

**Educational Content Related to Feeding Difficulties in Children with Autism and Other
Developmental Disabilities**

Emily Sparks

Department of Occupational Therapy, Texas Woman's University

6923: Occupational Therapy Doctoral Capstone Project

Dr. Tanya Elizabeth Benjamin

April 28, 2024

Introduction

This capstone project is designed to focus on education for pediatric feeding difficulties in children with Autism or other developmental disabilities. Specifically, the project's purpose is to create educational resources for parents and caregivers to use for their own knowledge in order to decrease stress at mealtimes. This need for education was first identified through an extensive literature review that focused on effective strategies to be used when treating a feeding difficulty. The literature states that challenges associated with feeding can affect the family unit, meal time, and can cause parent/caregiver burden or stress (Curtin et al., 2015). Furthermore, parent education has been shown to be an important factor in the success of a child's feeding during mealtime (Carpenter & Garfinkle, 2021). Thus, the project aimed to decrease parental stress through the use of educational resources.

Processes/Methodology

In order to complete this capstone project, the student paired with an agency mentor who specializes in the area of pediatric feeding. The mentor is the owner and founder of Greater Heights Pediatric Therapy, a clinic that often treats patients with a feeding difficulty. The student first conducted a needs assessment in order to determine what the greatest concerns of parents and caregivers were. An open-ended survey was disseminated to parents that asked a variety of questions regarding their child's feeding difficulty. The results were then coded and analyzed to further help the student narrow down the topics to include in the educational resources. Through the first half of the project, the student observed occupational therapy feeding sessions with the agency mentor in order to gain specific knowledge about pediatric feeding. Additionally, the student conducted independent research to further learn about the topic and to gather material that was pertinent to the resources. The student was able to use clinical reasoning skills to

determine the best material to be used in the resources, as they were a synthesis of the information gathered from the needs assessment, observations, independent research, and mentorship from the agency and faculty mentor, that was then organized in written documents. Furthermore, the project was created through the lens of sensory processing, as this is a crucial component of the feeding process and a specialization of occupational therapy (Trewin et al., 2022).

Outcomes

Once the research and categorization of data was completed, four educational infographics and four corresponding videos were created. These videos and infographics each covered a specific topic including: background information explaining what a feeding difficulty is, oral motor skills and postural stability, sensory processing, and tips and strategies. They were also designed to be easy to follow and to be easily accessible. The resources were disseminated to the capstone agency for them to be then distributed to parents and caregivers of the target population. The capstone agency will now be able to use these resources anytime they need to provide education to parents and caregivers. This project reflects the need for practicing occupational therapists to continue to provide ongoing education to parents or their clients that they are treating. Additionally, the student was also able gain knowledge on a specific topic and fine tune research and clinical reasoning skills.

Conclusion

By completing this capstone project, the student will be better prepared to enter into the field, as they now have specialized knowledge in a specific area and focus. These skills can be used in daily practice and when interacting with clients and their family members. Furthermore,

the capstone agency now has several resources to be used at their discretion anytime education on a feeding difficulty is needed.

References

- Carpenter, K. M., & Garfinkel, M. (2021). Home and parent training strategies for pediatric feeding disorders: The caregivers' perspective. *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 9(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.15453/2168-6408.1725>
- Curtin, C., Hubbard, K., Anderson, S. E., Mick, E., Must, A., & Bandini, L. G. (2015). Food selectivity, mealtime behavior problems, spousal stress, and family food choices in children with and without autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 45(10), 3308–3315. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-015-2490-x>
- Trewin, A., Mailloux, Z., & Schaaf, R. C. (2022). Evaluation of mealsense©: A sensory integration–based feeding support program for parents. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 76(3). <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2022.046987>