ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF PARENTING CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

Chuck Brown LCSW-C and Elie Sollins, LGSW
Clinical Social Workers
Center for Autism and Related Disorders
Kennedy Krieger Institute
OBJECTIVES

- Participants will receive strategies for balancing personal, familial and professional responsibilities.

- Participants will receive information on adapting to their child’s special needs.

- Participants will receive information on resources available to support them in meeting their child’s needs.
WHERE WE STAND

What we know

- Children are at risk for developing ASD
- Intervention is vital
- You are participating in a valuable opportunity for your child
- An Autism diagnosis impacts your entire family.
Traditional responses when parenting a child with autism

- Stages of Grief
  - Denial
  - Anger
  - Bargaining
  - Depression
  - Acceptance
- Presence of guilt
HOW THIS EFFECTS US

Individual Effects
- Increased stress level
- Mood Changes
- Shifting of Goals
- Change in Communication

Family Effects
- Increased stress level
- Mood Changes
- Shifting of Goals
- Change in Communication
Parental stress and autism

- Parents raising a child with ASD suffer more stress
  - Uncertainty about the cause
  - Socialization challenges
  - Behavioral challenges
- Stress is physically damaging
- Strong link to higher rates of depression
Haim G. Ginott -- a teacher and therapist

“I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. I possess tremendous power to make life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration, I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis is escalated or de-escalated, and a person is humanized or de-humanized. If we treat people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat people as they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming.”
STRESS WARNING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Cognitive Symptoms
- Memory problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Poor judgment
- Seeing only the negative
- Anxious or racing thoughts
- Constant worrying

Emotional Symptoms
- Moodiness
- Irritability or short temper
- Agitation, inability to relax
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Sense of loneliness and isolation
- Depression or general unhappiness

Physical Symptoms
- Aches and pains
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Nausea, dizziness
- Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
- Loss of sex drive
- Frequent colds

Behavioral Symptoms
- Eating more or less
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Isolating yourself from others
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
- Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)
Strategies for Combating Stress

Stress Management Strategies

- The Relaxation Response
- Practice Deep Breathing
- Progressive Relaxation
- Therapy
- Meditation
- Guided Imagery
- Yoga
- Healthy Eating
- Exercise
- Fun
**RESPONDING TO THE CALL TO ACTION**

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<th>External Response</th>
<th>Internal Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Grief Process</td>
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<td>Motivate</td>
<td>Changes in the parental relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activate</td>
<td>Changes in the family</td>
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What can support you in this process

Utilize Support Systems

- Spousal
- Family
- Friends
- Religious Community
- Local Organizations
- National Organizations
- Social Networks
HOW TO BALANCE IT ALL

- Learn from other parents
- It is vital to take time for yourself
- Establish routines
- Be Organized
  - http://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/documents/100-day-kit/forms_version_2_0.pdf
- Set limits
  - Learn to say no and yes
STRENGTHENING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARTNER, FRIENDS & FAMILY

- Communicate openly
  - Response to diagnosis
  - Feelings relating to day to day demands
- Schedule time together
- Be honest when communicating your needs
- Try to reach an agreement
Helpful Resources for Children Newly Diagnosed with ASD

Books

- Facing Autism: Giving Parents Reasons for Hope and Guidance for Help by Lynn M. Hamilton
- Early Intervention & Autism: Real-Life Questions, Real-Life Answers by James Ball, ED.D., BCBA

Web Based Resources

- http://www.pathfindersforautism.org/
- http://www.ppmd.org/
- http://www.baltimoreautismsociety.org/
- http://www.autismspeaks.org/
ENJOY YOUR CHILD

- Celebrate each strength
- Do less
- Go at a child’s pace
- Unplug
- Be present
- Play
Questions?

Chuck Brown 443-923-7592 email: brownch@kennedykrieger.org
Elie Sollins 443-923-7645 email: sollins@kennedykrieger.org