. The speech-language pathologist further added,

But mom's main concern was, as long as she is good in school. Okay, go apologize. And I'm like she doesn't know what she's apologizing for; it happened 5 hours ago. It's not I'm sorry I went to hit you because she didn't hit me to hurt me; she hit me because she was frustrated. But it's like getting through to the parents that they are not a typical child.

The avoidance of challenges and concerns raised by the professional violated this mutual trust. The speech-language pathologist continued,

Just some parents who don't, they try to get it, and they think they're getting it, but they are so concerned with appearances. As long as their child is good and they appear good, and they are good at school, and they are well behaved, then that's okay.

Recommendations

Recommendations to Speech-Language Pathologist

One speech-language pathologist demonstrated the importance of a professional's being willing to listen to a parent's concerns and provide

opportunities for open communication. These efforts will have a positive impact on the relationship between parents and professionals. According to the professional,

I would say to them to be very down to earth and open, and respectful to the parents, and the situation, and there is a lot of emotionality to having a child with disabilities, any kind of disability, and you have to respect that. And you have to try to find some equal footing that you have to get on and get on that footing, and try to be open to them.

In order to become an active listener and be willing to grow and change while working with parents, another speech-language pathologist recommended;

And just providing, I learn a lot through list serves. I try and keep a parent perspective, as a parent yes I do have a little bit more understanding of living with a child 24/7, and I could absolutely not even imagine having a child with autism 24/7, but one of the biggest things I think, eye openers I think, is going to an autism conference in State College. I decided to go to all the parent seminars and it was so eye opening. I sat back and they really didn't know who I was. But and just to hear their experiences.

For professionals to receive this adequate training on how to connect with families in this practice, the speech-language pathologist added,

And just the parent perspective and the sibling perspective you know, and just the list serves that I am on that there is a lot of parent involvement keeps me kind of grounded like because a lot of people are like I'm specially trained in this, and I've just come back from this conference and they are very stuck in their ways, and then when you hear about the parent that's just suffering to get through the day, it kinda grounds you and sees them as a person, not just a demanding parent.

One speech-language pathologists provided recommendations on how to create this foundation for trust with parents. She stated,

So I think even prepping them gradually throughout the process in terms of what the process involves because they don't know, and we're so wrapped up in it that it becomes second nature to us. We forget that no one knows the process unless you're involved in it and it can be scary. And when they come to the meetings, they leave with oh my goodness more than, you sign less papers in a mortgage we say. And I think it can be scary and overwhelming if they don't know.

The vast amount of information provided to parents must be calibrated to the parent's understanding and emotional state. In order to facilitate these interactions, one speech-language pathologist suggested, "Maybe just including supervisory personnel, and calling in as many resources you can think of to help you document, and help you just demonstrate, here's our process."

For parents and professionals to positively work together to solve problems, one speech-language pathologist recommended reinforcing a parent's positive actions. She suggested, "I guess just give them credit—reinforce them. Yeah um, you know, I do like all that reinforcement and pairing and making them know that I'm a good person."

One speech-language pathologist recommended that professionals must work to help parents celebrate today's successes and not set expectations that are too high. The speech-language pathologist explained,

Those big programs play into the parents' desires to have that instant improvement so I think that helping the parents become critical consumers and not, so I try to welcome whatever they tell me and acknowledge it, and also to see if it's a good fit for their child.

She further stressed the importance of parents understanding realistic expectations;

And helping them to understand that it's a developing process and yes it's not that we don't want to give him that 8000 dollar device if we think it's going to work, but we need to start at square one, or we need to start here, we need to do an assessment.

Recommendations to Parents

Parents must be willing to discuss specific issues that need to be taken into consideration and work with professionals to help create and facilitate this partnership. Six speech-language pathologists recommended that parents must

acknowledge the professional's perspectives and opinions. In order for parents to respect a professional's experience, roles and contributions, one speech-language pathologist recommended,

Um, oh definitely. Um, I think by just being open and bringing their kid in for the evaluation, ya know, they're concerned and everything, and, um, just, ya know, whenever they come visit the program or just follow any of the suggestions, or, ya know, I think that helps make it more positive.

Although having a child with ASD is extremely difficult for parents, they must be open to seeking help from professionals in order for the child to receive the appropriate services. A second speech-language pathologist suggested,

They have to be willing to kind of put themselves out there. And not to, you know say, well no, he can't do that or we don't, I don't want him to go on that trip with you guys. I'm gonna keep him home that day, so, just kind of you know, trusting us but communicating too.

A third professional recommended that parents must face their fears and have faith in the professionals who are working with their child. She stated,

I don't know obviously first hand, but I can imagine how extremely difficult it is to, ya know, be hit with this news, and then everyone's trying to tell you to try all these new things at home and everything. But, to my advice would be to just give it a try because, I mean, it's been shown to work, and ya know, it would only benefit the child and the whole family, ya know, if it DOES work.

For a fourth speech-language pathologist with similar viewpoints, she had also illustrated, "Um, my biggest thing would be to be more, um, open minded I guess, but listen more." Parents must put their personal feelings aside and working towards a common goal with professionals. Upon discussing what another speech-language pathologist would recommend to parents, she verbalized,

It would have to be a dream. The meeting of my dream. I would just say work with us and keep an open mind, and be willing to say she knows what she's doing. Take that leap of faith with us and I think that would be the most of what I want to say.

A relationship built on mutual trust and respect is so important. However, in order to collaboratively resolve differences, a fifth speech-language pathologist commented, “Um, Well, sometimes I try to agree to disagree on some things. Or know that, I don’t know, parents sometimes think maybe...they do need to trust us more.”

Personal Qualities

Supports

To ensure that partnership is being carried out appropriately, parents and professionals must express personal qualities that are necessary for effective partnerships. Two speech-language pathologists commented on the importance of being empathetic and compassionate towards the parent’s needs;

You know, as a parent I, my children don’t have disabilities. Like, I just can’t imagine... I know the dreams I have for my kids. I can’t put myself in their shoes. But I can see where they’re coming from too.

