

COPING UP WITH CHILDREN HAVING AUTISM: A PARENT'S GUIDE

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ABSTRACT

Autism in the terminology refers to poor communication (speaking, gesturing, listening, any mode of communication to get the message across to other people) socialization (how the individual fits into a group like the family, friends or community). Autistic children suffer from a complex neurological disorder performing repetitive behavioural actions and have difficulties in interaction. Parents often find it difficult to manage autistic children primarily due to ignorance, lack of information and knowledge on this subject. Parents of autistic children must first accept the bitter truth that their children are different from others. They need to be patient with them, invest more time and develop mutual understanding which can make their lives better. The fact that autistic children are difficult to handle when compared to other children is true. Parents of children with developmental disabilities (autism or intellectual disabilities) are more susceptible to stress and have a greater burden of adversity than other parents. Thus, having a deep knowledge on this subject and proper guidance would help them in the long run. If autistic children are aided with a good mentor, they can be easily integrated into the society. The present paper attempts to provide parents of autistic children with proper structured understanding on this subject and awareness to take up additional responsibilities of handling an autistic child and manage them more effectively.

KEYWORDS: *Autism, Autistic children, Parent's Guide, Special Education, Learning Disability*

INTRODUCTION

The world is a judicious mix of children with various types of learning capabilities and skills. Every child follows a different learning style, and sometimes, a mix of styles to adapt to the society. The scope of a parent to gauge and adapt to each learner as per the requirement at his/her level of learning comes into play at this stage. There are three broad categories of learners: (a) Fast learners (b) Average learners (c) slow learners. "Fast learners" usually have an upper hand and have the capability to learn and adapt faster than their peers. The "Average learning" group require added attention and effort both in school and at home. These learners can catch up with the fast learner's category if appropriate, strategies and styles are developed to deal with them. The "Slow learner" category is the one that finds it hard to develop the right fit of strategies of learning or to quickly adapt to the world around them. This category is usually characterized by low performance, lethargy and demotivation. A teacher's duty in a special or inclusive classroom is to bring the entire classroom to a healthy level of learning and improvement. It is done by applying various combinations of strategies with all three major groups of learners fitting into their zone of proximal development and achieving the inclusivity of the classroom. Similar strategies need to be developed by parents at home to reinforce the teachings in school. According to a study conducted by Korzekwa (2011) homework performance and independence in students with Autism can be achieved

through self-management and parents as interventionist. This invention resulted in improved task handling of the autistic children with homework completion and more confidence.

If proper measures are not taken, it could lead even to slower development, or sometimes deteriorate the development of the child. This in turn may lead to increased stress levels and depression amongst parents. Parents of children with developmental disabilities (autism or intellectual disabilities) are more susceptible to stress and have a greater burden of adversity than other parents. The parent's satisfaction or dissatisfaction appears to be constructed from two criteria: whether parents see themselves as experts or non-experts about their child and parent's opinions on the purpose or goal of the intervention or the services they received (Robert, Leblanc, & Boyer, 2015). Olsson & Hwang (2001) further demonstrated that mothers of children with autism experience more stress as compared to fathers as they spend more time with them. Khandari (2006) conducted a research demonstrating all the issues related to an autistic child's behaviour, mother's perspective and social relationship. He stated that parents of children with autism go through different stages of realization, reaction, adjustment and become flexible to adapt their lifestyles to meet the needs of their children.

Parents are the first to recognize a developmental problem in their children and must pursue their concern until they receive a satisfactory diagnosis and find or develop appropriate services for their child. Once they find a suitable treatment program, parents typically are active partners in their child's education to ensure that skills learned in the educational program transfer to the home setting and to teach their child the many behaviours that are best mastered in the home and community. Just as no one treatment for autism is sufficient for the range and severity of autism symptoms, so too no one single model of parent engagement will meet the different needs of families (Valentine, 2010). Parents need to adopt different measures targeting different behavioural abnormalities in their children with autism.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To emphasize on the responsibilities of parents of Autistic children and to suggest measures to manage their children more effectively.

