



Building Bridges, Empowering Families: A Leadership Program for parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

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ABSTRACT

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The current research focused on teaching leadership skills to parents that have children diagnosed with ASD. The study background originated from the dire of need of helping and educating parents to handle effectively the adverse challenges of symbiosis with an individual with ASD and author's personal interest, after attending a leadership program, to develop a leadership program of educating parents. This study aimed to document parents' knowledge on different leadership skills such as empathy, collaboration, problem-solving, responsibility, and communication. The second step was to implement the leadership program that includes strategies, workshops, and activities. The final objective was to document the outcome of this program regarding parents' behavior and the overall effectiveness of this project.

The situation of this study was never conducted before in the Greek context, whereas one team of parents that had children with ASD was the sample, therefore the selected strategy of research was a case study. For the aforementioned reasons, qualitative data method was selected, and the use of partly quantitative data were utilized. Quantitative method was implemented in the form of anonymous parental questionnaire to document and evaluate the knowledge of the parents around leadership skills and how they are handling challenging situations. Moreover, a second survey was administered in the end of the program to evaluate the knowledge that parents acquired and address their overall experience. A semi-structured interview was employed to assess parents existing knowledge and the address the challenges they face in their daily routine.

In this case study, implementing a leadership program to parents that have children with ASD was considered successful. It was found that this leadership program helped parents to trust and include in a more engaging way other family members in the decision-making process and felt more confident when they handled stressful and emotional adverse situations. Results have also shown that parents were taught how to establish communication with their children by using concise and short sentences. Future research suggestions should expand the sample size to 100 parents and this could strengthen the validity of the findings.

Key words: Leadership skills, parents' training, ASD, crisis management, communication

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	6
1.1	Research questions	7
1.2	Research structure	8
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.1	Why educating parents with children with ASD?	9
2.2	An overview of parent education programs	10
2.3	The impact of parenting in child development	12
2.4	Challenges faced by parents of children with ASD	14
3	PARENTAL LEADERS	17
3.1	Essential leadership skills, strategies and activities that enhance parental training	18
3.1.1	Communication.....	21
3.1.2	Strategies for developing communication skills	22
3.1.3	Collaboration	24
3.1.4	Strategies for developing collaboration skills	26
3.1.5	Problem-solving.....	29
3.1.6	Strategies for developing problem-solving skills	31
3.1.7	Responsibility	34
3.1.8	Strategies to promote responsibility Skills	36
3.1.9	Empathy	38
3.1.10	Strategies that promote empathy skills	39
3.2	The financial and psychological impact of ASD on families and society.....	40
3.3	Summary of literature review.....	42
4	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	44
4.1	Research method	44
4.2	Data collection and analysis.....	45
4.3	Anonymous parental questionnaire	47
4.4	Leadership program parental experience survey	47
4.5	Interviews conducted	48
5	PRACTICAL CASE STUDY: A LEADERSHIP PROGRAM FOR PARENTS WITH ASD	50
5.1	Learning objectives of the program	50
5.2	The beginning	51
5.3	Actions taken and process development.....	52
5.4	Structure of the leadership program.....	54
5.5	Implementing the leadership program.....	57
5.6	Practical research conducted	78

5.7	Parents' perspective: anonymous questionnaire results	78
5.8	Interview results	84
5.9	Leadership program parental experience survey	93
6	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	98
6.1	Recommendations for future studies and limitations	103
6.2	Personal reflections.....	104
7	REFERENCES	106
8	APPENDICES.....	123

ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
SEN	Special educational needs

1 INTRODUCTION

The current research topic was selected based on the student's own interest in teaching leaderships skills to parents with children with autism spectrum disorder. As a special education teacher, all children regardless age or condition can be educated and trained respectively. Parents who have children with ASD, struggle in everyday life with the upcoming adversaries.

To support these kinds of parents, a leadership program specialized to equip them with skills such as cultivating communication between the parent and their offspring, vision skills that will appoint the parent as a leader that will effectively lead the way to the whole process of growing up a child with difficulties. Specifically, the program aimed to equip parents with leadership skills such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, responsibility, and empathy.

This thesis will focus on investigating, training parents with applicable knowledge and evaluating the parents' knowledge before and after participating this leadership program. Particular in Greece, there have not been any prior leadership program for parents with children with disabilities according to the literature review on scholarly websites. The current program was conducted by the author and a team of professionals in a primary school of Kalamaria, Greece. The author has operated as a Program leader.

The inspiration of creating a leadership program for parents with children with ASD, started in 2015, when the author was a bachelor's degree student in Special education in University of Macedonia and attended a leadership and pedagogical conference in Thessaloniki, Greece. The current program aims to equip parents with practical knowledge on handling tantrums, organizing the daily schedule, collaborating with other parents or professionals, recognising and understanding one's needs and promoting healthy behaviour.

Educating parents with ASD could also be fruitful in terms of finance. A study conducted in the United States revealed that the total cost of ASD is approximately \$4.6 trillion in the last 15 years, where one third of it could be reduced if

parents were trained adequately (Tsiplova et al., 2022, 93). This could save billions of dollars from both the state and the parents.

1.1 Research questions

The purpose of this master's thesis was to implement a leadership program for parents that have children diagnosed with ASD, gather information about the knowledge of parents on assessing and handling disruptive behavior. The objective is to comprehend the potential obstacles that parents with disabilities face in their daily routine, their experiences, their perspectives, assess their current knowledge on handling and managing the maladaptive behavior, and equip them with leadership skills to resolve conflicts in the future.

The main research questions were:

What are the greatest challenges parents, and their children with autism faced in their daily routine?

In what ways did parents resolve stressful situations and conflicts with their children with autism?

How did this leadership program help parents to develop their leadership skills to support the children with autism?

1.2 Research structure

The current research will be structured in a way to provide the reader a better comprehension and insight of the process of the research:

Chapter one is an introduction of the current study, whereas it provides a summary of the topic, research topic and questions and the desirable structure. In addition, it is mentioned the reason the selected topic was chosen and the relevance.

The second chapter includes the literature review of the study. There will be a literature review about parenting programs, the scope behind educating parents and the impact of successful parenting upon upbringing children. Moreover, in the third chapter will be introduced the key principles of leadership skills, and in what way these could benefit parents in handling disruptive behaviour of their children or organizing one's timetable in an efficient way. Lastly in this chapter the fiscal aftermath on the society and the impact on the families will be briefly explained, making it necessary for a parenting leadership program similar to this one, to be broadly implemented.

Chapter four encapsulates an overview of the data collection and the research methodology. A short introduction will briefly explain the research methods selected, the scope of the research and how the data sample was collected and analysed.