Another professional proved to be sympathetic and supportive as she stated,

They come with a diagnosis, and we do an evaluation, and most of the time, the parents are just looking for some sort of positive hope. I guess because they just don’t have, I mean, they see how other kids are, and they see their children, and they just...the one mom especially, and she was crying when she was talking to us cuz she just...with, there was just no hope she felt that her child would ever talk or would ever, ya know, be able to function with other kids.

One speech-language pathologist reported that they remained open at all times and responsive to parents. She explained,

If a mother comes in alone or a father comes in alone, I make it a point to say if your spouse has any questions, or if anyone else has any questions, you know to tell them to feel free to call us. I find that a lot of people come, they’re nervous, and I know I do this to my husband with a lot of things like “well, what did she say?”

In order for professionals to deliver services and develop effective parent-professional partnership, parents must be open-minded and willing to listen to the professional's suggestions. One speech-language pathologist emphasized,

Um, some of the parents, we always say it like our model parents, who I love. And we are like we wish everyone is like you. Where they are very open minded, but they are very realistic. They don't think like okay there's a cure, and I'm going to find a cure. But they think my child has potential, and I want to provide them with everything I can and they are very open with suggestions. You'll ask them to try something and they'll try it, and they will honestly try it, and they will let us know if it works or if it doesn't. And that has been phenomenal.

A second speech-language pathologist also elaborated which parents are flexible and willing to work in partnership;

Those parents who aren't so defensive, but who are really open to suggestions and who are really willing to try anything that works, and who are very grateful. And you know, that's one portion of the parents who are, you know, very nice to work with, very easy to work with and very, you know, when you work well with the parent, I just feel like the child does that much better. When you're all on the same page.

Personal Qualities

Barriers

Some parents became narrow-minded and stop listening to professionals when information is painful or difficult to comprehend. One speech-language pathologists illustrated the difficulty communicating with parents who are reluctant to accept the diagnosis of ASD;

Um, but, I don't know, we have one student right now who, they won't let him have a diagnosis because they said they will not allow him to be autistic, and that's just frustrating. So, and I don't know what's gonna happen to that student. He's supposed to go to kindergarten next year and I don't know, so that's frustrating...

Another speech-language pathologist argued that parents are disinclined to follow the professional's suggestions;

That's kind of frustrating with those parents who um, just don't follow through or don't under... I don't want to say don't understand, but don't listen to your advice or they get defensive. That's frustrating I would say.

Three speech-language pathologists indicated that a parents' denial about ASD could stand in the way of treatment. One speech-language explained,

So there are a few parents that are in denial. And they're, I don't even think they're frustrating, I don't know what the word is, it's just...sad because they aren't willing to realize the special needs of their child then it's hard to work with them because they think their child is okay, then they're not, they don't necessarily take a lot of the suggestions you have because they don't think it applies to their child or it's not their child that's low.

As for a second speech-language pathologist, families oftentimes refuse to believe or admit that anything is wrong with their child;

The hugest barrier has been denial and the parents not willing to admit that there's anything wrong; I mean they are still okay with the speech, but that diagnosis is huge and so hard for many parents to accept whether it's the stigma that goes with it, and not my child, and things aren't wrong with my child. That has been the biggest barrier with parents I've encountered.

A third speech-language pathologist stated that parents admitting that their child is anything less than perfect is a challenge. She illustrated,

One of the challenging things is a lot of times when you suspect it, uh, that a child is...has some sort of autism spectrum disorder and you have concerns, and you bring those up to the parents, and they really don't wanna hear about it. And that's...the most frustrating thing.

One speech-language pathologist explained that a lack of understanding about ASD could result in parents who are demanding and overly aggressive. She illustrated this;

I'm a parent myself. You understand this, have hopes and dreams that, um, may not be what you're going to realize at that time. And it's, it's very hard

for them to understand why we can't just fix this. Um, why there isn't something that can be done. Why, if we just work harder, try harder, find something new, do something a little bit differently, it, it would change things in a different way. And that's, that's hard.

Another speech-language pathologist declared that a parent's request to "put on your shoes" could be followed by aggression. She responded, "And I think the biggest thing out there, which is also a challenge, is they kind of feel like they need to be up in arms and really militant and demanding from the get go." One speech-language pathologist even declared that parents are never satisfied and continue to demand more from professionals, "So I shouldn't say that they are too involved, they just want a lot... um there are parents who seem to never be pleased.

Recommendations

Recommendations to Speech-Language Pathologists

In order to foster a positive parent-professional relationship, one speech-language pathologist recommended the importance of being confident and secure with one's decisions. She stated,

And don't ever let them see you're afraid. Don't let them see you sweat. Don't let them see you nervous. They are looking for someone, even though they won't admit it, they're looking for someone who knows what they're doing and they are putting a lot of trust and faith into you, and this little being they have and needs help hasn't been away from them. We're their first school day exposure and they're really, it is hard, and you have to remember that too... for them to just put them on a van and say "see ya" for eight hours.

As for a second speech-language pathologist, remaining available to parents when needed is critical. She suggested,

And I just want them to know it's hard when they are coming from preschool because preschool services are done so differently than school aged so I just always feel like they're going to get home and not feel like they know what they want to do. Or get home and not be able to answer this question so let's make ourselves really available to them. And we typically do that.

A third speech-language pathologist illustrated that professionals should remain positive and affirmative; “And um the parents, I think most of them, if you keep it very positive, I think that they do follow along even when there is a problem.”

A fourth speech-language pathologist recommended that making parents feel comfortable and appreciated is crucial for a positive parent-professional relationship;

I like to meet parents on a personal level, really, I think it helps to build the rapport to see what that parent is going through, to see what that child is going through, and whether it’s at home or in a therapy room; it’s just a rapport session. It’s not around a table.

