



# Teaming Interactions between Parents and Professionals Working with Children with ASD

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Erinn Finke, Kathryn Drager, Elizabeth Serpentine,  
*Penn State University*

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With assistance from Patricia Bonnano, Lauren Carn, Emily  
Jones, Stephanie King, Jessica Machara, Melissa Mancini, Anne  
Rohan, Jessica Sanchez

-and-

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# Teaming Interactions between Parents and Professionals

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- A growing body of evidence supports the importance of parental involvement in education.
  - (e.g., Bermudez, 1993; Davies, 1993; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Moles, 1993).
- In addition to enhancing student outcomes, effective parental engagement in children's education also benefits parents and teachers.

# Teaming Interactions between Parents and Professionals

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- Parents appreciate teacher guidance and may experience increased efficacy for helping their children learn when teachers offer specific suggestions for involvement.
  - (e.g., Epstein, 1986; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow, 1995).
- Despite the benefits of parental involvement, parents and teachers alike have reported barriers to effective involvement.
  - (e.g., Bermudez, 1993; Davies, 1993; Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Lightfoot, 1981; Moles, 1993).

# Teaming Interactions between Parents and Professionals

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- Barriers may include:
  - Differences between parents' and schools' goals for children's education;
  - Language differences; and
  - Varied structural constraints (e.g., school accessibility limited to workday hours).
- Further, studies examining the parents' perspectives have identified a number of barriers including:
  - Distrust of educational professionals
  - Negative experiences entering the special education system
  - A need for frequent communication from professionals
  - Difficulty obtaining services
    - (Dunlap, G. (1999); Dunlap, G., Robbins, F., & Darrow, M. (1994); Stoner, J., Bock, S., Thompson, J., Angell, M. Hely, B., & Crowley, E. (2005).

# Teaming Interactions between Parents and Professionals

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- Authors of studies investigating the parents' perspectives developed recommendations for professionals:
  - Listen to parental concerns
  - Provide parents with research-based information
  - Facilitate a smooth transition from early intervention to special education
  - Help parents participate in IEP meeting by instituting procedural changes
  - Facilitate frequent communication with parents
  - Recognize that all interactions have potential to enhance or reduce trust
- These recommendations were derived from the parents' comments, but were not recommended by the parents themselves.



# Teaming Interactions between Parents and Professionals

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- Professionals recommendations for other professionals regarding working with parents:
  - Have regular team meetings and include parents in these meetings.
  - Make sure the roles of all the professionals on the team are well defined and understood.
  - Respect all members of the team and acknowledge their contributions.
  - Communicate effectively with each other.
    - (Soto, Muller, Hunt & Goetz, 2001).



# Current Study

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- The current study recognizes the importance of parents' perspectives *and* the perspectives of the educational professionals (specifically the speech-language pathologist) on teaming interactions.
- A total of 26 interviews with parents and 23 interviews with SLPs (primarily from Pennsylvania) were completed, transcribed, and coded. This poster presents the preliminary results of this study, based on the transcripts of five parents and five SLPs.



# Current Study

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- The goal of this project was to obtain information from the parents and SLPs of children with ASD on the interactions among members of the IEP team.
- The following results are discussed:
  - Parent perspectives on interactions with professional members of the team.
  - SLP perspectives on interactions with parents.
  - SLP perspectives on interactions with other professionals.
  - Recommendations from parents to school teams and other parents.
  - Recommendations from SLPs to parents and other professionals.

# Parents' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Challenges of working with professionals

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- Some parents found that school professionals are not a good source for referrals.
- Many parents believed that professionals in the schools will only give the child the minimum amount of time.
  - *“My feeling about the schools with these therapies is, they will give you the minimum they think they can get by with. I feel that any school district is going to do as little as possible.”*
- They stated that there is a disconnect between the approach of a parent, who wants what is best for the child, and the school, which considers the “bottom line”.
  - *“[What] most schools, I think, will do is look at what they have available, not at the child’s needs.”*



## Parents' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Challenges of working with professionals

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- Many parents believe that they know more about ASD than the school professionals, and that professionals have too many preconceived notions.
  - *“Okay, in general, professionals don’t know as much as I do.”*
- A few parents expressed mistrust of the school team.