The 5th chapter encompasses an insight into the case study of the parenting leadership program that have offspring with ASD. It will be presented shortly the 30-weekend parenting leadership program including instructions, activities, materials and homework for parents. Information will be provided on how the parents were recruited, the venue of the workshops, the rationale (reasons) of creating and implementing such a program.

The last chapter will incorporate the findings and the discussion of the current research. Lastly, appendix include printed material from the workshops, the semi-structured interview questions and surveys.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Why educating parents with children with ASD?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) presents a series of challenges for families. Educating parents who have children with ASD is a complex, yet interesting process. One who provides targeted information and strategies, could empower parents to navigate the specific needs of their children across various domains, cultivating progress and positive outcomes (Dawson-Squibb et al., 2020).

One crucial area for tailored education is understanding a child's learning style. Children with ASD may have specific strengths and weaknesses in areas like auditory processing, visual learning, or motor skills (Begeer et al., 2008). Educating parents on these differences allows them to look for appropriate educational placements and collaborate with teachers to implement individualized learning strategies. For example, a parent might learn about visual supports or assistive technologies that can enhance their child's learning experience in the classroom.

Another area requiring specific focus is social-emotional development (Slade et al., 2018). While social interaction can be challenging for children with ASD, some may also experience heightened anxiety or emotional dysregulation. Programs could equip parents with strategies for managing these challenges based on their child's specific needs. For instance, parents might learn social skills training techniques to help their child develop friendships or explore mindfulness exercises to promote emotional regulation (Lang et al., 2009).

Furthermore, education programs could address specific challenges related to daily living skills. Children with ASD struggle with routines, self-care tasks, or managing transitions. Educating parents on strategies such as visual schedules, positive reinforcement techniques, and breaking down complex tasks into smaller steps can empower them to help their child develop greater independence in daily life (Koegel et al., 2012).

Beyond addressing specific challenges, parent education programs should acknowledge the unique needs of siblings of children with ASD. Siblings could experience feelings of isolation, confusion, or resentment (Stoner & Angell, 2006). Educating parents on strategies for developing positive sibling relationships and ensuring each child feels valued and supported within the family could contribute to a more positive home environment for everyone (Orsmond et al., 2009).

The effectiveness of parent education programs depends on ongoing support and communication. Programs should offer opportunities for parents to ask questions, share experiences, and connect with professionals and other parents facing similar challenges (Chaidi & Drigas, 2020, 198-201). Additionally, training should be readily available and accessible, potentially offered online or in community centers to accommodate busy schedules.

2.2 An overview of parent education programs

Parent schools, or parent training programs aim to help parents improve communication and relationship with their children and equip parents with a range of skills to recognize, define, observe and deal with their children's problem behaviour. These programmes are structured so that they can be implemented by appropriately trained individuals from a variety of disciplines (Wright & Wooden, 2013). Most programmes have a duration of between 4 and 32 weeks. Parents participate in the meetings without the children.

Parent education programmes are divided into three categories:

1. Parent education programmes in which parents are trained by participating in parent groups under the coordination of one or two trained facilitator trainers within a clinic or community setting (Barlow & Steward-Brown, 2000). These programmes are aimed at parents with children with a particular problem or parents whose children are not a problem but wish to learn new ways of parenting.

2. One-to-one parent education programmes, in which parents meet individually with the same therapist, in the context of a clinic or in the parents' home (Lee & Park, 2010). These programmes are mainly therapeutic in nature.

3. Self-education programmes for parents. in which parents manage their own training e.g. by reading a manual or watching videos in a clinic or at home in the absence of a therapist, again for therapeutic purposes (Viola et al., 2020).

Parent education programmes in Greece have been established under the term parenting schools. According to the definition given by M. Chourdaki , "the term parenting schools refers to adult schools of optional attendance, which aim to provide knowledge about the family and the upbringing of children and deal particularly with psychological problems, health and hygiene issues, as well as providing advice on certain personal difficulties (Chourdaki, 2021). Parenting schools are a form of a modern educational institution, which is part of lifelong education, without the familiar shape of other educational institutions. It is aimed at parents, future parents and young people, who, by taking part in groups, are informed on issues relating to the development and needs of the child and the formation of their own psychology (Guryan, Hurst & Kearney, 2008). The main purpose of the parenting schools is the preventive mental hygiene of the individual.

According to Shepard and Carlson (2003), parent education programmes are also a kind of school-to-family intervention, where parents participate in groups under the coordination of a trainer who presents topics from a pre-planned agenda to the whole group of parents rather than to each parent individually. Most of the time is not spent on presenting each topic, but on practicing and actively engaging parents in acquiring specific skills, such as practicing ways to reinforce the child's behavior (Chevalier, 2004, 43-45).

The main objective of parent education programmes is prevention (Peterson, Peterson & Hakansson, 2004). Parent education programmes are intervention programmes within a broader framework of primary mental health prevention in the wider area of health education and health promotion (Ross & Mirowsky, 2011).

Group parent education programmes are one of the various parenting interventions reported in the international literature. Other interventions that may be beneficial to parents include individual parent education programmes, individual counselling, telephone support, brochures that are relevant to a topic and aimed at providing written information to parents, newspaper and magazine articles, books on parenting, materials from reliable sources available on the internet (Dickson, Gregg & Robinson, 2016).

2.3 The impact of parenting in child development

The way parents raise their children is now a key issue of increasing concern to professionals. There is a growing interest in defining successful parenting. McGroder and Hyra, referring also to the work of Shonkoff and Phillips, state that children are influenced by who their parents are for instance in terms of gender, age, origin/ethnicity, intelligence, education, temperament, by what parents know e.g. about child development and behavior, by what parents believe for example attitudes about parenting and what parents value e.g., education, achievement, obedience, interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the expectations from the child age- or developmentally appropriate beliefs about behavior, beliefs about child achievement, and by what parents ultimately do e.g., their actions and style (McGroder. & Hyra, 2009).

The basis of a person's personality and the development of his or her basic core beliefs are developed in the childhood years (Jung, Adler & Hull, 2014, 19-26). At this age, the main agents of education are parents and the family environment that they themselves shape (Pimpa, 2001). However, it would be unfair and scientifically incorrect to conclude that the problems and difficulties of modern children are solely due to the parents, since factors such as the social and economic status of the family influence parental functioning and, by extension, the social, psychological, cognitive and general development of the child.

In addition, factors such as the child's own idiosyncratic characteristics, heredity, school and the educational level of the parents have an impact on the child. Low

economic class parents are more authoritarian and punitive than middle class parents and use more corporal punishment (Boe et al., 2018). Stressors affect parental functioning. However, the relationship between severe stressors and parental functioning is not linear. Even low levels of parental stress can have negative effects on parental functioning. Negative parental attitudes (aggression, rejection, criticism, blaming and belittling) are not synonymous with a lack of concern (Jones et al., 2021).