Recommendations to Parents

Three speech-language pathologists recommended that a positive attitude from parents would allow for a good working relationship. One speech-language pathologist recalled,

I think some of the most successes I’ve had are with the parents who come in with a positive attitude and hey, thank you so much for working with my child and treating my child wonderfully and here’s what I’m seeing is happening at home... and here’s what I’m not seeing. Hey you’re saying that he’s doing this? How can I make it happen at home? The follow through is a big piece.

A second speech-language pathologist also recommended that an optimistic mindset would promote partnership. “I hope they can come in with the understanding that we want their child to succeed. I don’t think there is any professional out there that wants to set the child up for failure.” A third speech-language pathologist stated that exhibiting these characteristics would help parents work effectively with professionals;

Well, biggest and foremost that when their child hits the age where they will be receiving services from any of us, first of all try to be positive. And I understand that it can be difficult to have a child with special needs and really just want to go out there and push, push, push for everything your child needs.

Dreams/Goals

Eight sub-themes emerged under the topic of dreams and goals professionals have for their students: (a) happiness; (b) communication; (c) contribute to society; (d) independence; (e) meaningful life; (f) relationships; (g) career; and (h) education.

Happiness

Four speech-language pathologists discussed hoping that their students are happy with his/her life. One speech-language pathologist stated, "Oh, I'd like to see them happy with themselves. I'd really like them to, you know, you just know that they're happy with the progress they've made." The speech-language pathologist further added,

I think if they're, um, internally and externally content and happy within their environment that would be their ultimate goal. I'd like to see them happy within themselves. Um, it's really...it's a remarkable difference for these children.

A second speech-language pathologist briefly stated, "In 20 years, I would like to see them happy." As for a third speech-language pathologist, "Yeah, their own happiness. If it's alone with every Thomas the Train truck, or train that there is, then that's happy." Finally, one speech-language pathologist stated, "I would like to see them live rewarding, happy lives."

Communication

Five speech-language pathologists expressed functional communication skills as the primary goal for children with ASD. According to one speech-language pathologist, "Um, I want them to feel they're comfortable that they can communicate, get their needs met." A second speech-language pathologist also illustrated communication to be of chief importance for the child, "Um, probably being able to...oh wow. Um, to definitely be verbal." Another speech-language pathologist also commented, "And that they would be happy and able to communicate with others." She further added, "That's my hope. Just for them to be happy and be able to interact with other people and communicate with other people." As for a fourth speech-language pathologist, she stated, "My number one would have been, well if you would have said 5 years, I would said communicating functionally within their classroom." Another speech-language pathologist also said, "The biggest thing I would say is for them to be able to function expressively in the community. That they can express their wants, express their needs, have conversations and just kind of enjoy that part."

Contribute to Society

Two speech-language pathologists explained the importance of these children contributing to society. One speech-language pathologist illustrated, "I just would like them to, you know, be part of the community." A different speech-language pathologist also commented, "I want them to be able to add something to the community. Be a productive member."

Independence

Four speech-language pathologists responded that they wished their students became independent when he/she got older. According to one speech-language pathologist, "Um, I hope some of them will definitely be able to live on their own." A second speech-language pathologist also stated, "Um...and being able to just navigate society like most of us do, and to be able to advocate themselves." She further added, "My hope would be that they would just be able to function independently in society." Another speech-language pathologist stated, "I would like to see some of them go and receive some training and be able to just be independent. I would love for them to always have someone working to make them do the most that they could independently." A fourth speech-language pathologist expressed, "But that they can function, live more independently and not have to rely on someone for all their needs."

Meaningful Life

Three speech-language pathologists stated that they wished their students would live a normal, meaningful life. According to one professional,

I would like to see them as successful adults leading a meaningful life and whether a meaningful life is the guy giving out stickers in Wal-Mart or the guy that is going to create the cure for cancer. I think that as long as they're happy and leading meaningful lives for themselves.

She further added, "I would like to see their parents see them successful and be able to share their experiences with other parents and...big dreams." As for a second speech-language pathologist, "I want them to grow up and have real lives." A third speech-language pathologist stated, "So my biggest goal realistically is for them to come back one day and be like, and have them be typical people in society. You know, just like you and I that would be great."

Relationships

Three speech-language pathologists wanted their students to get married or have meaningful relationships. One speech-language pathologist commented, “You want them to be happy and you want them to have a good relationship and be able to connect on a personal level.” A second speech-language pathologist stated, “In 20 years, I would like to see them all married.” A third speech-language pathologist also indicated, “It’d be nice if they could all get married and have families and be happy.”

Career

One speech-language pathologist wanted her students to have a career and be successful. She stated, “...and, and have a job. I think they could, you know, work in some type of, in some type of job. Um, you know, and maybe some of them could work in more technology.”

Education

Three speech-language pathologists expressed their hope for students to attend college and continue their education. One professional expressed her feelings by stating, “I would like to believe that a lot of them are going to go back to regular education.” A second speech-language pathologist stated, “I would like to see them all in college.” A third speech-language pathologist also expressed, “I would like to see them at a special university.”

