

# Sharing Developmental Concerns with Parents



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# What professionals are in our audience today?



- Physicians?
- Social Workers?
- Psychologists?
- Teachers?
- Speech-Language Pathologists?
- Occupational Therapists?
- School Counselors?
- Others?

# Helping Families Listen to and Work With Feedback about their Children



Why can this be a challenge for families?

We have to respect the parenting experience they  
may be facing...

We have to listen too...

# Families may be hoping...



# Research on the Parenting Experience



## Review of Current Research on Parents of Children with Autism (Pisula et al., 2003)

- Profound stress experience
- Stress Profile
  - Atypical Child Behaviors
  - Lack of Knowledge about Child's Problems and Developmental Challenges

# Research on the Parenting Experience



- There are a few studies looking at the positives of autism parenting...(Kayfitz, Gragg & Orr, 2010)
- Parents with less parenting stress reported more positive experiences
  - Sample experiences
    - ✦ Learning through challenges
    - ✦ Source of happiness and fulfillment
    - ✦ Source of strength and family closeness

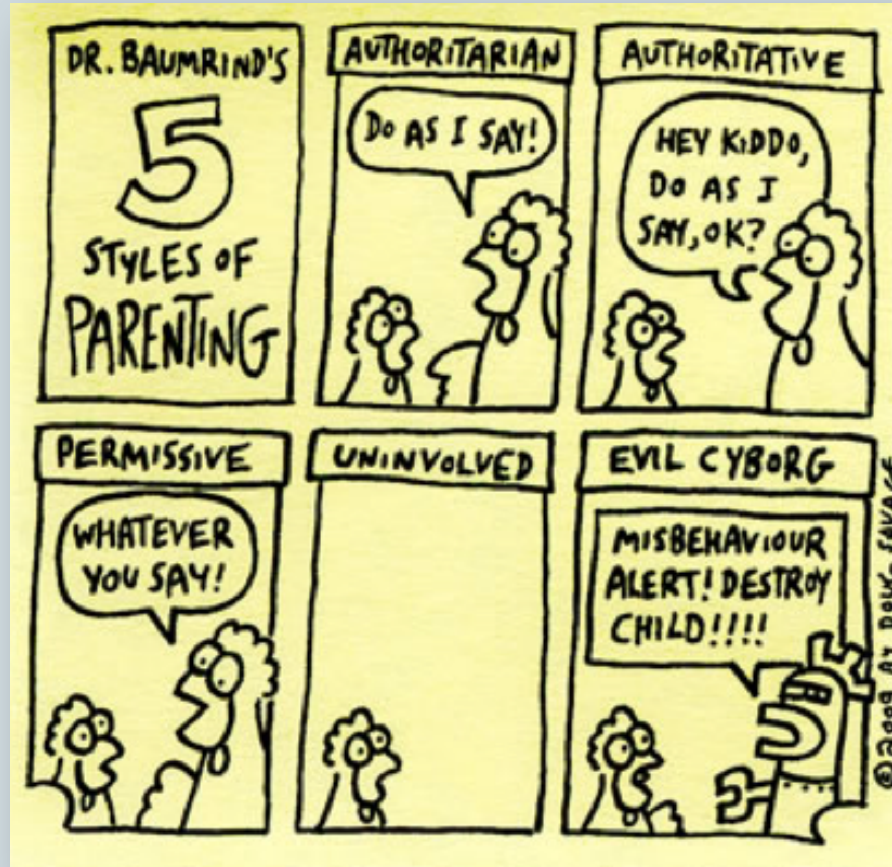
# Helping Families Listen



What approach is a good match for a particular family?

- Have a set of possible approaches
- Know your family
- Watch and Listen for cues.

# What is this family's style?





# Helping Families Listen



- Begin and end your discussion on a positive note
- What are child's strengths, things he does well?

# What Content?



- What has taken place in the assessment process (even if informal)
- What conclusions you have reached
- Why?
- Important for family and child to ask questions
- Important for family and child to provide information
  - either to confirm or disagree

# Summarizing Where to Go from Here



- **Ways Forward**
  - The most important part of the contact
- **Leave on a Positive Note**
- **Brief and Clear Plan for Next Steps**

# Wonderful CDC “Tips” Sheet



- [http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents\\_pdfs/TipsTalkingParents.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/TipsTalkingParents.pdf)

The screenshot shows a Safari browser window with the address bar containing the URL [http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents\\_pdfs/TipsTalkingParents.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/TipsTalkingParents.pdf). The page title is "Tips for Talking with Parents". The content includes a sample conversation between a teacher and a parent, and a list of tips for these conversations.

## Tips for Talking with Parents

**If you suspect a child has a developmental delay and believe a parent is unaware of it, this sample conversation can give you ideas of how to talk with the child's parent.**

Good afternoon, Ms. Jones. We love having Taylor in class. He really enjoys story time and follows directions well. He is working hard on coloring but is having a difficult time and gets frustrated. I have also noticed a few things about Taylor's social skills that I would like to discuss with you. Do you have a few minutes? *[Cite specific behaviors and when they occurred.]*

Have you noticed any of these at home?

