

## Maintaining Healthy Relationships

*An OCALI Parent Package*



educational service center  
OHIO Department  
of Education  
Foster care services provided under contract with  
Ohio Department of Education & Office for Exceptional Children

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## Objectives

- Participants will gain a greater understanding of the impact a child with a disability has on family life
- Participants will gain information on building parent-professional relationships
- Participants will learn strategies to support communication, collaboration, and relationship building in their child with ASD

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## Relationships are everywhere!



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**What relationships can be affected or changed when a child with special needs is part of the family?**



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### **Relationships to Explore Today**

- **Inter-family relationships:** those within the family unit
- **Family and Professional/Service Provider relationships:** those with professionals providing services to an individual or others in the family
- **Relationships with friends:** those outside the family such as friends and those in the community

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### **The Family**



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"..sometime around age five to ten years the marital deficits and inadequacy of the traditional roles began to show evidence of strain and even open dissatisfaction. Dads became frustrated at the demands of their wives to "play with" a son or daughter who didn't know how to play, and moms became frustrated at the lack of involvement of their mates. In retrospect, this appears to be the time that the existing intra-marital separation starts the couples on a path towards formal separation and divorce."

William M. Bolman, M.D., University of Hawaii - John A. Burns School of Medicine, Child Psychiatrist (ASA's 37th National Conference on Autism Spectrum Disorders, 2006)

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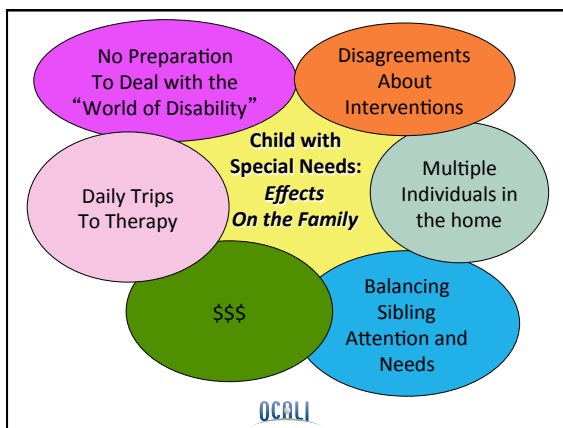
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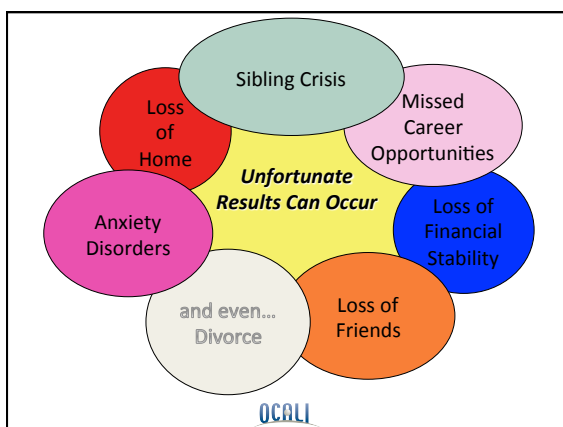
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### Relationship Building Within the Family

- Communicate often
- Share feelings
- Set alone time
- Express emotions
- Needs change
- Ask for help



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### Communicate Often

- Vocally or written
- Allow time to just talk (reduce distractions such as TV, computer, phones, etc.)
- Exchange information (share what happened today)
- Don't make all conversations about the disability



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### Share Feelings

- All emotions need to be shared (anger, happiness, depression, sadness, excitement)
- Don't keep thoughts bottled up inside
- Allow tears



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### Ask for Help

- Seek others in the family unit who can assist (financially, emotionally, spiritually)
- Don't be afraid to ask!



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### What to Avoid

- Shutting down
- Not seeking help
- Denial the we need help  
Sometimes we need a break from the constant challenges that face us
- Constant anger



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### Everything is "Balance"! How can you add balance to your life?

- Therapy options
  - What works for your child and family?
- Set priorities
  - What truly IS important?
- Family time
  - Begin with what you can do



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## Prioritize your family.



- Make time for YOU!
- Make time for communication!
- Make time for fun!