Table 2

Coding Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Parent-child Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Support<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Importance of parent-child interactions○ Barriers<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Lack of knowledge○ Family Pressures○ Recommendations for Parents
Parent-professional Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Communication<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Support○ Barriers○ Recommendations to Speech-Language Pathologists○ Recommendations to Parents○ Equality<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Support○ Barriers○ Recommendations to Speech-Language Pathologists○ Recommendations to Parents○ Mutual Trust<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Support○ Barriers○ Recommendations to Speech-Language Pathologists○ Recommendations to Parents○ Personal Qualities<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Support○ Barriers○ Recommendations to Speech-Language Pathologists○ Recommendations to Parents
Dreams/Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Happiness○ Communication○ Contribute to Society○ Independence

- Meaningful Life
- Relationships
- Career
- Education

Chapter 4

Discussion

In 1991, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) became an eligible category for special education services. Since that time, an enormous amount of research has been conducted regarding the identification and effective treatment for children with ASD (Schreibman, 2000). Raising a child with ASD is a long, exhausting journey that is fraught with challenges. Families are often destroyed dealing with the effects of this incurable condition as the array of developmental and behavioral problems fall largely on the family. However, with positive parent-professional collaboration during the diagnosis and treatment process, a child's strengths can be capitalized, while his/her wants and needs are simultaneously addressed. By actively promoting the concept of positive teaming interactions between parents and professionals working with children with ASD, it is important to recognize the supports and barriers to this collaboration as well as the strategies to overcome these barriers and promote a working relationship. In the current study, the perspectives of eight speech-language pathologists were sought on the parent and professional relationship.

Parent-Child Interactions

Importance of parent-child interactions

Supports & Recommendations

"Your child has autism" are the four words that will forever change the life of a parent. Although grasping this concept may be difficult to endure, parents must accept their child's diagnosis and recognize that their child may have needs that

other children do not have. Parents want the very best for their child; however, the day-to-day responsibility of managing a child's social, sensory, and communication deficits creates incredible hardships.

According to the speech-language pathologists in the current study, a child's relationship with his or her parents is critical to the child's development. Parents are inevitably the child's most important teacher/therapist and should be the most invested in their future. Speech-language pathologists concluded that parents serve as the primary partners in their child's life in order to ensure the child's healthy progression, early learning, and school readiness. To build a strong and successful parent-child relationship, parents must stay connected through all ages of the child's upbringing. Although no parent is ever fully prepared to hear that their child is anything other than happy and healthy, love and support provided by parents will help a child learn, grow, and succeed.

As concluded by speech-language pathologists, positive parent-child interactions allow parents to enjoy the time spent with their child. Rather than focusing on how an autistic child differs from other children, professionals discussed the importance of learning to celebrate the child's smallest successes. Parents must understand that it takes mastering a variety of small tasks to accomplish one large achievement and thus, it is critical to focus on how far the child has come rather than how far the child has to go. With a parent's nagging and prolonged lecturing, a child may become unresponsive to a parent's demands and simply withdraw.

For parents of children with ASD, the level of stress can be crushing. Parents are overwhelmed with coping with their own personal needs as well as the needs of their autistic child. It is imperative that parents seek trained personnel in order to determine specific techniques and activities that will help encourage a child's independence. In order to ensure that a child is functioning at his/her highest potential, educators may work with parents to familiarize them on how to teach a child with ASD to learn. This will allow parents to serve as active partners in their child's education and make certain that skills learned in the educational program are transferred to the home setting. Through the attendance of after-school programs provided by the school system, services are provided to children and their families. These programs allow children to benefit from socially interacting with his or her peers while parents are given the opportunity to socialize with other parents who are facing similar challenges. Moreover, parents and professionals directly working with the child outside of the classroom will increase socialization, communication, appropriate behaviors, and independence.

Parents may learn various techniques and the reasoning behind them through the help of speech-language pathologists and other healthcare professionals. With access to the necessary training and support, parents may gain an understanding of the child's personality and help assist in acquiring the necessary skills that will allow for a productive and enjoyable lifestyle. The burden of raising a child with ASD can be lightened if a parent learns the appropriate strategies for spending instructional time with their child and making an effort to enhance their parental roles in their education. As the child's first teacher, parents

are responsible for providing positive and enriching experiences that will help the child to grow and flourish. The relationship between the parent and child is vital to the child's development and overall well being.

In order to improve a parent's relationship with his/her child, it is essential that a parent join the child's world. If parents expect too much from their child and are constantly demanding, children may rebel or tune-out. By encouraging a child's interests, parents are providing their child with a sense of being valued and appreciated. Placing a child's self-esteem before a parent's expectations will allow parents to capitalize on opportunities to let him/her grow and mature independently. From the school system in particular, demands on the child may seem insurmountable, however, motivating the child for greater success and encouraging the child to reach a higher level of functioning is most beneficial.

Lack of knowledge and training

Barriers & Recommendations

The lack of resources and appropriate education affect the ability of parents to work effectively with their child. Although parents are intimately familiar with their child's needs, they may not be as knowledgeable about ASD as well-trained professionals. This inexperience and lack of knowledge may hinder a parent's ability to nurture and stimulate language development which can be detrimental to a child's success in school. Therefore, parents must work with teachers and therapists to identify the skills to be targeted and the behaviors to be changed (Wintersteen & Young, 1988). With more knowledge and training about ASD, parents may become equipped to make informed decisions for their child, prevent situations that may

cause difficulties, and strive to troubleshoot problems that may be stressful for the child (Wintersteen & Young, 1988).

Family Pressures

Barriers & Recommendations

The daily demand of family life and caring for a child with autism also presents barriers for parents. Speech-language pathologists concluded that parents often do not have enough time to work on academic skills with their child because of other children in the family. In an attempt to keep the family balanced and ensure that the needs of each family member are met, parents may have difficulty working with the child on the necessary academic work outside of school. Overworked and overburdened parents are under a great deal of stress to split their parental attention evenly and as a result, a parent's relationship with his/her child may be compromised.

Speech-language pathologists also felt that parents are faced with financial challenges because of the demands of raising a child with ASD, and the economic strains that may result from seeking the appropriate resources and services for the child. For most private health insurance plans, the expenses related to therapy and treatment for the autistic children are not covered. Moreover, parents may face challenges in continuing to work a full-time job while tending to the twenty-four hour caretaking of their disabled child (Vosler-Hunter, 1989). Thus, a reduction of household income paralleled with increased expenses, leaves many families in financial debt. A low socio-economic status may influence when and how early a diagnosis will occur and if treatment is available. This may result in a lack of access

to facilities and services, and the timely intervention necessary for the appropriate services for their child (Vosler-Hunter, 1989).