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming

## Interactions: Challenges of working with parents

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- Many SLPs stated that it is important for parents and professionals to work as a team. SLPs mentioned that a key to this is establishing meeting times that everyone can attend.
- Some SLPs have found that parents need help in recognizing small successes and in seeing how small successes add up to larger gains in communication and academics.
  - *“I think the parents, for one, ...don't see the little things that we see...”*
- Many SLPs stated that parents infrequently follow through with assignments sent home from school.
  - *“Sometimes when we do therapy it's like we're starting over from scratch every time, because there is no follow through.”*

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Challenges of working with parents

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- Many SLPs stated that parents need assistance in understanding evidence-based practice and with determining which interventions have evidence to support them and which do not.
  - *“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, there is not really a study that has shown it’s really efficacious.”*
- Many SLPs stated that it is critical to establish good communication between home and school.
- Some SLPs stated that parents do not treat them as competent professionals.
  - *“I think some, they think that the school system is not knowledgeable, that only the outside agencies know best.”*

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Challenges of working with parents

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- Many SLPs stated that parents have high demands on the SLPs time, and want more services than there is time in the day to provide.
  - *“They’re very stressful, they want, you know, they want therapy everyday, an hour a day, and you know, I might not work that much. They are willing to come whatever time of day, but there is no more time in the day.”*
- Some SLPs have found that parents don’t see SLPs as people. They don’t realize that though I care for their child I have a life outside of my work.
  - *“[I have] parents who have called, like, on my personal phone, to discuss things really late at night.”*

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Challenges of working with parents

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- Some SLPs have reported that it is difficult when parents seek many assessments to, in their perception, get the diagnosis/services they want.
  - *“...they think their child has apraxia and I don't. And, but they'll seek out, and they'll go, and they'll get diagnosis after diagnosis after diagnosis...it's like they're bound and determined to...change your point of view.”*
- Some SLPs stated that it is difficult to communicate with parents who are reluctant to accept the diagnosis of ASD.
  - *“[It's] frustrating to deal with parents who are in denial.”*

# Parents' Perspectives on Teaming

## Interactions: Positive aspects of working with professionals

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- Overall, many parents were generally pleased with their interactions with their child's specific therapists, and separated these professionals from the "school" as a whole or the administration.
  - *"But she seems to have gotten what she needed from somewhere and I know where that somewhere is. ...I wouldn't have done it without [her SLP]."*
- Some parents expressed that their child's therapists were just as interested in their child as they (the parents) were.
- When the parents felt that there was consensus on the team, their view of the relationship was generally more positive.
  - *"I've always gone into these [IEP meetings] thinking that this is going to be very confrontational and we're not going to get what we need, and actually it has not turned out that way. ...once we figured out that we were able to negotiate something that was acceptable for us and for the school district...we don't really have any complaints in that area."*

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Positive aspects of working with professionals

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- Overall, SLPs reported it is nice when parents open a dialogue and ask questions.
- Many SLPs reported that it is helpful when parents recognize that they are the number one experts on their child, and provide information about their child and their child's interests.
  - *"...they're the number one expertise on their kid. I mean we know different strategies and different things, but they're the best...they're the most important person who knows their kid the best."*
- Many SLPs stated that parents are great supports for their children.
  - *"[Parents] are extremely supportive of their children...they do things with their children and get them involved in lots of groups and organizations..."*

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Positive aspects of working with professionals

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- Overall, SLPs felt it made for a good experience when parents attended all team meetings.
- Overall, SLPs felt it made for a good experience when parents followed through with homework assignments and with communication back and forth between home and school.
  - *“We have a lot of parents who would follow through.”*
  - *“We have parents who will just try to implement strategies that we’re working on.”*

# Parents' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Recommendations to the School Team

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- Understand that professionals do not have the entire picture. Educate yourselves on the current research.
  - *“Definitely go to trainings because you never know when you’ll have a kid with autism.”*
- Ask parents questions. Ask for the parents’ input. Have open lines of communication.
  - *“One thing that I really like that the school does is they ask for my input at these meetings about what happens at home.”*
- Try to see the parent’s perspective.
- Respect the parents.
  - *“They have to respect the parents. They have to say, maybe these parents have great ideas.”*

# Parents' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Recommendations to the School Team

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- Don't worry about money.
- Ask the question directly, "How do we make parents part of the team?" Parents being part of the team needs to be a priority.
  - *"The parent has to be treated as part of the team. ... I didn't even know what an IEP was when we moved here."*
- Let parents know you are working in the child's best interest. Let parents know that success is a priority.
  - *"I think making parents feel like they're actually listening and they care about their child and they're not pushing them through because they have to."*

# Parents' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Recommendations to the School Team

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- Provide parents with options and resources.
  - *“I think it'd be very helpful to have one person as maybe a source of recommendations in finding out about other services that you could get for your child even if it's not exactly the same.”*
- Don't use jargon; make sure parents can understand.