What mainly affects the child negatively is the level of negative parental attitude, thus the way it is expressed (Shine & Perry, 2010). Abidin reports that, the effect of stressful situations on the parental functioning of parents with limited psychological reserves is significant (Abidin, 2006, 90-98).

It is therefore concluded that, parents themselves live our stressful, competitive times, accept its effects, suffer and become tired. Without realizing it, they transfer their insecure and conflictual psychology to the child and create an inappropriate atmosphere of environment and education (Barroso et al., 2018). Thus, interpersonal relationships of anxiety, aggression, insecurity, overprotection are created, familiar conditions for the formation of the familiar problems and crisis facing the modern family group. Parental behaviour is influenced by many factors (Ostberg & Hagekull, 2000).

Thus, a vicious cycle begins where the negative behaviour of the parents influences the negative behaviour of the child and this in turn negatively influences the behaviour of the parents (Hayes & Watson, 2013, 598-600; Morgan, Robinson & Aldridge, 2005). This parent-child interaction affects not only the social but also the cognitive development of the child (Guajardo, Snyder & Petersen, 2009, 45-48).

In general, positive features of parenting such as caring for the child from an early age characterized by sensitivity, responsibility and involvement, help the child's positive social and emotional adjustment. These characteristics are protective factors in the onset of problems during childhood and adolescence, promote the child's self-esteem, school performance and social development, and reduce the

occurrence of anxiety and depression (Phua, Kee & Meaney, 2020). In contrast, negative features of parenting such as, childcare from an early age characterized by indifference, neglect, strictness, distance, punishment, indiscretion and reactivity, are associated with a variety of problems in child adjustment and the development of emotional and behavioral problems (Mak et al., 2020).

2.4 Challenges faced by parents of children with ASD

The disturbances seen in children usually lead to torsion in the family functioning, with possible problems related to emotional distress on the part of siblings and problems related to the marriage of parents, effective communication, disagreements in how to handle out-of-control behavior and family budget stress (Hartley et al., 2010, 449). Upon especially observing the feelings of the parents of children diagnosed with ASD, frustration and feelings of helplessness will be seen. These individuals have extensive need of receiving information about the disorder in a brief and understandable manner (Chu et al., 2020). It is thought that it is very important both to inform parents about special therapies with the purpose of minimizing the defects seen and to present information on how to use a social support network in order to reduce the stress level in the education of children. (Operto et al., 2021)

Even though ASD is defined on the basis of behavioral symptoms, its effects are not limited to the individual or their behavior. It also places a heavy burden on their families, with resultant stress having a broad effect on all the members of the family unit. These are commonly health, behavioral, societal, economic, educational or religious issues. The diagnosis is often a major crisis that leads to a need for responsibility and a heavy burden of distress for all the family members (Alli, Abdoola & Mupawose, 2015). Especially in the process of adaptation to new conditions, a wide range of parental reactions can be observed that include feelings of disbelief, anger, guilt, embarrassment, fragility, frustration and also major emotional reactions regarding living with such a fact (Shepherd et al., 2020, 1340-1345).

Another crucial aspect of parents has to do with the emotional and psychological perspective of the disorder (Yorke et al., 2018, 3395-3410). If we as a society are

asking parents to increase the hours of structured social skills training their child receives daily, then to achieve this, the parents need to be more physically and mentally able. If there are non-ASD children in the family, they need a more balanced family life, and this means the larger demands on the parents from caring for, educating, and guiding the children with autism need to decrease. There are interventions that can help parents learn to accept the diagnosis of autism, manage their emotions during difficult events, and understand the influence of positive thinking, beliefs, and values on their child's behavior for example, stress inoculation training (Sterret, Shire & Kasari, 2017). However, education must begin with a full understanding of the implications of having a child with a disorder like autism and must start when the child is young (Chaidi & Drigas, 2020).

A recent review of the literature found that the rate of maternal depression and other mental health problems are higher in families of children with ASD than in families of children with Down syndrome, physical disabilities, and no disabilities (Bennett et al., 2012, 91-93). However, as the authors point out, many other systematic and non-systematic reviews concluded that mothers of children with any type of disability were more at risk for developing mental health problems than were mothers of typically developing children. While this is true, the high demands and many behavioral challenges across home, school, and community settings make the stress and associated mental health problems experienced by parents of children with ASD particularly challenging (Kütük et al., 2021, 3-6)

Educating parents about the ways autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may impact their and their child's emotional and psychological well-being is crucial. Once parents understand these issues, they can move on to learning ways to help their child. Parents who know little about autism can easily miss the early signs of ASD (Rutherford et al., 2019). When they have little understanding of how to help their child succeed, they may become frustrated and overwhelmed. Uneducated about how to cope with stress or care for their own needs, parents of children with ASD experience a high level of stress and are at increased risk for depression. (Demšar & Bakracevic, 2023, 998-1000; AlTourah et al., 2020).

On the other hand, financial and time constraints are considered to be hurdles in parents life that have children with ASD. For instance, behavioral treatment, which has been found to produce better results in the most severely affected

children, is generally only offered to families of moderate or high SES due to the prohibitive costs (Zablotsky et al., 2014, 395-398). While a trade with no relative dollar amount is feasible, it generally means sacrificing an income so that one parent can stay at home to take care of the child. Unfortunately, that invariably means depleting financial resources and accumulating significant debt. Programs such as Medicaid, which occasionally offer services at no cost to the family, often have waiting lists or feature other significant limitations (Ntre et al., 2018, 990-993). While clinical trials also offer free treatment, less than 1% of affected children receive treatment through clinical trials, and on average, few clinicians have clinical trial treatment slots (Rodgers et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2020, 478-480)

Families of children with ASD face a unique and complex set of challenges and demands. There is overlap in the literature regarding challenges early interventionists and families believe could be alleviated through greater parent education, including finances, program options, and waiting times (Temple & Reynolds, 2007, 130-135). Families often have to wait at least several months before a child can begin receiving intensive and expensive treatment services. Extensive time and money have to be spent obtaining an ASD diagnosis, therapy often involves time-consuming travel and waitlists, schools often do not provide enough appropriate services, and medical services frequently exclude those with ASD due to severe behavior problems (Smith-Young et al., 2020; Kanne & Bishop, 2021, 140-142)

3 PARENTAL LEADERS

Leadership, traditionally associated with organizational contexts, takes on a unique form within the family unit. Here, parents act as leaders, guiding their children towards responsible adulthood. However, unlike a corporate setting, parental leadership is a multifaceted concept that blends elements of authority, guidance, and emotional support (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011, 21-24). Parental leadership is defined from a multifaceted perspective, encompassing setting direction, fostering growth, leading by example, and fostering open communication.