Once the diagnosis of ASD is made, parents may also experience chronic guilt and depression relating to their child's disability. Guilty feelings may interfere with a parent's interactions with their developing child. As they come to the realization that their child will quite likely require lifelong care and support, pressures begin to control every aspect of the family's life (Vosler-Hunter, 1989). A concern about their unknown future creates an additional level of stress as parents are apprehensive about their child fitting into society and growing into an independent adult. In order to improve a child's mental health and ability to cope, parents must strive to decrease the stresses they face regarding their autistic child. Helping parents helps children, too (Vosler-Hunter, 1989).

Parent-Professional Relationship

Communication

Supports & Recommendations

Communication is an important element in the parent-professional partnership. Results indicate that the speech-language pathologists felt that significant changes were evident in children whose parents were actively involved in the school and maintained open and positive communication with professionals. Aside from scheduled parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings, speech-language pathologists orchestrated a variety of ways that parents and teachers may communicate with each other. Daily communication logs, e-mails, communication books, recorded videos of the child, and the sending home activities for parents to

follow are all approaches that professionals have taken in order to provide consistent communication with parents, and keep them informed about the child's performance at school. Phone calls and visits to the classroom also appeared to be positive ways to cooperate with speech-language pathologists and keep parents informed about the child's progress and challenges. Although communication with parents when they are dropping their child at school is brief and informal, this approach may further help to increase the comfort level and relationship therapists have with parents. While it may not be an ideal time to discuss larger problems and concerns, the interaction may allow for parents and professionals to set up future appointments with one another. In many instances, professionals used a variety of methods to communicate important information to families. Professionals must recognize which communication approach works for different kinds of information that must be provided. For parents who are hard to reach, alternative methods of communication should be considered.

In order to ensure appropriate and effective communication and find a happy medium with parents, professionals often make adjustments to suit the particular needs of parents. Allowing parents to choose which mode of communication they prefer fosters an open communication channel, and makes for a more positive parent-professional relationship. For parents who work during the day or evening and are unable to attend meetings or maintain frequent communication, professionals have implemented valuable methods of communication to keep parents informed. The efforts made by professionals are critical in determining the amount of family involvement. The school should strive to make every effort

possible to provide information to parents that will empower them to make decisions about their child's needs. The knowledge provided by professionals will allow parents to develop their own perceptions about what is best for their child and give parents a sense of efficacy (Dunst, Trivette, & Johanson, 1994). Using open communication to make parents feel comfortable with the school will enhance parental involvement, while building trust and rapport with parents.

Speech-language pathologists acknowledged that communication with parents is frequent and meaningful. A parent constantly informed about what their child is learning at school allows professionals to discuss these topics in greater detail and provide opportunities for parents to explore. Additionally, parents are invited to share their ideas and offer support to professionals regarding specific topics where the child may be struggling. Professionals noted that they appreciated knowing that parents are concerned and interested in their child's progress. By calling home to provide feedback, report the mastery of a new skill, or simply alert the parents of an anticipating change in the classroom, parents appeared grateful for frequent communication and more comfortable with their child's school. Specifically for children with low-functioning ASD, frequent communication between parents and professionals is essential to monitor the child's progression. If well informed, parents can work as the primary partner in their child's education and encourage learning at home.

In addition to conducting effective communication from school-to-home, parents need to keep the school informed about their child's s needs and home environment by relaying information from home-to-school. Parents hold a central

importance in the health, wellbeing, and development of their child and thus, collaboration between parents and professionals is vitally important for understanding a child's strengths and needs. Professionals must respect the knowledge and opinions of parents and provide them with opportunities to express their concerns and priorities. Communicating this intimate knowledge to professionals will help gain a full picture of the child's abilities and maximize his/her potential. Parents are encouraged to complete questionnaires, respond/send notes to the school, or phone call the professional to keep them informed about parents' ideas and concerns. Professionals can then use these opinions and suggestions to construct learning activities that would benefit the child and help alleviate some of the parents' concerns. A professional's sensitivity to parent difficulties at home also proved to be a positive factor in developing a strong parent-professional relationship.

In order for parents to play an active role in the child's education, professionals must ensure that parents have a clear understanding of their reason for implementing specific goals. Through open and positive communication, parents may work towards accepting a professional's decisions and educational philosophy. During a child's treatment services, professionals must involve parents every step of the way. In order for parents to be in agreement with professionals regarding a child's current achievements and subsequent target areas that may be beneficial, professionals must provide parents with a clear and reasonable outline of the child's development. To improve parental comprehension, graphs are often used to document a child's weekly progression. Graphs can be constructed in a clear,

concise manner and at a readability level appropriate for the general public.

Professionals can use this technique as a means to facilitate a parent's trust and support in the decision-making of professionals. By speaking openly and directly to parents about a professional's efforts and concerns, parents will have a greater understanding of the particular task that must be targeted, and the strategies for accomplishing that task. Furthermore, professionals described the use of simple language that is familiar to the family. Avoiding the use of educational jargon and long explanations is most understandable for parents.

Positive collaboration may be accomplished through the joint efforts of both the parents and professionals as they strive to influence a child's life. Parents and professionals may provide a basis for mutual understanding through the frequent sharing of information and openness to questioning and clarification. While parents inform professionals of their intimate knowledge of their child and the needs of the family, professionals in turn must educate parents about their specific skills and expertise; they provide strategies to help families overcome problems within the home in order to promote positive functioning. Through this teamwork, parents and professionals can help a child lead a more fulfilling and rewarding life.