Responsibilities of Parents Regarding Autistic Children

- Parents should be very cautious and aware of their children as to where they are going, what they are doing and with whom they are involved.
- As the child is repetitive in nature, he needs to be engaged in some good activity. The responsibility of parents and the guide is to keep the child mentally and physically engaged in something productive.
- Children with Autism may not be spontaneous to every action or situation in life, therefore the parents should always try to be mentor and teach them to respond and react in a positive and healthy way.
- Parents should keep a keen eye on their activities because there is a hormonal rush which creates a storm in their bodies and they behave aggressively and becomes very hyper at times. Parents should know and have tricks and tact's so that they can control over anger and aggression.

- Sex is a natural phenomenon, but autistic children may turn out to be unsafe, unhygienic and harsh with the act. This issue needs to be handled with care and knowledge should be imparted so that they involve in a safe and careful activity.
- Special care takers can be arranged at home to handle such children because it can be emotionally and physically tiring for parents at times. This will help them in emergencies and help the family to get some healthy space at times.
- Creating a healthy equation with guide, school teachers, and the child's friends helps the parents to maintain a healthy friendship circle and create a sense of belongingness with the child and the world around him.

Outdoor Activities and Interaction with Society

Autistic children need exposure to the outer world too, and schools and parents should arrange outdoor activities. There are many events which are specially organized for these special children like racing, fun games, dance competitions, fashion shows etc. This increases self-confidence, self-evaluation, the spirit of healthy competition, better speaking and interactive skills and involvement in society. Parents of autistic are unsure on how the society would accept their children and hence are prepared for both the positive and negative reactions. Regular outdoor activities made it easy for the children to withstand the exterior atmosphere. There are several kinds of people in the society and one need to tackle all kinds of situations, so exposure of kids to the world out is very essential. Malls, stationery shops, grocery shop, vegetable vendors, shop next door are the places where children can be taken regularly so that they go hand in hand with the society. Visiting to friend's house, relative's house, attending family occasions like birthday's, weddings, anniversaries, etc. can create an emotional and social development in them. Physical activity interventions to have a moderate or large effect on a variety of outcomes, including for the development of manipulative skills, locomotor skills, skill-related fitness, social functioning, and muscular strength and endurance (Healy, Nacario, Braithwaite, & Hopper, 2018).

DISCUSSIONS

The whole world is progressing towards globalization and India is no exception to it. However, there is still neglect of certain burning issues of our country like children with disability and their inclusion in the normal school curriculum. When significant progress has been made in many countries like USA, UK towards the issue concerned, we cannot afford to leave it behind. Raising an autistic child in a family involves many difficulties and problems to the parents and other family members, and because of these difficulties and problems, the family functioning gets affected.

Education of disabled children has common goals as compared to the education of all normal children. The children with autism have feelings exactly like normal children, but in a different state of mind. Such children can be provided education either in the regular classroom or special classes within the same environment of the regular school. The special school strengthens their abilities and helps them grow according to their own abilities. Such special services or special education may vary depending the type of disabilities. It is also expected that the study would lead the readers to value and respect the roles and responsibilities of teachers, parents and other stakeholders in the field of special education and maintain a positive attitude towards the autistic individual. For the parents, it is imperative to-

- understand the most common types of learning/physical disabilities and the typical symptoms of manifestation
- understand how learning disabilities are different for every affected child.
- understand how to implement inclusive practice by teaching techniques such as hands-on activities, group work, and computer-based learning.
- understand the process of collaboration with teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

Accepting the fact that the child is not normal to solve a major problem and help to make a direction clear in life so that both the family and child live a healthy and happier life. A good mentor is required so that the family knows the need of the child and work upon. A good relationship with neurologist, physician, teachers, special trainers, and special institutes helps the child grow and maintain a responsible life.

Parents should actively take part and give extra time in child's life. This helps in creating a healthy bond between them and gives the child a sense of belongingness in the society. The graph of such special children is increasing in India and so is the need of recognized special schools. With the help of the school these kids match up the social standards and are not ignored and accepted in most parts of the society. Disability only becomes a tragedy when society fails to treat everyone equally.

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