

PUTTING THE FAMILY IN THE PICTURE

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FAMILY STRESS

- Many studies looking at stress on families with a child with disability
- Mother and father stress levels differ
- Mothers severe emotional distress
- Fathers greatest stress was coping with mothers stress
- Autism consistently hits all markers as the having the greatest stress impact on families
- Divorce rate – commonly quoted rate of 80-85%
 - Studies do not support that finding (Siegal 33%/Bromley 30-35%)

FAMILY STRESS

- Significant effects on siblings
- Research varies on the impact to siblings
- Sibling support groups found to be important (Howlin and Yates 1990)
- Being able to talk about and have language to explain autism significantly affected coping skills (Bagenholm and Gillberg 1991)
- Families who sought external support reported lower levels of sibling rivalry (Stanford 2003)



EASING THE BURDEN

- What does the research say eases the stress on families?
 - External sources of support
 - Accessing programs for the child with autism
 - Generally PARENT EMPOWERMENT

PARENT EMPOWERMENT

- Fuzzy term
- Greatest source of stress generally is lack of control
- How do you get control back?
 - Education education education!
 - Decide upon treatment as a family
 - Structure family unit to make these options happen
 - Educate and inform family unit

PARENT EMPOWERMENT

- One study found, greatest determinant of functioning family was a good partnership with therapy providers
- Many providers in past have excluded parents from therapy - “we are the experts”
- If empowerment reduces stress, which in turn increases family functioning
 - Get empowered, ask questions, get involved!

PARENT EMPOWERMENT AT L.E.A.R.N.

- Parent Training
- Parents involved in all therapy sessions
- Parents involved in setting therapy goals
- Parents active participants in Program Development
- Parents as Teachers Program (PTP)
- Parent Support Group
- Encourage questions and involvement
- School support

WHAT WORKED FOR US

- Rearranged roles
- Accessed family support
- Rearranged financial arrangements
- Short term sacrifices for long term payoff
- Considered therapy priority in order to get family functioning again
- Educated other daughter
- Educated family
- Worked together as a family unit