Communication

Barriers & Recommendations

Learning the specific communication barriers that may exist between parents and professionals working together is an important step to increasing parent involvement. Parent-professional communication is challenging, especially when parents do not speak English or come from different cultural backgrounds

than the professionals. These cultural differences may be extremely difficult to overcome, especially if parents and professionals resort to their own unique language and cultural influences when interacting with one another (Cross, Bazron, Dennis & Issacs, 1989). The ability for professionals to recognize these cultural differences and provide subsequent services is essential to positive teamwork.

Socio-economic status and educational levels also appeared to be a primary obstacle to effective communication. The extent to how parent-professional collaboration is compromised is dependent upon a professional's ability to locate and secure resources for the child and family and the parent's ability to obtain these sources of information (Cross et al., 1989). However, if a parent has a lack of understanding of the health challenges of their child at every juncture, children may receive inappropriate placements and diagnoses.

Professionals providing parents with appropriate knowledge and education increases parental involvement. However, some speech-language pathologists noted that some parents have similar characteristics to their child with ASD. Professionals mentioned that some parents demonstrated odd and socially inappropriate behaviors which often may affect the parent's level of participation and extent of cooperation. Parents with autistic tendencies may not be aware of what is socially appropriate and may express difficulty in understanding specific topics. As a result, parents may face challenges to understanding how to appropriately care for their child and how to seek the services needed.

Parental involvement is a combination of commitment and active participation on the part of the parent to the school and to the student. However,

parents may not have the time to fully communicate with professionals or participate in professionally prescribed programs such as parent trainings and conferences. This may limit the type and extent of information professionals can give to or receive from parents and may have negative consequences on the child and family.

As an expert on the child, parents are expected to relay information to professionals regarding their concerns for their child and the family's needs. However, some parents lack the frequent two-way communication and some professionals are unable to develop plans for effective treatment and related services. Professionals often develop a negative perception of parents; they believe they lack the initiative to help their child succeed. In the absence of parental involvement, parents appear to be disinterested in a child's education and development.

Equality

Supports & Recommendations

To establish positive relationships, parents and professionals must be of equal status, position and worth to the team. The ability for both parties to join together towards a common purpose or goal will ensure that both parents and professionals are equally contributing to the child's education. According to the findings provided by speech-language pathologists, parents and professionals must recognize and acknowledge the strengths and expertise of each another. Often professionals serve as the guide and support for parents by providing sources of information to educate them about their child's condition and potential course of

their disability. Professionals must also be prepared to share their knowledge relating to treatment strategies and techniques, community resources, and the child's educational program and team members at school. In order to further involve parents, professionals frequently recommend specific conferences and autism support groups as well as newspaper articles and newly discovered research that may be advantageous to the parents. With the daily challenges of raising a child with ASD, professionals also resort to other parents who are dealing with similar situations. Providing parents with opportunities to contact other parents may be an excellent resource for emotional support and information. Moreover, the effectiveness of this relationship is further enhanced as parents share their expertise with professionals regarding new techniques and findings.

To build the skills for positive teaming interactions, professionals stressed the significance of working as a unified, collaborative group. Beginning with the early stages of intervention, professionals should attempt to enforce this level of support. In order for parents to believe that professionals have the child's best interests at heart, professionals need to strive to build a trustful environment that is responsive to a parent's suggestions and concerns. If a parent recognizes that the team's mutual goal is helping the child cope and adapt to his/her way of life, parents will be more enthusiastic about working in partnership. Viewing parents as equal members of the team will also increase a parent's desire to cooperate.

To accomplish joint decision making between parents and professionals, parents are encouraged to attend IEP meetings and conferences, frequently visit the school, and observe the child in his/her school environment. Through this increase

in parental involvement, parents may become more confident that the professionals and school team are responsive to their concerns and needs. With the involvement of parents in the IEP process and subsequent conferences, parents and professionals may mutually agree on educational goals and improve the line of communication. Furthermore, prior to meeting with families, professionals may write down questions or requests for information to ensure that all areas of a parent's concerns are addressed and/or are being acted upon. Through this collaboration, professionals can increase their understanding of the child's home environment while parents may become knowledgeable about the child's educational setting. For effective joint planning and decision-making, parents are also encouraged to communicate if changes are required to be made; professionals are able to make the adjustments necessary for families to be as satisfied as possible. A healthy and working relationship may also be achieved through allowing families to regularly visit the school. By welcoming parents into the school and allowing them to feel comfortable with their child's school environment, parents will become more familiar with the professional and how the professional will support the child's education. An invitation to visit the child's school prior to the opening of the school year can be an excellent opportunity to launch this partnership. Professionals can also support parent observations of the child to provide home strategies and suggestions that will enforce carryover of specific skills and increase a parent's competence in teaching their child. Engaging parents in specific student learning tasks will provide parents with the knowledge they need to reinforce skills outside the classroom.

In addition to observations of the child, professionals can also provide parent-training sessions to promote the acquisition of a child's skills in the home and community settings. Regardless of the level of input provided by parents in regards to their child's needs and course of development, professionals should teach specific techniques and offer suggestions to help a parent facilitate the child's communication development (Dunlap, Fox, Vaughn, Bucy, & Clarke, 1997). School training sessions may be effective and allow parents to freely express their concerns and feelings with professionals and other parents. Parents appeared to appreciate these meetings and felt comforted by a variety of individuals who could relate to their challenges. On occasion, speech-language pathologists offered home visits for conferences and training sessions with parents. Home visits appeared to be successful in gaining insight about a family's expectations for their child, as well as an opportunity for parents to become involved in treatment interventions. Parents can also use in-home training sessions as a chance to seek additional knowledge from professionals regarding problem-solving skills (i.e. potty training).

