



ORAL PRESENTATION

Autism parent support group

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Abstract

Introduction: Receiving a diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder for one's child can be a painful experience for parents, that may require an adjustment of their beliefs, feelings, and expectations regarding the child so that they continue coping with raising their child. Because of the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders, parents' psychological adjustment can be especially challenging. Literature shows higher stress in parents of children with autism once compared to parents of children with other developmental disabilities. These findings must raise the clinicians awareness to improve methods of supporting families of children with autism.

Objectives: Provide information to parents about the characteristics of this disorder, advising them about the resources and interventions available and at the same time allowing them to share their concerns with other parents facing similar difficulties. These groups enable parents to increase their knowledge, skills and competencies needed to directly deal with their children, sometimes facing stressful events, which shows to increase the parent's self-confidence and self-assurance.

Methods: The authors with this work briefly present a parenting group model applied in the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Department of Centro Hospitalar do Porto.

Results: Children's family with autism spectrum disorders participate in a group during 6 sessions (twice a month), that covers several topics, such as interventions, medication, social support, family stress, and counts with the contribution from the different elements of the multidisciplinary team involved in this intervention process (child psychiatrist, psychologist, paediatrician, social worker and occupational therapist).

Discussion: In-depth investigation in this area must be done to understand the best approach to the support of these high risk families. Randomized controlled trials of group intervention are required in order to confirm the effectiveness of these interventions.

Conclusions: Groups for parents of children with Autism can be an approach to the high stress levels of these families and therefore professionals should develop efforts to provide them the best support.

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