Firstly, parental leadership involves establishing a clear direction for the family unit. This includes setting expectations for behavior, outlining core values, and establishing routines. Parents create a framework for decision-making, guiding children through ethical dilemmas and navigating complex social situations. For instance, a parent might set a curfew for teenagers, explaining the rationale behind it and the importance of responsible behavior (Lamb, 2012, 99-100). This framework provides a sense of security and stability for children, allowing them to develop a sense of right and wrong while understanding the boundaries that keep them safe.

Furthermore, parental leadership is instrumental in fostering children's growth and development. This extends beyond simply providing for basic needs. It involves creating opportunities for children to learn and explore, encouraging them to develop new skills and interests (Hartman & Harris, 1992, 155-158). Parents act as coaches, offering guidance and support while allowing children to experience the joys and challenges of independent learning. This might involve enrolling a child in extracurricular activities, helping them with challenging homework assignments, or simply creating a space for them to pursue their hobbies (Baumrind, 1996, 410-412). By developing a growth mindset, parents empower their children to become resilient and independent learners, preparing them for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

However, parental leadership goes beyond simply setting the course and encouraging growth. It also involves leading by example. Children are highly observant, constantly absorbing the behaviors and attitudes modeled by their parents (Griffith, 2001, 165-170). Effective parental leadership requires consistency

between words and actions. Parents who preach honesty while engaging in deceptive behaviors undermine their authority and confuse their children (Hays, 2016). Conversely, parents who demonstrate respect, compassion, and responsibility through their daily actions create a powerful learning environment. Children internalize these behaviors, shaping their own moral compass and developing essential life skills.

Finally, effective parental leadership prioritizes open communication. This creates a safe space for dialogue, allowing children to express their feelings, opinions, and concerns. Parents who actively listen and encourage open communication build trust and foster a sense of connection with their children (Bray et al., 2022). Open communication allows for the exploration of complex topics and the development of critical thinking skills. Teenagers, for instance, might be more likely to discuss issues like peer pressure or substance abuse with a parent they feel comfortable talking to (Duncan & Edwards, 2013). By creating a space for open dialogue, parents empower their children to make informed decisions and navigate the complexities of life with confidence.

3.1 Essential leadership skills, strategies and activities that enhance parental training

Parental involvement in children's school success is a simultaneously complex, personal, and communal issue that reflects one of the most important factors ensuring the healthy development of a child throughout the history of education. Understanding leadership skills necessary to raise a generation that is raised by successful parents will provide important contributions to the field of education sciences (Cunningham, Kreidere & Ocon, 2012, 116-120). The connection between success in autism rehabilitation and leadership skills has not been analyzed previously, and to our knowledge, it has not been mentioned in the international literature.

In light of this information, parental involvement in the process of educating special children, autistic children, and the reinforcement of both the attitude of those

parents and the leadership behaviors necessary to accomplish this task appear to be a topic worthy of further study (Johnson et al., 2020, 455-461; Dreaver et al., 2020, 1660-1665). Leadership is an important personality trait and competency that has been considered a criterion that determines the suitability of an individual to perform functions and tasks in many areas such as sport, business, education, and the field of special education (Tobón et al., 2020, 190-198). Modern definitions interpret leadership as a dynamic process comprising various management techniques and emphasize the development of this process through conscious efforts. Recent studies draw attention to the fact that providing students with social skills to be harmonious individuals through school education is imperative (Dowd & Green, 2022).

A number of empirical studies in the field of educational management and leadership support the arguments that leaders play an essential role in achieving effective results in schools. (Day, Sammons & Gorgen, 2020). Leadership skills should not be seen only in connection with the role the leader is expected to play, as an individual in a group or team, the organization, or with those who are being led or with the direction in which they are being led (Chaidi & Drigas, 2020). Leadership involves a dynamic process that involves interactions and influences among participants, who perceive and grant leadership to others; assume responsibilities, address common interests; and create group relations and effectiveness, depending on the procedures used, the resources, and the situation they are experiencing (Ho & Lin, 2020, 81-88).

Indeed, the term "leadership" is understood as having descriptive, prescriptive, inferential, dynamic, personal, situational, variable, process, and differential aspects. The term refers to a leadership role as well as to an activity (Rodić & Marić, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021, 542-549). The activity manifests in the strategies used by the leader who wields a positive influential action aimed at attaining a series of interconnected goals (Yuliantini et al., 2021, 305-307).

Skill is behavior that brings about a certain effect or outcome. A distinction should be made between ability and competence (Wong et al., 2020, 300-302). Competence refers to the capacity to perform specific behaviors or a series of behaviors

with the aim of achieving a particular goal within a specified domain. This positions an individual at a higher or more ideal level in the application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or their combination compared to others (Mohammadi et al., 2020, 1150-1152).

Competence includes proficiency in knowledge, skills, utilization of previous learning, problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, communication, and the cultivation of attitudes, awareness, and independence, as well as social and emotional intelligence (Chaidi & Drigas, 2020). Ability is the natural talent, capability, or capacity to acquire competence through exposure to educational opportunities that encourage the utilization of cognitive processes, creativity, memory retention, and group interactions (Ho & Lin, 2020, 82-85). It encompasses abilities in knowledge, skills, ability to use prior learning, problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, communication, and development of attitudes, awareness, and autonomy, as well as social and emotional intelligence (Herrero & Lorenzo, 2020, 1700-1708; Suarez et al., 2022, 770-772). Ability is the aptitude, capacity, or receivership to acquire competence as a result of contact with learning opportunities that stimulate the use of thinking, creativity, and memory processes and group dynamics (Abouzaj, 2019, 1070-1071). Providing skills training so that parents can improve their leadership skills is a novel approach that can address the critical barriers in parent-mediated interventions (Drmic et al., 2024). The first critical barrier, as identified, is that parents lack the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the interventions.

The second critical barrier is that parents also require support from coaches to help them understand intervention strategies (Yi et al., 2020, 297). Furthermore, parents report that less frequent intervention coaching adversely affected their implementation of intervention strategies (Overbeek et al., 2021, 422-426). Providing leadership skills training to equip parents with the necessary knowledge and skills, and thus build their personal capacity, is an effective strategy for addressing these critical barriers (Ocloo et al., 2021). In addition, direct coaching would be more time-effective after parents have gained leadership skills (Cohen et al., 2020, 210-212).

Parents of children diagnosed with ASD often become advocates for their children out of necessity (Smith-Young et al., 2022). They adopt the role of leaders to ensure their children receive comprehensive services, including medical, educational, and social services (Alderwick et al., 2024). These same skills can be leveraged to help connect and support other families who are in similar situations (Guo et al., 2023, 1079). Research has identified a need for parent-mediated interventions targeting various areas, such as addressing severe behavior and ensuring long-term care related to transition planning. Research has also identified four critical barriers related to parent-mediated interventions: lack of parent knowledge/skills, lack of coaching support, lack of access to intervention resources, and lack of time/motivation (Lee & Meadan, 2021, 288).