Equality

Barriers & Recommendations

Parents who are uneducated about treatment approaches for ASD may be unable to appropriately advocate for their child. Desperate to achieve a sense of "normalcy" for their family, parents may become fixated on any treatment approach that is available. However, although a particular technique may have worked for a child with ASD in the past and was effective, treatment must be tailored to the unique strengths, weaknesses, and needs of each particular child. Rather than

conversing with professionals to formulate an approach that may be more personalized to the child, parents may be unwilling to recognize a professional's assistance and thus time is wasted on a useless intervention approach. Despite the professional's willingness to educate parents and recommend appropriate resources, parents may refuse to follow the professional's suggestions or take advantage of workshops and conferences. This lack of knowledge and expertise results in parents who are excessively demanding and unreasonable, which negatively affects parent-professional collaboration.

Too much knowledge and awareness of parents also demonstrated challenges for positive parent and professional interactions. Eager to be acquainted with every facet of the school system, parents may become challenging to work with and not fully appreciate the efforts made by professionals. With the enormous amount of resources available today for parents, their expectations of the school are far greater than ever before. Parents appear to never acquiesce to the side of the school; they expect professionals to hear their concerns and be responsive to their demands.

Many speech-language pathologists shared this frustration about the lack of parental involvement in education. Although parents often expect professionals to perform "miracles," parents' beliefs about what is important, necessary and permissible for their child are critical to education. Moreover, the lack of involvement may have a negative impact on a student's performance in and out of the classroom and may impede continuing educational development and success. For many, parental involvement appeared to decline dramatically as the school year

progressed. Parents were more inactive in partaking in school functions and training sessions, and as a result, may have been unable to appropriately motivate and encourage the child outside of school. Professionals also emphasized their disappointment in parents when rejected from in-home training sessions; academic and personal growth to improve the child's skills was compromised.

Although parental participation is essential for fostering learning at home, monitoring a child's progress, and providing feedback to professionals, some parents are too involved in their child's education. "Helicopter parenting" may cause parents to become aggressive or overbearing, often creating difficulties for the school to accommodate their needs. Even though helicopter parents usually have good intentions, their high expectations and endless demands may create a number of challenges for effective parent-professional partnership (Dunnewind, 2004). Since any kind of involvement is better than none at all, professionals in this study controlled the excessive amount of participation by setting boundaries for parents to follow. Professionals found the importance of setting limits for the amount of time parents were allowed to observe at school; this would limit interference with the school system and maintain the confidentiality of other children.

For parents who are uncompromising and/or inconsiderate to a professional's point of view, maintaining a positive parent-professional relationship becomes challenging. Rather than negotiating with a professional the specific needs to be addressed, parents may ignore or overlook a professional's expertise and demand that their own needs be met. Devaluing a professional's contributions may greatly affect the ability to form a partnership. In some instances, parents resorted

to inviting lawyers and advocates to IEP meetings to ensure that parents receive the services demanded.

Trust & Respect

Supports & Recommendations

Developing a trusting and respectful relationship is unlikely to occur automatically or easily (Dunlap, Fox, Vaughn, Bucy, & Clarke, 1997). Professionals acknowledged that mutual respect and trust is fostered by successfully blending the knowledge and skills that both parents and professionals contribute to the relationship. To encourage this level of trust and respect, professionals often viewed the expertise of parents as complementary to their own specialized skills.

Capitalizing on the parents' personal expertise helped gain important insight and understanding of the family. By listening to what parents ask for, and are being willing to respond to, professionals value the input of parents. Providing parents with the sufficient amount of time for them to express their needs and desires, helps lay the foundation necessary for this collaboration. Moreover, addressing a parents' concerns in a sensitive and practical manner will allow parents to understand which goals may be realistic, and which may be out of reach.

Although a trusting relationship may not develop quickly, parents often appreciate and feel at ease if professionals share equally information about themselves, their opinions, and their previous experiences. For parents, acknowledging a professional's assistance and accomplishments may have a positive impact on their relationship. With a vast repertoire of skills and training, parents are provided with opportunities to obtain new knowledge about their

child's behavior and strategies to modifying these behaviors. Maintaining this ongoing relationship encourages parents to reach out to professionals for support.

The majority of professionals concluded that parents felt connected with the school and were satisfied with the professional's commitments to educating their child. Parents were pleased with the professional's knowledge of ASD, their ability to communicate with parents, and their dedication to involving parents on the school team. To further establish a trustful rapport with parents and family, professionals may often seek additional professional assistance to make certain that parents feel more comfortable with the school system. The use of home visits may also help initiate a productive partnership as parents and children often feel more comfortable in their home environment. During a home visit, parents may take more of an initiative in the relationship, and a child may establish positive feelings about his/her parents' acceptance of the professional.

Equality

Barriers & Recommendations

For some parents of children with ASD, years have been spent engaging in difficult and adversarial relationships with professionals and healthcare providers. It is important that parents disregard past judgments and instead, work to create a constructive relationship with professionals. Without establishing a collaborative relationship between parents and professionals, it is often impossible to provide optimal care and services to the child. If parents can overlook their previous experiences and recognize that a vast majority of professionals are focused on the

best interests of the child, parents will be more willing to trust professionals and the school team.

Professionals reported that the lack of mutual trust and respect may contribute to parents' lack of expertise and knowledge. Professionals become unsure that a parent has the sufficient degree of knowledge to make suggestions about the services the child is receiving. The lack of understanding makes it difficult for parents to appropriately advocate on behalf of their child as well as appreciate a professional's aim and purpose. A professional's dissatisfaction with a parents' knowledge and training may greatly affect the level of trust. Parents were reported to become extremely demanding and overly involved, reaching levels that are unmanageable by professionals. These pressures become a burden to professionals as they attempt to fulfill the needs of the families they work with. It is important that parents become aware of the stress they present to professionals and learn to balance their time and energy accordingly. Rather than becoming defensive and uncooperative, parents should learn strategies that effectively work with professionals in order to clearly understand their expectations.

