

Together to achieve resilience using family-centered approach

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During the last three years, the number of occupational therapists working in the home environment has increased due to recognizing home-based interventions as crucial in achieving therapy goals in early intervention with children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In order to establish strong family resilience after the child was diagnosed, the therapist needs to apply a variety of skills for maintaining family well-being. Since occupational therapy in the community is still new in Croatia, therapists need to be resilient in order to prove their role in home-based therapy interventions which will be discussed in this poster. Literature suggests a family-centered approach in a home environment working with families of children diagnosed with ASD as an effective occupational therapy approach. In this poster, the authors will provide techniques used for achieving goals in the home environment using a family-centered approach as well as proving the need for occupational therapy which, in Croatia, is still something therapists struggle with. Moreover, this poster will provide an evaluation of parents' satisfaction with a family-centered approach during 10 months of therapy. Finally, the authors of this paper will suggest tools for improving occupational therapy skills using a family-centered approach.

CROATIAN UNION OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR AUTISM (CUAA)

A non-governmental organization, working to promote the status and quality of life of people with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families.

CUAA is an umbrella organization of 12 associations from Croatia and has been active since 1979. It was founded by the parents of children with ASD.

MOM & DAD - KNOW HOW & WHEN

A project with the goal of educating, providing support and giving structured care for children with ASD. It is a three year project which supports 24 families, 8 by every year of implementation. Families receive support from psychologist and special teacher through structured workshops and occupational therapist through direct home support. Also, it is provided legal help from the lawyer. Each family have a 10 month support from all experts.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST AS AN PROJECT LEADER:

During piloting this project, occupational therapist has been recognized as an important expert in working with families with children with ASD because of a specific approach that makes occupational therapists different from other experts. As the main activity in the project takes place in the home environment, it has been logical to engage occupational therapist to provide support directly to families and help them achieve their goals in areas of self-care, productivity and leisure. With the constant contact with families, occupational therapist receives important informations of what is needed to be improved in the system, as well as the community.

Evaluation of the children and their families included in the project during 10 months of implementation

At the beginning of the work of each family, an assessment was conducted to plan therapeutic goals and to make individualized plan for each child. At the end of ten months of involvement in therapeutic work, final assessment was conducted to determine progress. It has been estimated that progress has been made in all development areas in all children included in the project. Progress has been recognized also by the parents which stated that after given support, they can understand their child's needs, know how to communicate with them, make rules of behaviour and enjoy their common activities as family.

Conclusion

Family centered approach is highly needed in Croatia as early intervention programs to improve family participation using the family-centered philosophy as a guide. Family is the most important element in development of a child and it must be in central focus during the assessment, decision making process and implementation. In order to achieve their resilience, family needs support from experts, but also from the whole environment and to achieve that, while working with families, it is recommended that occupational therapist is recognizable as an important expert working with families and implementing family -centered approach.