The first two barriers are directly related to the need for parent training in leadership (Alinsunurin, 2020, 25). This section outlines five crucial leadership skills: communication, collaboration, problem-solving, responsibility and empathy and how these skills can be cultivated and developed through specific strategies and activities in parents with ASD.

3.1.1 Communication

Leadership communication in various educational domains is associated with speaking, listening, being open, patient, and firm, observation, and self-regulation. Although the parent's demand is an essential part of the leadership process, more often than not, the parents unfold their queries to the staff in leadership positions by asking, 'how do you want it to happen?' (Rogers et al., 2021). Generally, the school staff directly participating in student-care and improvement have the power to realize the potential active leadership role that parents could exhibit through these transactions, which are often set at specific times according to the calculation of time made by the teachers. Their motivation for asking questions at education-related meetings increases with the parents' awareness, the extent to which the teachers' best implementation capacity is valued (Leithwood, 2021, 377). They leave it to individuals in the principal's sphere of influence (Kakhramonovich, 2021, 484). The term 'leadership' refers to the human ability to influence others' behavior to achieve a common goal or objective (Benmira &

Agboola, 2021). Communication is recognized as one of the most critical skills of leadership, especially when navigating difficulty or change, which is useful for post-secondary settings and effective social communication in today's interconnected workforce (Chaidi & Drigas, 2020).

Effective leadership communication was viewed as involving multiple, interdependent processes encompassing both personal initiative and fostering others' participation (McCauley & Palus, 2021). Good communication skills of leaders create healthy and motivated teams. However, leadership communication lately draws more interest as it is connected to building and sharing transformative idealized visions among parents, teachers, and students with special education needs, especially the behavior and performance levels of children with ASD (Fisher et al., 2020, 1859-1861). The expectations of parents are considered part of the dynamic process through which the actions are meaningful, economic units of communication, creating the children's perceptions, beliefs, and emotions (Kirby et al., 2020, 78).

3.1.2 Strategies for developing communication skills

Positive, encouraging statements such as "I appreciate your successful efforts, you can do it, I trust you" should be used (Glidewell et al., 2018, 4). In addition to the words, the tone of the child welcoming him and enabling him to establish an eye contact to show that the child is very important can be shown (Bavlı & Kocabaş, 2022, 444-446). It is necessary to make sense of the mother to seek commonness. The child can feel himself and enjoy the interaction. The mother can establish a good contact with the child by making the eye contact and using an open body language (Thorsson et al., 2024, 14). The important tricks of gaining child's trust are to clear active listening, trust, and non-essentials, for the child to emulate the voice and body language. These know are essential for the empathy of the conversation (Dhawan, 2021). Providing a responsive, attentive communication is as important as what is said to the conversation during communication. During the conversation, the parent approaches the child (Vitalaki & Katsarou, 2021, 73)

Proving a positive communication cycle with the child with ASD is important for the parents. According to the elements of transactional analysis, it is important for the parents to maintain an "I am OK - you are OK" communication mode with their children (Tustonja et al., 2024, 44). For this to be possible, constructive, open and positive interpersonal communication scenarios need to be developed adopting an empathic, supportive, positive, and affirming attitude. Effective conversation can be established by respecting the views of the child, understanding what he is saying, and using clear and unambiguous language, providing clear instructions, making active listening and reflective answers (Bakhshandeh, 2023, 227). Unqualified, negative statements such as "you cannot do it, again, everything is wrong" can destroy the child's will to continue, whereas unqualified, positive statements such as "everything is great, you are the best" may give the child a false sense, and his hard work may be assumed as unnecessary (Kurowicka, 2020, 893).

Displaying empathy is valuable when your children communicate with you. Here are some of the best ways to make certain that you communicate empathy:

- When talking with others, show respect and acknowledge their feelings and experiences. In essence, attempt to put yourself in their position.
- Allow your body to show empathy: make eye contact, offer emotional looks, and maintain spontaneous touching (pat on the back, for example).
- Listen thoughtfully. Listening allows a world of difference when intertwined with empathy.
- Try to picture yourself in the other person's scenario. This technique allows you to show concern for the other party more easily.

To become a better listener, keep the following points in mind:

- Concentrate on hearing words. A positive nod or encouraging "uh-huh" demonstrates that you are still carefully following the conversation.
- Control your own self-absorption. Remember the message may not be about you.
- Show genuine interest. Use nonverbal encouragement such as body position, movement, and vocal sounds.
- Exhibit empathy for the speaker's emotional state.
- Encourage the speaker to talk.

Passive listening is the practice of keeping quiet throughout a conversation. You just let the other person speak because you feel you should say something. In other words, you are polite and quiet – physically present, but mentally elsewhere. Active listening, however, means that you provide feedback and interact with the speaker. You take the time to comprehend what is said, balance the speaker's message, and demonstrate empathy.

Cultivating teamwork, building bridges, encouraging, developing, and growing our people were some of the words parents associated with seeing the communication skills of leadership of empathy and understanding in action (Kurowicka, 2020, 892). Indeed, the empathetic leader seeks to understand their followers so as to fashion appropriate policies and practices that both respond to and grow out of that empathetic understanding devoted through disciplined practice (Tustonja et al., 2024, 45). It demands the willingness to "walk in the shoes of others," to appreciate the diversity and complexity of their experiences, to listen and value their unique perspectives, to learn from them, to communicate openly, honestly, and humanly, to foster good relations, and to instill trust (Sandua, 2023).

3.1.3 Collaboration

For parents raising children with disabilities, collaboration emerges as an essential skill. It transcends a mere exchange of information, evolving into a powerful force that fosters positive outcomes for both parent and child. This collaborative approach necessitates effective communication, a shared understanding of the child's needs, and a willingness to work synergistically with a network of professionals and fellow parents (Turnbull et al., 2020). The collaborative landscape encompasses various stakeholders. Parents collaborate with educators to ensure a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) aligns with their unique needs and learning style (Turnbull & Carr, 2020, 1107). This collaboration involves open communication regarding the child's strengths, challenges, and preferred learning strategies (McGregor & Simmons, 2001).

Parents bring invaluable insights gleaned from their daily interactions with the child, while educators provide expertise in curriculum development and differentiated instruction (Turnbull et al., 2020, 1115). Effective collaboration paves the

way for a more holistic and effective approach to the child's education. Collaboration extends beyond the realm of professionals. Parents can leverage the strength and support of other parents facing similar challenges. Parent support groups offer a safe space to share experiences, exchange resources, and navigate the complexities of raising a child with a disability (Dunst & Trivette, 2010, 365). This collaborative environment fosters a sense of community, reduces feelings of isolation, and empowers parents through collective problem-solving and emotional support (Dunst & Trivette, 2010, 376).

