

HOW AUTISM PARENTS CAN BENEFIT FROM COUPLES COUNSELING

TOP-DOWN APPROACH

Kids with ASD tend to be extremely sensitive to the emotions of those around them. When parents are well-adjusted and able to regulate their own emotions, the affected child does better. However, couples counseling is often last on the list of the myriad of therapies parents go to. Put it first, and other things may fall into place easier.

PROCESSING THE GRIEF

An autism diagnosis is described in the research as one of the most difficult experiences for a parent, and can even result in post-traumatic stress reactions. For a couple, the grief can either bring them closer together or create a wedge. Processing this grief both separately and together is key.

GETTING ON THE SAME PAGE

Many couples have difficulty communicating effectively, especially when they disagree and emotions are running high. Being able to discuss what doctors, therapies, and educational interventions to pursue, when to stop them, and how to schedule them into a family's life can all result in disagreements that leave couples feeling disconnected. Learning to respectfully disagree and hear each other's point of view are crucial skills in the autism parenting world.

ADJUSTING TO THE NEW NORMAL

Perhaps the most difficult part of it all is figuring out how your home life and relationships change due to the autism diagnosis. I call this "creating your new normal" and it must be done intentionally in order to cope effectively and stay connected to your partner.

FINDING A COUNSELOR

If you can find a licensed therapist who has "walked the walk" and understands your issues first-hand, hire them and put them on speed-dial! But if not, a licensed clinician who works in the areas of child development, grief, trauma and even coping with chronic illness will have the skill set necessary to provide quality counseling. Most importantly, find a clinician with whom you are both comfortable and make the commitment to go regularly.