

**Support Groups for Parents of Children with Disabilities**

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## **Introduction**

Many parents of children with disabilities are lost within a newfound diagnosis that they seldom understand and without adequate support their own health and well-being can be compromised. These parents have a need for support and community to navigate the stress related to the overwhelming amount of information they receive, life changes they may need to adapt to, future challenges they may face, and the resources available for their children. Research has found that support groups influence parental well-being. They ease parents' sense of isolation and peripherality,<sup>1</sup> ease uncertainties and foster a sense of empowerment,<sup>2</sup> reduce stress,<sup>2-4</sup> reduce depression,<sup>3</sup> and reduce anxiety.<sup>3-4</sup> The purpose of this capstone project was to assist parents of children with disabilities with improving their quality of life. The focused areas of study include leadership, program and policy development, and education. Furthermore, the specialty topic was program development.

## **Processes/Methodology**

The plan for this capstone experience was for the student to help with the development of an occupation-based program that included opportunities to support parents' psychosocial needs and help them develop the strategies and skills necessary to improve their quality of life. To address this, the student first administered pre-test items to identify parents' opinions on how capable they felt with their ability to support their child with their needs in the following areas: diagnosis, feeding, speech, sense of community, community/school/government assistance, sensory processing and emotional regulation, school advocacy. This initial data promoted the student's knowledge to help develop a needs assessment and curriculum utilizing occupational-based strategies for each one-on-one parent support meeting. Subjects then participated in weekly or bi-weekly one-on-one parent support meetings for 8 weeks. After 8 weeks of intervention, post-test items were administered to promote the student's knowledge on the effectiveness of the one-on-one parent support meeting in improving parents' quality of life.

## **Outcomes**

A performance goal, professional reasoning goal, and experience goal were created that were unique to the student's focused area of study and desired specialization of this capstone experience. The performance goal was to create a program guide for the capstone agency to utilize for future support group meetings after the capstone experience ended. The outcome was that the student identified parents' needs to develop occupational-based strategies, education training presentations, and community resources that effectively addressed parents' needs and improved their quality of life. The professional reasoning goal was to apply evidence-based practice process to translate two recommended strategies for support group design and assess effectiveness of both to determine the best strategy for the capstone agency. The outcome was that the student analyzed the literature and developed a synthesis matrix to identify the themes in support groups that parents perceived as valuable and their effectiveness on improving parents' quality of life. The experience goal was to independently plan, implement, and evaluate one-on-one parent support meetings and apply modifications to future support group meetings. The outcome was that the student identified parents' needs and developed a curriculum utilizing occupational-based strategies for each one-on-one parent support meeting.

## **Conclusion**

Through this capstone experience the student found that parents' opinion of feeling fully capable and satisfied with their ability to support their child with their needs prior and after the one-on-one parent support meetings primarily increased. Also, the differences in parents' need for help to support their child with their needs prior and after the one-on-one parent support meetings primarily decreased. These findings suggest that providing parents with one-on-one parent support meetings that focus on occupation-based strategies may counteract feelings of inadequacy. Ultimately, this may positively influence long-term outcomes of their child and the parents' overall quality of life.

## References

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