Technological advancements further enhance the collaborative landscape. Online platforms and social media groups connect parents with a wider network of support, allowing for information sharing, resource exchange, and peer-to-peer mentoring (Singh & Rose, 2017). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the digital divide and ensure accessibility for all parents within the collaborative network (Singh & Rose, 2017). On the other hand, children with disabilities thrive when collaborative environments are established, bringing together the knowledge, resources, and diverse perspectives of parents, educators, specialists, and the children themselves. Collaboration in this context involves open communication, shared goals, and a commitment to tailoring interventions and support structures to the unique needs of each child (Kyzar et al., 2021, 320).

Importantly, collaboration should center the child as an active participant. Fostering self-advocacy and self-determination in children with disabilities begins by providing choices, seeking their input throughout decision-making processes, and respecting their perspectives (Sinai-Gavrilov et al., 2019, 4645). Incorporating the child's voice, collaborative efforts become more meaningful, fostering empowerment and a sense of agency for the child.

Collaboration also plays a critical role in boosting self-advocacy and self-determination in children with disabilities. When children are included in decision-making processes about their therapies and educational plans, they develop a sense of agency and ownership over their own progress (Syriopoulou-Delli, Cassimos & Polychronopoulou, 2016, 335). Empowered with choices and encouraged to express their preferences, children become more active participants in their own

learning and development, leading to enhanced confidence and self-esteem (Ruble, Dalrymple & McGrew, 2012).

3.1.4 Strategies for developing collaboration skills

Parents of children with autism, like all parents of children with disabilities, have unique knowledge about their child, including their abilities, personality, likes and dislikes, sensitivities, and what activities and environments work best for them (Di Renzo et al., 2020, 117). Parents have this knowledge because they spend the most time with their child and are responsible for their care. It is essential for professionals to gain this parental perspective and treat it with the same level of importance as any expert knowledge they may possess (Samsell et al., 2022, 93). By recognizing and valuing the information each parent holds, professionals can gain unique insights and establish a collaborative relationship built on mutual respect (Houser & Spoede, 2015, 83). This will result in more effective outcomes for the child as important, relevant decisions are made with the child's best interests in mind (Fallon & Zhang, 2013, 47).

Collaboration among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder is facilitated through the shared experience of parenting a child with a particular set of needs, such as those identified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act as essential for parents to be involved in addressing with professionals (Samsell et al., 2022, 96). In order to promote collaboration, certain strategies can be employed, such as recognizing and building on the unique knowledge that each parent possesses, creating opportunities for discussion and decision-making that are focused on the child, promoting a positive parent-professional relationship through active listening and empathy, and implementing key activities such as parent support groups, which can be facilitated by professionals (Syriopoulou-Delli & Polychronopoulou, 2019, 35).

In addition, many parents today are using online social networks that are specifically designed for individuals with similar interests or experiences, such as caring for a child with ASD (Gillespie-Smith et al., 2021, 15). These online groups allow parents to communicate and share information with others from the comfort of their own home, and are generally free of charge (Amon et al., 2022). Therefore,

they are easy to access and the members can remain relatively anonymous if they wish. Such resources can be especially beneficial for parents who are unable to easily attend in-person meetings due to a lack of babysitting, transportation, or time (Weissheimer et al., 2020, 2). With increased popularity of social media, and the diversity of platforms that exist, there are endless opportunities for parents to form connections and support networks online (Chayko, 2019, 519).

Parent support groups are one of the most popular and stress-reducing activities for parents of children with ASD (Neece et al., 2024, 990). Such groups offer parents the opportunity to share experiences and information, to support one another emotionally, and to provide helpful coping strategies (Hammond et al., 2021). Parents who participate in support groups report decreased feelings of isolation and anxiety, increased empowerment and emotional support, and more effective coping. Different fathers and mothers may join parent support groups for different reasons, preferring different types and styles of groups (Jaspal and Breakwell, 2022, 1285).

Promoting collaboration involves coordinative, problem-solving, and communicative behaviors from both parents and professionals (Zilberstein et al., 2024, 15-17). Connors found that parents appreciated professionals who provide them with information, actively listen, are willing to accept feedback, and are easily accessible (Lundberg, Lindh & Collberg, 2024, 10). Therefore, the following activities can help promote positive collaboration with parents of children with ASD through enhanced communication: providing parents with clear but variable amounts of information based on their individual preferences, active listening, taking initiative, providing feedback, and accessibility (Callanan, Ronan & Signal, 2020, 9). Last but not least, a vital activity to enhance collaboration is to build partnerships with the parents, realizing the family is the constant in the child's life across home, school, and community (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

Collaboration between parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and professionals is crucial for the success of interventions and the well-being of the children (Rojas-Torres et al., 2020, 294). Parents are in fact the first educators of their children and possess unique knowledge about their child's behavior, abilities, and characteristics (Tokatly Latzer et al., 2021, 1047-1048). It is therefore

essential that professionals support and collaborate with parents to enhance the development of children with ASD.

The Web 2.0 generation of the Internet provides new opportunities for collaboration through technology (McHaney, 2023). The distinguishing features of Web 2.0 are the ability of users to create and modify content and to engage in social networking among many other activities (McHaney, 2023). Blogs, wikis, and social networking sites, among others, are part of Web 2.0. Although many parents of children with ASD are not taking advantage of the new technologies, those who do report specific and valuable benefits (Rabba et al., 2020). The use of easily accessible web-based and other electronic tools supports and enhances parent-professional collaboration. Web 2.0 allows professionals to work with parents to develop and maintain the transition plan. A key aspect of Web 2.0 is collaboration, and that, of course, is a key aspect of effective transition planning (Almalky, Alqahtani & Trainor, 2020, 119).

Within the spectrum of ASD, software technologies provide several benefits in terms of improving and enhancing collaboration (Cañete & Peralta, 2022, 8321). Technologies can be used with parents (a) to fill in communication gaps with professionals, paraprofessionals, friends or relatives; (b) to collect and organize information about the child; (c) to learn new information; and (d) for entertainment. Many websites and software packages are available to help parents learn about ASD as well as the stages of their child's development and the best methods of intervention (Purnama et al., 2021, 9-12). These online resources can also facilitate collaboration by allowing parents and professionals to share information or insight (Ohara et al., 2023, 11).