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Recommendations to other Professionals

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- Work with the team.
- Be accountable for your decisions and recommendations.
- Keep reliable and logical data
  - *"...keeping data and being accountable is one thing that we can do to help, you know, get the parents to trust us."*
- Keep an open dialogue with parents.
- Give parents articles and research that supports your interventions decisions and/or recommendations.
  - *"Sometimes if you can give, maybe find a couple articles or something that are written, you know that support what you're looking for and share those."*

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Recommendations to other Professionals

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- Help parents to understand the school process.
- Let parents know that everyone on the school team is working for their child.
- Give parents simple and logical carryover activities.
  - *"I also 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. And just give some little thing they can find relevance in what you're doing."*
- Invite parents to observe sessions at school.
- Provide parents with in-services and trainings.
  - *"...my old school used to have nightly programs."*
- Let parents know that you care about their child.
  - *"When I speak to parents, I have to tell them I love their kids. As the parents they have to have the beliefs in themselves that you are the expert."*

# Parents' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Recommendations to other Parents

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- Look at the process as a team effort.
  - *“I think more of the issue is the school’s attitude going in and also the parents’ attitude, where you have to go in, and I think, look for it as a team effort to help this child.”*
- Realize that you may not get everything you want.
  - *“I think you have to look at, you’re a team working together to solve this problem with this child. And realizing that, they have to both realize that, you’re not going to get everything that you want maybe.”*
- Know and understand the budget process.
- Know what your child needs and fight the school for what he/she needs.
- Never attend an IEP meeting without an advocate or a lawyer.
  - *“Do not go in without a lot of other people. Numbers are good.”*

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Recommendations to other Parents

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- Give professionals a chance and trust them; they want what is best for your child too.
  - *“I would say,...give us a chance...to be able to see, you know, to, to realize that we are working for the best for their kid.”*
- Give professionals feedback, in a nice way.
  - *“That if they see something they don't agree with, or don't understand or whatever of have a concern about that its okay for them to say that...communication.”*
- Participate in meetings and in other opportunities for communication.

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Recommendations to other Parents

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- Agree to disagree with professionals on some occasions.
- Acknowledge that professionals are trained, and that they are basing their decisions on training and expertise.
  - *“We have studied a lot, to kind of respect that, and know that what we are recommending isn't just something we're pulling out of a hat.”*
- Help professionals to bridge the goals of the home program and the school program.

# SLPs' Perspectives on Teaming Interactions: Recommendations to other Parents

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- Let professionals know what works at home, and what your child likes and dislikes.
  - *“They could initiate saying ‘here’s what works at home, here’s what he does at the dinner table’...”*
- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Let professionals know when treatments and plans change at home. Changes at home affect how the child does in school.
- Trust your instincts.
  - *“And I tell all of them, because regardless of what we experts, including myself, say, if your gut is telling you it’s not right; then it’s not right.”*



# Discussion

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- Parents and professionals both expressed challenges and benefits to teaming interactions.
- Overall both groups indicated that teaming is critical to meeting the needs of children with ASD.
- The recommendations provided by both groups indicated that both groups want to work on creating successful teaming situations and interactions.
- Both sets of participants want to create a situation where the best interests of the child with ASD are the central focus and where communication is honest and open.



# Discussion

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- There are several issues that are serving as barriers to achieving positive teaming interactions between parents and professionals.
- Some of these barriers can be overcome by specifically addressing them in open communication.
- Overcoming other barriers may require training and provision of specific information to parents, professionals, or both.
- Future research needs to be done to determine best practice strategies for including parents in a multi-disciplinary team and improving this relationship.

# Contact Information

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- For more information please contact:
  - Erinn H. Finke
    - [enh109@psu.edu](mailto:enh109@psu.edu)
    - (814) 863-2279
    - 501G Ford Building, University Park, Pa 16802
  - Kathryn Drager
    - [kdd5@psu.edu](mailto:kdd5@psu.edu)
    - (814) 863-6347
    - 308 Ford Building, University Park, Pa 16802