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## Parent-Professional Relationships



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## Each Family Has a Unique Culture

Professionals recognize:

- The importance of relationships with families
- The uniqueness of each family



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### Differing Perspectives

- Parents and professionals may view each others roles differently
- They may have different expectations
- Barriers to a partnership can develop



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### Importance of Parent-Professional Relationships

- Families who have higher satisfaction with partnerships tend to have more communication with their child's teacher and to participate more in school activities  
(Summers, Gotto, Epley, & Zuna, 2007)
- Family-professional partnerships explain a significant portion of variance in the extent of parent involvement and the nature of parent-teacher communication  
(Zuna, 2007)

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### Importance of Parent-Professional Relationships

- Families who have higher satisfaction with partnerships also have higher family quality of life  
(Hoffman et al., 2006)



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## What Parents Are Looking For

Parent research indicates that parents want a professional to:

- Listen
- Respect Families
- Accept them as important team members



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## So, what is my role in the parent-professional relationship?



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## Relationship Building with Professionals

- Collaborate
- Listen to each other
- Share information about your family
- Gather information



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## So What is the Parent's Role?

- I am not objective, nor should I be, it is my child we are discussing
- The parent viewpoint is unique and vital, like no one else on the team
- However, I do not have all the answers, and neither does anyone else
- I do not need to make decisions alone



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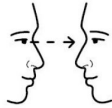
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## Strategies to Support Communication:

Monitor Body Language

### Eye Contact

- Try to periodically look at the speaker
- When speaking, look at all individuals in the room



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## Strategies to Support Collaboration:

Monitor Body Language

### Body Language

- Monitor your facial expressions- You may not be sending the message that you want to send!
- Nod head in acknowledgement
- Look interested-Lean Forward



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## Strategies to Support Collaboration:

Develop Active Listening Skills

- Acknowledge
  - Value the importance of what everyone brings to the table, no matter how difficult
  - Use words such as “right, really, yes”
- Reflect, Paraphrase, Summarize
  - Use speaker’s exact words
  - Re-state information to assure a clear understanding of the basic thoughts and ideas of the speaker



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## Strategies to Support Collaboration:

Develop Active Listening Skills

- Elaborate
  - Build on information the speaker has given you
- Ask
  - Relevant questions for clarification and do not continue until clear



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## Strategies to Support Collaboration:

Be Proactive

Gain Information

- Read all pertinent information before face to face contact
- Explore any and all statements, ideas and requests
  - Do not need to agree, just agree to explore and consider



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### Strategies to Support Communication and Relationship Building

- Think before you respond- "Wait time"
- Communicate ideas, goals, visions early in the process
- Develop a consistent and ongoing communication process



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### Strategies to Support Relationship Building

#### Communication

- Don't let concerns develop into problems
- Verbally acknowledge areas of disagreement. Find a point of agreement to begin



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### What to Avoid: Red Flags!

If you find yourself doing or thinking these, be aware that you may be setting up a more difficult situation

- Not seeing others viewpoint
- Assuming the professionals do not care
- Forgetting to thank them or refusing to thank them
- Making (or considering making) threat

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## Relationships with Friends



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## Friends

- Allow laughter
- Be honest
- Share emotions
- Spend time
- Share interests
- Seek support
- Allow new friends



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## What to avoid...

- Not making time for friends
- Comparing yourself
- Not listening to their needs and concerns



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### So, "Been There Done That"?

- Nothing new here?
- Tried all these ideas and strategies?
  - Sometimes it may take longer than you expect
  - You may not initially see the impact
  - Sometimes you may need to go the next step
    - Legally (i.e. procedural safeguards)
    - Outside assistance
      - Advocates, Mediators and Lawyers
      - Therapists and Counselors



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### Red Flags for Help!

If you see yourself in several of the following situations, you may need some outside help to move through the issues you face:

- Constant sadness, hopelessness, agitation and/or irritability
- Generally feeling anxious, sometimes for no obvious reason
- Trouble sleeping, low energy, fatigue, difficulty concentrating
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Significant weight change
- Loss of interest in favorite activities



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### Short Quiz

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special!
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

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## How did you do?



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## Everything is about Relationships!



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### Reminders:

- Be a child advocate, not a program advocate
- Prioritize the goals with the needs of the family
- Give time to the family: work as a team
- Suspend judgment: assigning fault is useless
- Be open and consider possible benefits from interventions
- Get away occasionally
- LAUGH



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AUTISM SOCIETY  
Improving the Lives of All Affected by Autism  
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**Parent Package Materials series was developed by the expert staff at OCALI, in collaboration with the Autism Society of Ohio, and funded by the Ohio Department of Education's Office for Exceptional Children**



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