Lastly another way to promote collaboration in parents is through their partnership with professionals (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013, 11). Aiming at parental stress and well-being is therefore essential throughout the collaboration (Toros et al., 2021, 100). Parents need to feel supported, understood, and guided through family-centered services resulting in positive effects on the collaboration and the child's intervention as well. Professionals should use a strength-based approach to empower parents, recognizing that parents are the experts about their child. Then, professionals can learn from them while working together for the child's

best interest. (Lee et al., 2020). With guidance, professionals can work as a team in which enhancing the parents' well-being and reducing parental stress will have positive consequences for both the child and the team around him (Ball et al., 2020).

Collaboration between professionals and parents is essential. However, it is important to note that part of the first steps within professionals' collaboration with parents have to be supporting parents in being actively involved in their child's intervention (Winburn et al., 2014, 750-752). When parents are overloaded, they may not have the energy or time to collaborate or participate in decisions regarding their child. Therefore, supporting parents with family-centered care, flexibility, advocating, and offering information in various ways are routes to collaboration. By interconnecting both concepts in practice, professionals and parents work to ensure the best outcomes for the child with autism spectrum disorder, as well as the family (Ridgway et al., 2021, 270-272).

3.1.5 Problem-solving

Problem-solving, the ability to identify challenges, generate potential solutions, and implement strategies, is a core life skill crucial for everyone, including individuals with special educational needs (SEN). While individuals with SEN may encounter unique problem-solving barriers, it's vital to recognize that they also possess valuable strengths and resilience that can be harnessed to develop robust problem-solving abilities (Everatt, Weeks & Brooks, 2008, 28).

Learners with SEN often need explicit instruction and support to develop effective problem-solving strategies. This may involve breaking down complex problems into smaller, more manageable steps and providing scaffolding to guide the solution-finding process (Yakubova & Taber-Doughty, 2017, 10). Supporting students in self-monitoring and self-evaluation encourages them to reflect on their problem-solving efforts, fostering independence and critical thinking (Kolbensschlag & Wunderlich, 2021, 82).

Certain types of disabilities can present specific challenges to problem-solving. Students with intellectual disabilities may struggle with abstract reasoning or considering multiple solutions simultaneously (Browder et al., 2018, 229). Learners with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may face difficulties with sustained focus and organization (Friedman et al., 2018, 500), hindering their ability to follow a problem-solving process systematically.

Parents under the proper guidance could implement a series of strategies to cultivate a problem-solving environment and equip their offspring with weapons to tackle every-day problems and adversaries (Hartley et al., 2016, 732). To begin with, problem-solving isn't always intuitive, especially for learners with ASD. Clearly modeling and teaching explicit problem-solving steps demystifies the process (Childres, Shaffer-Hudkins & Armstrong, 2012, 8). One should begin by breaking down problems into smaller, more manageable components. These could include defining the problem, brainstorming potential solutions, evaluating options, implementing a selected solution, and reflecting on the outcome (Keen, 2011, 14). By externalizing these steps, students gain a structured approach to tackling complex problems, reducing cognitive strain (Keen, 2011, 19).

In addition, according to Vygotsky's Scaffolding technique, individuals with disabilities could be trained to act more on their own terms (Verenikina, 2003). Scaffolding involves providing temporary support to learners as they work toward independence. During problem-solving, this might include offering prompts, using graphic organizers, or providing partially completed examples to guide their thinking (Verenikina, 2003). The key lies in gradually decreasing the level of support as the learner gains competence and internalizes strategies, promoting self-reliance and self-confidence.

Moreover, parents should expose their children in real world practices scenarios and situations. Embedding problem-solving practice into real-world scenarios fosters transferability and deepens understanding (Zhong & Xu, 2019, 1530). Consider age-appropriate tasks relevant to learners' lives. Having students calculate the cost of groceries, troubleshoot a malfunctioning electronic device, or navigate transportation routes engages them in authentic problem-solving experiences.

This contextualized practice enhances generalization of problem-solving skills, equipping them to tackle unforeseen challenges outside the classroom.

When it comes to technology, individuals with disabilities could be trained to use technological means to improve their daily routine. Research has shown that a wealth of assistive technology tools can specifically support problem-solving for learners with ASD (Vlachou & Drigas, 2017, 1). Graphic organizers and mind-mapping software facilitate planning and organizing thoughts visually (Edyburn, 2006, 2). Text-to-speech tools remove the burden of decoding words, allowing students with reading difficulties to focus on understanding the problem itself (Bouck & Yadav, 160). Simulations and virtual environments offer safe spaces for hands-on experimentation, encouraging risk-taking and reducing anxiety around problem-solving (Bouck & Yadav, 2022, 152).

For parents raising children with disabilities, fostering problem-solving skills transcends a mere educational concern. It becomes a collaborative effort, a journey where parents and children navigate challenges together, building resilience and a sense of empowerment (Dunst & Trivette, 1994). This journey necessitates a multifaceted approach, encompassing resourcefulness, collaboration with professionals, and strategies tailored to address the unique needs of each child.

3.1.6 Strategies for developing problem-solving skills

Activities to encourage problem-solving in the home are discussing the consequences of behavior, discussing and creating family policies, role-playing, and family group meetings (Bonete et al., 2016, 305-309). These suggestions are by no means exhaustive but should provide enough examples to encourage educators and professionals working with families to think of ways that they can help parents in their attempts to gender problem-solving skills in their own children (Bozkurt & Demircioğlu, 2021, 2520-2525). At the least, these suggestions can help parents see the reward they may receive when the long-term goal is finally realized.

Parents are an important focus for problem-solving efforts. Parents need problem-solving skills to meet their daily challenges, particularly in this time of increasing environmental pressures (Hacatrjana, 2022,7). If parents cannot develop the

necessary skills to solve problems in an acceptable way, they will have difficulty in helping their children become effective problem solvers (Haenilah et al., 2021, 290-293).

As you act out the various roles with your children, you can use this example of dialogue or make up your own:

Mom: Let's start over, and why don't you kids try solving the problem before things got out of hand?

Angela: I don't like people putting their feet up on my seat.

Ryan: But I didn't get your seat wet. I still have snow on the bottoms of my feet.

Mom: Ryan, keep your feet down.

Angela: (shoves them again)

Ryan: (crying)

Mom: Angela, Ryan, stop that right now. You are in big trouble. And, from now on, you two will sit in the front seat and be monitored when we go anywhere. And we are going straight home when we are done shopping!

Example 2: The Coloring Pencils. At Janelle's house they only had three red coloring pencils. Laura had the pencils because she was Janelle's best friend that day. When the other children asked Laura if they could use a red pencil, she said that she did not have any more left. Janelle was sitting at the desk with a package of red pencils in her hand and she wanted to hand them out, but she just sat there.

Example 1: The Wet Shoes. Angela and Ryan were with their mother in the car on the way to get clothes for school. Angela had just finished swimming and had her wet shoes on. As Angela was squirming around in her seat, Ryan put his feet up on the back of Angela's seat and touched Angela's wet shoes. Angela shoved Ryan's feet off the back of her seat and Ryan started to cry.