Ms. Jones, here is some information that shows the developmental milestones for a child Taylor's age. Let's plan to meet again next week *[set a time]* after you've had time to read it and think it over. *[Provide information such as the fact sheets.]*

Ms. Jones, I know this is hard to talk about, and I may be over-reacting, but I think it would also be a good idea to talk to Taylor's doctor about this in the next few weeks. You can take this information with you when you go. The doctor can give Taylor a "developmental screening" which can answer some questions about his progress and whether you need to do anything else. Maybe there is no problem, but getting help early can make a big difference if there is, so it's really important to find out for sure. Let me know if you need anything from me for that doctor's appointment!

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. We'll all do our best to help Taylor. He is a great kid!

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### Tips for these conversations with parents:

- Highlight some of the child's strengths, letting the parent know what the child does well.
- Use materials like the "Learn the Signs. Act Early." fact sheets. This will help the parent know that you are basing your comments on facts and not just feelings.
- Talk about specific behaviors that you have observed in caring for the child. Use the milestones fact sheets as a guide. Example: If you are telling the parent "I have noticed that Taylor does not play pretend games with the other children," you could show the parent the line on the milestones fact sheet for a four-year-old that says that a child that age "engages in fantasy play."
- Try to make it a discussion. Pause a lot, giving the parent time to think and to respond.
- Expect that if the child is the oldest in the family, the parent might not have experience to know the milestones the child should be reaching.
- Listen to and watch the parent to decide on how to proceed. Pay attention to tone of voice and body language.

# CDC “Tips” Suggests 2 Alternatives



- 1. You suspect a child has developmental differences, but parent seems unaware
- 2. Parent approaches you with concerns

# Parent seems unaware



- Good afternoon, Ms. Jones. We love having Taylor in class. He really enjoys story time and follows directions well. He is working hard on coloring but is having a difficult time and gets frustrated. I have also noticed a few things about Taylor's social skills that I would like to discuss with you. Do you have a few minutes? [Cite specific behaviors and when they occurred.]
- Have you noticed any of these at home?

# Parent seems unaware



- Ms. Jones, I know this is hard to talk about, and I may be over-reacting, but I think it would also be a good idea to talk to Taylor's doctor about this in the next few weeks. You can take this information with you when you go. The doctor can give Taylor a "developmental screening" which can answer some questions about his progress and whether you need to do anything else. Maybe there is no problem, but getting help early can make a big difference if there is, so it's really important to find out for sure. Let me know if you need anything from me for that doctor's appointment!
- Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. We'll all do our best to help Taylor. He is a great kid!

# Parent Approaches You



- Mrs. Smith, you wanted to speak with me privately about Taylor?
- [Listen to her concerns. See if she has noticed the same behaviors you have, and share examples that are the same as or different from hers.]
- I am glad to know we are both on the same page. I have some information that might help you when you're watching Taylor at home this week. This fact sheet shows the developmental milestones for his age. Each child develops at his or her own pace, so Taylor might not have met all these milestones; it's worth taking a closer look. Let's meet again next [set a date] after you've had time to read this and think about it.



# Parent Approaches You



- I also think it would be a good idea to talk to Taylor's doctor about this in the next few weeks. You can take this information with when you go. The doctor can give Taylor a "developmental screening" which can answer some questions about his progress and whether you need to do anything else. Let me know if you need anything from me for that doctor's appointment. Thank you for talking with me today. We'll all do our best to help Taylor. He is a great kid!

Let's evaluate the CDC's scripts...

What do you think?

# Additional CDC Little Tips



- Use fact sheets
- Discuss specific behaviors
- Make it a discussion, not a lecture
- Expect that for an oldest or only child, parent may not have experience with milestones
- Remind parent that you care for children and want their child to do their best

Another Source...

National Association of  
School Psychologists Listserv

# From NASP listserve...

## Delivering News to Parents



- Private discussion, with time for questions
- Use parents' observations of their child to point out what they already know
- Write down terms used by professionals
- Talk about what child can do and learn (what will they need to help them; what their progress may be)

# From NASP listserve...

## Delivering News to Parents



- Acknowledge the child and family as individuals, not category or disability
- Encourage family to educate themselves
- Point out the unique roles that parents play
- Point out importance of caring for selves and relationship of their well being of their child's

# What are some of your anxieties or fears about approaching families?



- My examples
- Your ideas
- And...what may be some of their anxieties about working with professionals?

# Rebecca Grau's Favorite Websites for Sharing Concerns with Parents



- <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/AutismChampion/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/concerned.html>
- <http://nichcy.org/babies/overview/>
- [https://www.firstsigns.org/concerns/parent\\_doc.htm](https://www.firstsigns.org/concerns/parent_doc.htm)
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