INITIAL REACTION TO DIAGNOSIS OF AUTISM

GOALS OF THE EXERCISE
1. Provide parents with the opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns soon after learning that the client has been diagnosed with autism.
2. Assist parents in addressing the challenges involved in raising a child with autism.
3. Increase the parents’ awareness of their own fears and worries about raising a child with autism.
4. Eliminate parents’ feelings of shame and guilt about having a child with autism.
5. Eliminate parents’ denial surrounding the client’s autism.
6. Assist parents in gaining a healthy acceptance of the client’s autism.

ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THIS EXERCISE MAY BE MOST USEFUL
- Attachment Disorder
- Mental Retardation

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCESSING THIS EXERCISE WITH THE CLIENT
This assignment is designed for the parents who have recently learned that their child has autism. One of the primary goals of the assignment is to provide the parents with the opportunity to begin to open up and share their thoughts and feelings about raising a child with autism. The parents are also given the opportunity to share their fears, concerns, or worries about how the client’s autism will impact not only themselves, but their other children as well. The parents’ responses to the questions can help provide insight into whether they are experiencing any denial and/or have developed unrealistic expectations (either good or bad) regarding the client’s future development. If the parents have developed any unrealistic expectations, then the therapist may need to educate the parents further about the diagnosis of autism. Ultimately, it is hoped that the parents will gain a healthy perspective and acceptance of the client’s autism. The exercise concludes with the parents identifying the resources that they feel will help them cope with raising an autistic child.
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When a parent learns that his/her child has been diagnosed with autism, this news can produce a mixture of emotions. Some parents may experience anger, fearfulness, or distress, while other parents may feel relieved because some of their questions have been answered. Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. Your responses will help your therapist understand your thoughts and feelings about raising a child who has been diagnosed with autism.

1. When did you first begin to suspect that your child might have autism?

________________________________________________________________________

2. What signs or symptoms of autism does your child frequently exhibit?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. What is the severity of your child's autistic symptoms? (please check the appropriate space)

   ___ borderline   ___ mild   ___ moderate   ___ severe

4. What was your initial response after learning that your child has autism?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. What was your spouse's initial response after learning that your child has autism?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. How have your child's symptoms of autism affected your life?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

7. How have your child's symptoms of autism affected your spouse?

________________________________________________________________________
8. How has your child’s autism affected your other children?


9. Before learning that your child had autism, how did you feel about your own parenting abilities?


10. What are your greatest fears or worries about raising a child with autism?


11. What do you perceive as being the biggest challenges in raising a child with autism?


12. What services do you think your child will need in the future?


13. In raising a child with autism, it helps for the family to receive support or help from other family members, friends, or agencies. Who can provide support for your family and you? What type of support would you like to receive for your family?


