
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Engaging with autistic children and their families: Strategies for effective partnerships

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Background: Autism diagnoses for children are becoming more commonplace due to greater understanding and insight concerning neurodiversity and an increased awareness of the importance of inclusion. Consequently, greater numbers of health and social care professionals, educators and practitioners in the community are more likely to find themselves supporting autistic children and their families. Understanding the needs, wishes and hopes of families who you interact with will enable you to plan your professional response to their needs more effectively.

Target audience: This presentation is intended for professionals responsible for supporting autistic children and their families within clinical, residential or community settings, in addition to those working in education settings. This presentation will explore the needs of autistic children and their families when they present at appointments or for services, and how you as the professional can make the most positive impact through your interactions.

Key messages: Supporting parents to support their children has fast become the mantra of disability support services here in Ireland. But what do parents universally really need from professionals to truly empower and enable them to support their autistic child?

A partnership approach between professionals and parents is instrumental in promoting more positive outcomes for autistic children. Yet what parents need more than anything else when they meet you is hope. They need to feel listened to, that their worries and concerns have been heard and they need to have hope that things can improve for their child and their family. You may not always be in a position to provide the level of service an autistic child truly needs. You can however maximise the effectiveness of your intervention with their family by establishing and developing good working relationships with their parents.

Learning outcomes: This presentation will provide you with strategies and tangible methods of supporting autistic children, via enabling and empowering parents. Actual case studies will be provided to demonstrate to attendees the effectiveness of active listening, being present and creating a space of hope, within interactions with parents. Examples of both effective and non-effective ways of engaging families will be presented, to maximise understanding and enhance positive outcomes.