Living with the Spectrum: Autism and Family Life

One Approach to Teaching Family Studies Students about Interdisciplinary Care

Jennifer S. Reinke, PhD, LAMFT, CFLE
University of Wisconsin – Stout
“a cluster of lifelong neurodevelopmental disorders marked by significant qualitative limitations in social interactions, verbal and nonverbal communication, and restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities”

(American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000)
Background

• Spectrum disorder (mild - severe)
• 1 in every 68 births in United States
• “Discovery” attributed to Dr. Leo Kanner, 1943
• Despite many theories, cause(s) of autism are not known
• There is no “cure” for autism

If you have met one person with autism, you have met ONE person with autism.
Characteristics of Autism

Autism core symptoms:
- Social interaction
- Qualitative impairment in communication
- Repetitive behaviors and restricted interests

Common co-occurring diagnoses:
- Intellectual disability
- Speech/language delays
- Adaptive skill deficits
- Attention challenges
- Hyperactivity/impulsivity (ADHD)
- Aggressive behaviors
- Anxiety/depression
- Seizures
- Sleep problems

(Barbaresi, Katusic, & Voigt, 2006)
So What?

- Highly probable students will engage with individuals and families affected by autism
- Family professionals must be knowledgeable about the many care team members involved in supporting families affected by autism
  - What is their role?
  - What is my role?
  - What is the family’s role?
HDFS 370/570: Living with the Spectrum Autism and Family Life

- Theoretical frameworks
- False beliefs about autism
- Impact on family relationships
- Cultural considerations
- Ethical considerations
- Policy issues
- Implications for family practitioners
Small Groups: Case Studies

1) As a group, identify the primary care team members in the scenario

2) Each group member is to assume the role of one of the care team members
   • Take 2 minutes to brainstorm “your” priorities and desired outcomes

3) Hold a care team meeting! 😊
   • Make sure that each team member’s voice is heard
   • Work together to identify a solution that everyone can agree on
Small Groups: Debrief

• What might be rewarding about being a member of an interdisciplinary team?
• What might be challenging?
• What are your reactions to this activity?
  – Did it help you further clarify your role as a family professional?
  – Did it further muddy your role as a family professional?
  – How might this activity be similar to or different from a “real” care team meeting?
Does it Work?

• Expressed deepened appreciation for rewards and challenges in addressing stakeholders’ interests
• Demonstrated critical thinking about role as a family professional
• Expressed confidence in applying an interdisciplinary approach across settings


Contact Information

Jennifer S. Reinke, PhD, LAMFT, CFLE
Assistant Professor
University of Wisconsin – Stout
Human Development and Family Studies
Phone: 715-232-1405
Email; reinkej@uwstout.edu