Personal Qualities

Supports & Recommendations

Several characteristics appear to be a positive influence on parent-professional relationships. These relationships are enhanced when professional's personal attributes include empathy, sensitivity, accessibility, flexibility, and openness. Professionals must demonstrate an understanding of the families' concerns, needs and priorities. By using sensitivity and establishing good rapport to

establish this level of trust, parents will feel comfortable to discuss their concerns. Taking time to talk to parents about concerns, listening to parents, encouraging them, offering practical help, and conveying a concern and interest for both parents and the child are factors that may contribute to a positive parent-professional relationship. A belief in a parents' abilities and an optimistic view of the child's development will also foster a level of trust.

Personal Qualities

Barriers & Recommendations

Positive parental involvement translates into positive qualities; commitment, responsiveness, sensitivity, and meaningful participation in their child's learning. However, professionals also described that parents portray a variety of negative qualities that greatly affect their relationship. Parents often were dismissive in response to a professional's portrayal of information. Sometimes they appeared to be too demanding and aggressive which posed challenges for professionals. By demonstrating feelings of denial, a child's treatment process was frequently disrupted. For some, parents did not believe in their own effectiveness and capabilities. Parents also lacked the skills necessary to work with professionals and thus, frustration and aggravation arose. Some professionals believed that parents did not demonstrate necessary qualities that positively attributed to helping them to work effectively.

Dreams/Goals

For children with ASD, they must overcome a tremendous amount of challenges throughout their life. Although most of these children still struggle with

daily hardships, professionals play an important role in helping these children succeed and inspiring them to follow their dreams. Professionals were concerned about children living a “normal” life, a life filled with happiness and joy. They hoped that these children would live a rewarding and meaningful life trusting the children would be happy within themselves. Professionals were eager for children to be contributors to society and live independent lives without twenty-four hour care of an adult. A primary goal for many of the professionals was the hope that a child would be a positive member of society and express his/her needs through functional communication. Professionals also hoped that these children would continue their education, attend college, and find a career that suited their interests.

Limitations and Future Research

Although a plethora of useful information was revealed relating to a professionals’ perceptions of their relationship with parents of children with ASD, (during the diagnosis and treatment process), these findings may not generalize to all speech-language pathologists working with parents of children with ASD. Although the perceptions and opinions of eight participants were used, their geographical locations were relatively similar, and these results may not be indicative to the viewpoints of speech-language pathologists in other areas. Furthermore, with the diverse characteristics of ASD, and the wide range of experience presented by the speech-language pathologists, the information may not be held true among other speech-language pathologists working with parents of children with ASD.

Since this study only targeted the experiences of eight participants, all of whom were from the same geographic location, a larger study needs be conducted with an extensive sample size as well as with participants who reside in various regions around the world. Including speech-language pathologists from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds may also help gain knowledge of these differences. Moreover, obtaining information regarding a parents' perspective of their relationship with professionals may be beneficial, as the differences and similarities of this partnership are explored. This knowledge will provide a clearer understanding of how to improve the overall quality of this relationship.

Professionals have multiple perceptions, some positive and some negative, regarding their relationship with parents, as well as recommendations that may improve their relationship. By learning what has occurred in the past, and understanding what needs to be done in the future, a parent-professional relationship may become one that is founded by effective communication, mutual trust and respect and equality. This positive-working relationship may ultimately be of greatest benefit to a child with ASD.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Speech-Language Pathologists

- 1) How would you describe your experience working with children with autism?
 - FOLLOW-UP: What has been your experience working with parents? What strategies have you used to include parents?
 - FOLLOW-UP: What has been your experience as a member of a team?
 - FOLLOW-UP: How did you learn about autism? What did you get in school? How have you used continuing education?
 - FOLLOW-UP: How do you keep data? What quantitative or qualitative data do you keep? What is your philosophy of data collection?
 - FOLLOW-UP: What has been your experience with managing challenging behaviors with children with autism?
 - FOLLOW-UP: What is your experience with different interventions for children with autism?
 - i. FOLLOW-UP:
 - Tell me about your planning process.
 - Tell me about a typical intervention session
 - What is your involvement with the child outside of your session?
 - FOLLOW-UP: What is your experience using AAC with children with autism?
 - FOLLOW-UP: Describe your role in a typical IEP process for a child with autism on your caseload
- 2) What are your long-term dreams for the children on your caseload? Where would you like to see them in 20 years?

Appendix B

Academic Vita of Meredith Spirgel

Name: Meredith Ashley Spirgel

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Education

- **Major:** Communication Sciences and Disorders
- **Minor:** Special Education
- **Honors:** Communication Sciences and Disorders

Thesis Title: *Teaming Interactions Between Parents and Professionals Working with Children with Autism*

Thesis Supervisor: Kathryn Drager

Work Experience

- **Date:** Fall 2009 - Fall 2010
- **Institution:** The Pennsylvania State University
- **Supervisor's Name:** Kathryn Drager

Awards

- Dean's List: 7 consecutive semesters
- Golden Key Honors Society

Volunteer/Activities

- Volunteer at the Communication Sciences and Disorders Department
- Teacher's Assistant for Introduction to Audiology Course
- Overall Head Chair for Cure Autism Now
- Teacher's Assistant at Happy Hour 4 Kids & Manhattan OT (Speech & Hearing Clinic)
- Volunteer for Marion K. Salomon & Associates (Early Intervention Program)
- Volunteer at Mill-Neck School for the Deaf

Previous Research/Publications:

- Independent Study on American Sign Language (2007)
- Internship Project on Autism (2007)
- Divisional winner of the Long Island President's Essay contest; money won was donated to the Ascent School for Autistic Children (2007)

Language Proficiency:

- Six years of studying American Sign Language

Career Goals:

- To gain admission into a graduate level program at a revered institution of higher education in pursuit of studies leading to a Master's Degree in Speech Language Pathology.
- Intend to pursue my Ph.D. in either Speech Pathology or Audiology
- Teach at the undergraduate college level