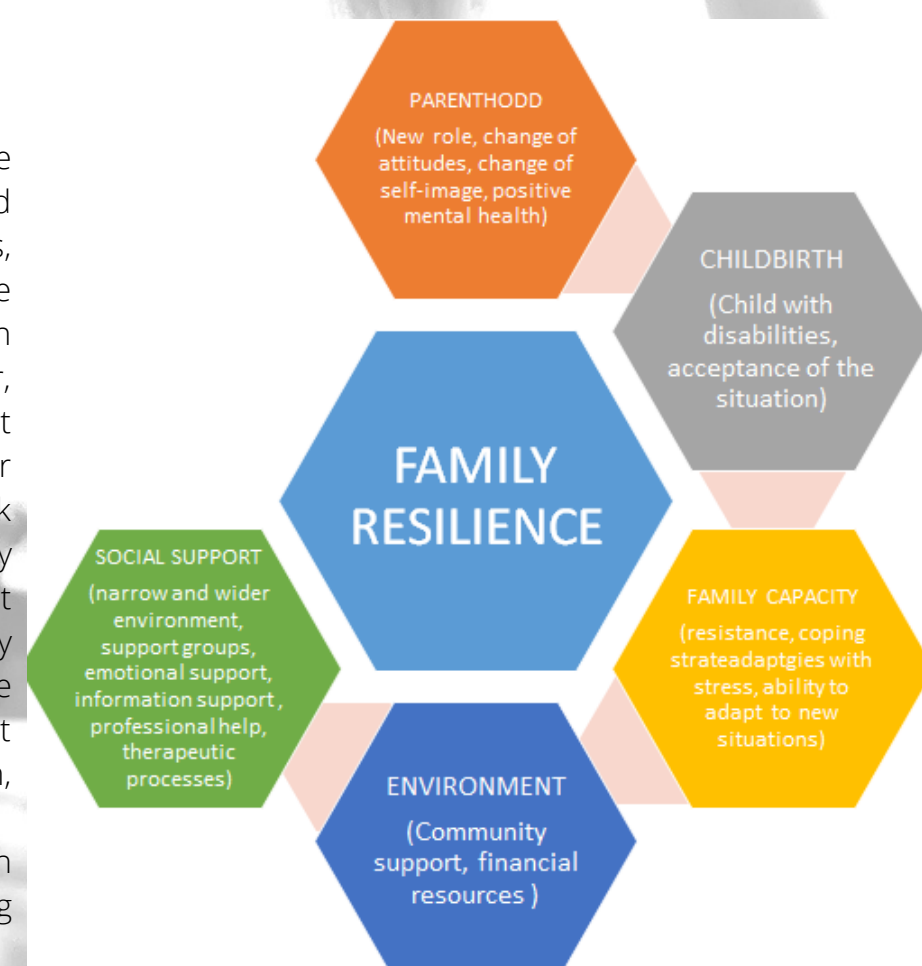
Stressful event as an impact on resilience

Many parents of children with disabilities experience high rates of stress. Parents of children with disabilities show higher rates of depression, health problems, and lower quality of life. This stress shown in parents has a direct impact on a child's physical and socio-emotional development. They can also impact family resilience. It's important that occupational therapists know how to implement recommendations, to work towards developmental goals and to address a child's developmental goals from a family-centered perspective. It is important that occupational therapists understand how stressful event (having a child with disabilities) impacts on previous family functioning.

Family

The most important element in a child's development because family members are the constant factor in the care of the child and are most familiar with the child's needs. As occupational therapists, we need to include family as the central focus during the assessment, planning, decision-making process and implementation phases of therapy (family training, counselling, home visits). Further, it will be better if the therapy process is provided in an environment that supports typical participation of the children in their home or community. In a family centered approach, sometimes there is a link why parents are unable to follow through with occupational therapy home programs into their daily routines. Some studies found that home programs prescribed by the therapist were not easily implemented in the family's natural environment because the mothers felt they lacked the skills and knowledge to carry them out and they did not want to take on a therapist-like role (Thompson, 1998).

If families are included in the treatment planning and intervention process they will be more motivated to implement the planning process in their home.



How to achieve family-centered approach in Croatia?

In Croatia, occupational therapy mostly takes place in cabinets, which also contributes to lower skills of parents to implement therapist's advice in the home environment and is also a reason for having difficulties in implementing specific activities in their daily routines. A lot of occupational therapists are still child-centered, focusing on child needs rather than family needs because traditionally, laws supported a child-centered approach that viewed the child as a separate entity from the family. One of the studies about social satisfaction, which is provided in Croatia, says that the most practical satisfaction comes from a partner, family, neighborhood, friends and coworkers, not from professional help (Leutar, Oršulić, 2014). Parents see difficulties in the system: lack of timely support and information, unprofessionalism and organizational difficulties, but also they see the importance and need of professional help. When they get a child with developmental disabilities they want system to support, advice and information. One of the crucial things is that they want professional help in their own home.

