

Autism: Beyond the Diagnosis

Program Description

As the parent of a 38-year-old son diagnosed with autism at the age of 2, and a professional working in the field of autism supporting families for the last 20 years, Ms. Palmer provides a unique perspective on the autism experience. With humor and touching stories from her own experience, Ms. Palmer will discuss what a parent may experience when their child is first diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, describing the changes in day-to-day life as well as the emotions a parent must balance as they learn to be an advocate for their child in the schools and in the community.

The presenter will discuss the surprising consolations that many parents discover in this experience. This includes the helpful connection to other parents and family members with similar experiences and the support these relationships can give, not only for the autism-related challenges in our lives but in the challenges that life presents that have nothing to do with autism. Ms. Palmer will also focus on the consolations that come from developing relationships with incredible professionals on our journey with our loved one with ASD and the qualities of the professionals that helped her family the most.

In preparing our children for their future adult lives, the presenter will emphasize the importance of teaching self-advocacy skills including the ability to make choices and to ask for help. She will also describe the importance of learning the functional skills that are necessary for individuals to have as they transition out of school to living and working in the community. Ms. Palmer will describe how individuals with ASD are life-long learners, and that the future will often bring unexpected accomplishments and successes, no matter where the individual may fall on the autism spectrum. She will use the example of her own son, who graduated from a large state university and another young man, who is non-verbal and lives in a residential farm program, to show that the future we fear is often not what we expect, and all of our children can be successful and have a full and happy life. This presentation will be inspiring and helpful to parents and family members as well as professionals and self-advocates.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this workshop, participants should be able to:

1. Describe what a parent experiences when their child is diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Diagnosis.
2. Explain the importance of teaching functional skills in preparing the individual with autism for adulthood.
3. Examine ways to support families who are living with autism.
4. Recognize that individuals with ASD are lifelong learners and the future can hold many possibilities and opportunities.
5. Discuss the consolations and benefits of parenting a child with autism

Target Audience

Human Service Professionals, school personnel, parents or caregivers, and anyone interested in this topic.

Contact Hours

1.5- 3.0 hours

Program Agenda

Consolations that come from getting a diagnosis of ASD for your child

Importance of connections to other families with ASD

Importance of connections to helpful professionals in the field

Qualities of the best professionals

Presenter's son's success story

Success story of another individual with ASD with many more challenges

Hopes and dreams of all parents for their children's adult lives

Why transition to adulthood is so hard

Feelings of parents during time of transition to adulthood

Importance of acceptance and a sense of humor

Making the transition to adulthood successful- Getting organized

Preparing the student

Preparing yourself (the parent)

Faculty

Ann Palmer is a parent of a 38-year-old son with autism, an author and presenter, and a professional having worked with families for close to 30 years. She was the Parent Support Coordinator at the UNC TEACCH Program and the Director of Advocacy and Chapters at the Autism Society of North Carolina. Ann is recently retired from being a faculty member at the Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities (CIDD) at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. She is the author of four books published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Her book, *Realizing the College Dream with Autism or Asperger Syndrome: A Parent's Guide to Student Success* was written about her son's college experience. *Parenting Across the Autism Spectrum: Unexpected Lessons We Have Learned*, was co-authored with Maureen Morrell and was the Autism Society of America's Literary Work of the Year. She is also the author of *A Friend's and Relative's Guide to Supporting the Family with Autism: How Can I Help?* and co-author of her newest book, *Drinking, Drug Use and Addiction in the Autism Community*.