

Surviving and Thriving: Strategies to Support for Families with Children who have Special Needs

Program Description

Families face a wide range of issues and concerns as they strive to provide the best care for their children with special needs. Parents are often overwhelmed when they discover that their child has a special need, and they must adjust their hopes, dreams, and expectations. Besides the concerns common when having children, parents of children with special needs must also deal with additional challenges and demands. Children with special needs can require an overwhelming amount of time, energy, attention, and finances. For some, the ordinary activities of life, including participating in the work force or attending a parent meeting, require a high degree of organization and juggling. Having a child with special needs can have a profound impact on the entire family. Having the support to meet these challenges is essential if children with disabilities and their families are to reach their full potential. This workshop explores the stages of adjustment that families often experience and identifies types of services and resources that strengthen and support families with children who have special needs.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this program, participants will be able to:

- 1) Demonstrate an understanding of the impacts of raising children with special needs from the perspective of families.
- 2) List strategies to better support families with children who have special needs.
- 3) Provide an overview of formal and informal services and supports available in North Carolina for families with children who have special needs.
- 4) Explain the roles of health care providers and other service providers in helping families to assess their needs and to identify sources of support and services to ensure family well-being.

Target Audience

Service providers, clinicians, teachers, families, community members

Contact Hours

3.0 to 6.0 hours

Program Agenda

9:00 AM Welcome and Introductions
Changing Expectations
Warm Up Activity: Job Change
Welcome to Holland
Sharing Our Stories/ Impact of a Diagnosis
Steps to Acceptance
Activity: Brainstorming
Parental and Family Stress
Long and Winding Road
Reactions from other people in families' lives

- 10:45AM *BREAK*
- 11:00 AM Supporting Families with Children who have Special Needs
Formal Supports
Navigating the Service System
Central Directory of Resources
- 12:00 NOON *LUNCH*
- 1:00 PM Informal Supports
Video: Washington State Parent to Parent Program
Parent-to-Parent Support
Sibling Support
Community Support
Local Family Support Network Programs
- 2:30PM *BREAK*
- 2:45 PM How Service Providers Make a Difference
Activity: Small Groups
Activity: Problem Solving
- 4:00PM Wrap Up

Faculty

Laurel Powell, MS is the Program Manager for the Family Support Program and the Family Support Network of NC University Office at the UNC School of Social Work. Laurel has worked with the IDD population and their support systems for over 20 years in many capacities. Laurel has expertise in building systems that support individuals with IDD and those who are neurodivergent. Laurel has extensive experience with crisis prevention and intervention planning for people with IDD and trauma histories as well as people with IDD who have co-occurring mental health challenges. Laurel's passions lie in supporting people with IDD and neurodivergence in advocating for their needs and utilizing positive psychology practices to build more accepting and affirming communities. Laurel has a degree in Special Education from UNC Wilmington and a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology from the School of Medicine at UNC Chapel Hill.

Barbara Leach is a Family Support Specialist and Special Projects Coordinator. She joined the Family Support Program at UNC, School of Social Work in 2005. She has over 30 years of experience as a child and family advocate for families with children who have mental illnesses, developmental disabilities, and other special needs. In addition to providing information and referral for families and providers, Ms. Leach serves as a family advisor on multiple state and national committees that work collaboratively to transform systems so that they better meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families. She presents extensively on topics relating to supporting families, family advocacy, family engagement, family/provider partnership,

cultural competence, and systems change. Ms. Leach is passionate about lifting the voices of diverse families and to promoting families as partners to co-create and develop services and systems that improve outcomes so that individuals with disabilities can live their best lives – healthy, independent, and self-determined.