A FOCUS ON PARENT TRAINING IN ASD

Research shows that parent training programs benefit children with ASD and their families. Parent training programs can improve children’s social-communication skills, such as social engagement, language and play. When parents use intervention strategies (rather than intervention only being provided by specialists), children show better skill generalization and maintenance, meaning they are more likely to apply their learning to new situations and remember and use what they learn over time. When parents learn to use intervention techniques, children are able to learn new skills in their natural environment, during meaningful activities with the family in the home. Parents can use intervention techniques throughout their child’s day, leading to more hours of intervention (overall).

Parent training programs can also benefit parents and other family members. Parents of children with ASD may become discouraged when their child does not respond to typical parenting practices. Learning effective ways to help their child with ASD develop may increase parents’ feelings of competence, help parents develop higher expectations for their child, and encourage parents to be more optimistic about their child’s future. Given this research, parent training is considered an essential component of a comprehensive intervention program for children with ASD.

We are very fortunate to be able to offer some parent training programs through the MSU Autism Research Lab. Please read ahead and enjoy a special parent testimonial as well.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Evaluation of Efficacy of Project ImPACT

We recently completed a research study examining the efficacy of Project ImPACT, a 12-week parent training program for families of children with ASD. Parents received training in intervention techniques to promote their child’s social communication during play and
daily routines for 12 weeks. Some families received training in the original twice-per-week training model, while some families received training in a modified once-per-week model. Training sessions for 12 weeks. A detailed examination of session tapes demonstrated that the parents learned to use the intervention techniques with fidelity and their children showed improvements in spontaneous language. Parent use of specific intervention techniques was associated with child language, suggesting that parents’ use of the intervention was directly responsible for their child’s language gains. Parent learning was similar in the once and twice per week training model, suggesting that this training model can be delivered in a once-per-week format without negatively affecting parent learning.

CURRENT PROJECTS

Evaluation ImPACT Online
Distance learning technology has the potential to increase access to parent training interventions. We are interested in examining the feasibility of a parent training program for young children with autism that is delivered over the internet. ImPACT Online teaches parents evidence based intervention techniques to use at home in play and routines to increase their child’s social communication skills.

All parents will receive access to a self-directed, 12-week training program that is delivered over the internet. Half of the families will also receive weekly coaching from a therapist on their use of the intervention with their child conducted over the internet. Participation is free and all required software and hardware will be provided at no cost.

Access to ASD Interventions
Recently there has been a large increase in interventions for children with ASD. This has complicated the process by which parents can easily sort through and choose the best services for their child. We are interested in examining how parents come to learn about intervention practices for their child. By doing so, it is possible to create a better model of spreading intervention knowledge to parents. Parent participants will complete an online survey about the interventions their child uses and the individuals who referred them to those interventions.

PARTICIPATE IN OUR RESEARCH
If you are interested in participating in these or other studies, please contact Nikki Bonter at bontem@msu.edu or 517-432-8031 for more details.

ONE PARENT’S STORY
Participating in Parent Training
“Our son Sebastian is 4 ½. We started out doing Project ImPACT four months ago, and our son has been also attending private play therapy and combination of ABA about 8 months prior to joining project impact.

We had implemented some of the techniques we had seen in therapy, but could not grasp well the concept of following our child’s lead. Therefore, outside of therapy it was really hard for us to connect with Sebastian on an hourly basis. We tried to reproduce some of the things we learned from observing therapy, but the task was overwhelming and successful only a few times.

Once we began Project ImPACT, we began to grasp the concept of ‘follow your child’s lead’. It seemed like it made no sense, but upon prescription we persevered on this funny task, and I say funny because you find yourself doing silly things.

If you stop taking yourself seriously you realize that it is actually fun, you forget about the world and you just sit down on the floor and decide to simply connect with your child by truly
seeing who he is and what it has to show you.

By following his lead and imitating my son, I can see how he feels and sees the world. This is very important, because this is where I believe I’m developing a connection with my child that is beyond words, it truly is the foundation.

Four months later we are just thrilled to see how much we have been able to connect and play with Sebastian in meaningful ways. At first he usually would turn his back against us and avoid wanting to play, he also almost never had eye contact.

Now he is actually coming to look especially for me, to ask to play games, he has a lot more eye contact and his ability to use spontaneous language and come up with new games has also increased. We have seen Sebastian bloom at home, in therapy, and at school and feel very fortunate and thankful to Allie, Nikki and all the Impact team for the amazing lessons and coaching work!” Ketzi (mom)

Thank you, Ketzi, for your amazing insights. You and Sebastian are doing a wonderful job!

~ImPACT Team

FAMILY TIDBITS
Updates from our families

3-year-old boy

“ My three-year-old actually wrote and X and O by himself in his great grandmother’s birthday card this week! This is a big for us since he has a hard time with fine motor skills!”

Way to go! We are proud of you!

Noah, 5 years-old

“Noah is reading! He loves it! His kindergarten teacher tells me that from an academic standpoint, he is doing “stellar work!” He can write his name, spell several words, is potty training, reading, singing, dancing, and learning how to share with his peers.”

Way to go Noah! We are proud of you!

Joshua, 4 years-old

“This morning Joshy looked at me and said, ‘Mommy, it’s snowing outside. It’s beautiful!’

Dominic, 8 years-old

Dominic will call mom by her first name, “Cathy”, and she has to remind him to call her Mommy. He also tries to call dad, “Larry.” Last week, Dominic called dad, “Larry”, and dad told him “no, that is not what you call me.” Dominic responded back, “Mr. Larry.”

Also, mom has been working really hard for several months with Dominic to say “bless you” if someone sneezes. Last week, mom sneezed and without prompting, Dominic said, “bless you!” for the first time!

Way to go Dominic! You make us smile!

Talan, 7 years-old

“Talan has been in many music programs at school throughout the years. The first couple programs he would cover his ears. He would get overwhelmed with all the people and noises. Well, this December they held a Christmas program for his first grade class. Talan stood there with his class singing, dancing and really enjoying himself. At the end of the concert, Talan approached the microphone and wished everyone a happy holiday season. It was very heartwarming to see him overcome the obstacles he has faced in the past. We are very proud of Talan. He has been integrated into a regular 1st grade class and he is doing great!”

Good work Talan! You are making everyone proud!

Thank you to all of the families who contributed stories for the Newsletter. We love reading them!
UPCOMING PROJECT IMPACT WORKSHOP

Project ImPACT is an evidence-based intervention that teaches social communication to children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) ages 18 months to 6 years.

Workshop Dates: May 30-31, 2013
This 2-day workshop is open to providers who would like to use Project ImPACT with children with ASD and related disorders and their families. It will use a combination of lecture, role play, and small group discussion to introduce attendees to the Project ImPACT intervention techniques. Providers will also learn how to use the Project ImPACT curriculum to teach parents of children with autism to promote social communication during daily routines and activities.

If you have any questions regarding the workshop, or would like to be put on our e-mail list to get upcoming registration information, please contact Nikki Bonter at 517-432-8031 or by email at bonterni@msu.edu.

JUMPIN’ JAX FAMILY GATHERING

In November, 2012, we had a wonderful family gathering at Jumpin’ Jax. We were lucky to see families that have participated in our studies, as well as several families that we had met for the first time! It was great to see how the children have grown, and to learn about the children that we had just met. What a great night! Keep your eyes out for our next gathering!