Below are two scenarios that you can act out at home. These are only a couple of examples of the situations that you might face in real life. After you have tried

these, think up a few with your child and make a list. Then, when the time comes, you can say, "Hey, remember the other day when we thought of some problems that you might run into with your friends? Here is one of them."

In addition, parents lacking problem-solving skills could incorporate a series of tasks to enhance that skill. Below there is an extensive list with activities that promote the cultivation of solving problems. These activities could also include children.

1. Read a book together and discuss the problem in the story and how it is solved.
2. Work together to plan out a vegetable garden. Discuss the potential challenges and possible solutions.
3. Plan a small dinner menu together, thinking through which food groups need to be represented and also considering the personal food preferences of family members.
4. Work together to clean and organize a room in the house. This would involve identifying potential problem areas, brainstorming ideas, and coming up with an action plan.
5. Wash and dry the dishes together, taking time to discuss other problems that came up during the day.
6. Work on setting up lessons and Solve It! problems, discussing and working through potential problems in the process.
7. As a family, choose an individual goal and discuss how the family can support each person in meeting that goal.
8. Help to plan a day outing. Discuss and brainstorm potential problems and work together to come up with a plan.

3.1.7 Responsibility

For parents raising children with ASD, the concept of responsibility transcends a mere developmental milestone. It transforms into a revolutionary act, a collaborative journey towards empowering their child to manage obligations, navigate complexities, and ultimately build self-sufficiency (Dunst & Trivette, 1994). This transformative process, however, is not without its unique challenges.

Understanding these challenges is paramount. Children with disabilities may grapple with a range of obstacles impacting their ability to grasp abstract concepts like responsibility, follow routines, or regulate impulses. Learners with ASD might struggle with time management, organization, and resisting distractions, jeopardizing their ability to consistently complete tasks (Teller, 2022).

Those with intellectual disabilities could benefit from simplified explanations and concrete examples when learning responsible behaviors (Raundelinuaite & Gudzinskiene, 2017, 270). Sensory processing sensitivities can overwhelm children during seemingly simple chores, necessitating modifications or alternative approaches (Polkinghorne, Hagler & Anderson, 2010, 52). Recognizing these potential difficulties allows parents to become effective guides, building a framework that fosters responsible behavior within a supportive and understanding environment.

Equipping a child with disabilities for the responsibility revolution necessitates a multi-pronged approach. One crucial strategy involves starting small and building incrementally. Parents can assign age-appropriate tasks, breaking them down into smaller, more manageable steps. Beginning with simple chores like putting away toys or sorting laundry fosters a sense of accomplishment and lays the foundation for increasingly complex responsibilities (Mitton & Harris, 1954, 269-271). This gradual progression builds confidence and ensures the child feels equipped to tackle challenges.

Effective communication is another cornerstone of the responsibility revolution. Visual aids and structure can significantly enhance understanding and reduce

cognitive load for children with disabilities (Bouck et al., 2022). Implementing visual schedules, checklists, and timers provides clear expectations regarding tasks and deadlines. Consider picture charts depicting task sequences or utilize color-coding systems to enhance organization. These visual cues serve as crucial supports, empowering the child to navigate the complexities of routines and responsibilities independently.

The responsibility revolution extends beyond simply completing tasks. It's vital to cultivate a growth mindset, where effort and persistence are acknowledged and celebrated alongside achievements (Dillen, 2008, 55). This approach encourages a focus on the process of engaging in responsible behavior, rather than solely fixating on the end result. When children with disabilities invest effort in completing chores or persist through challenges, parents should recognize and celebrate these strides. This fosters intrinsic motivation and encourages continued engagement in responsible behavior.

Natural and logical consequences offer another valuable tool in the responsibility revolution. Allowing the child to experience the logical outcomes of their choices, both positive and negative, provides valuable learning opportunities. For instance, a forgotten homework assignment might result in a missed recess, while completing chores independently could earn a coveted privilege. Open communication and discussions surrounding these consequences are crucial. Parents should emphasize learning from experiences rather than resorting to punishment-focused approaches (Noggle & Brennan, 2007).

The responsibility revolution is not a solitary endeavor for parents. Collaboration with educators and therapists is essential to ensure consistency in strategies across environments (Wallinga, Sweaney & Walters, 1987, 122-128). Open communication facilitates the creation of a unified support system for the child, ensuring consistent expectations and approaches at home and in school settings. Therapists can play a critical role in addressing underlying challenges, such as executive functioning deficits, that might hinder a child's capacity for responsible behavior (Bratter, Bratter & Bratter, 2013, 125). By collaborating with these professionals, parents can equip themselves with a wider toolbox of strategies to support their child's journey.

Responsibility extends beyond personal chores. Expanding the focus to encompass social responsibility offers valuable experiences for children with disabilities. Encouraging participation in age-appropriate volunteer activities or fostering opportunities for social contributions within the community cultivates empathy and a sense of belonging (Bierhoff, 2002, 170). These social contributions demonstrate the impact responsible actions can have on others, reinforcing a sense of connection and purpose. Inclusive playdates with peers can further contribute to this development by encouraging collaboration, respect, and a sense of shared responsibility within social interactions.

The responsibility revolution is a continuous process, and setbacks are inevitable. Maintaining a positive and encouraging approach allows children to feel safe to attempt challenges and learn from mistakes. Celebrating even small milestones acknowledges progress and builds self-confidence (Cridland et al., 2016, 200). By adopting a patient, tailored, and collaborative approach, parents can empower their children with disabilities to overcome challenges, embrace responsibility, and develop the skills necessary to navigate life with independence and self-reliance. The journey may be demanding, but the transformative power of fostering responsibility equips children with disabilities with the tools to navigate life's complexities with confidence and a sense of agency (Rankin et al., 2016, 281).

3.1.8 Strategies to promote responsibility Skills

Before exploring strategies, it's important to acknowledge the specific challenges parents of children with ASD face. Exhaustion, emotional strain, and feelings of isolation are common experiences (Coffman, 2003, 3). The constant demands of caring for a child with ASD can leave parents with little time or energy for self-care, a cornerstone of responsible behavior (Parker, Kallusky & Hellison, 1999, 28). Additionally, managing meltdowns and challenging behaviors can lead parents to feel overwhelmed and question their effectiveness, potentially impacting their motivation (Lyons et al., 2010, 520). Below are presented key strategies that could cultivate responsibility in parents.

Prioritizing Self-Care: Self-care is not a luxury; it's essential for responsible parenting. Encourage activities that promote relaxation and emotional well-being, such as mindfulness practices, exercise, or spending time in nature (Connolly, 2019). Support groups or online forums can connect parents with others who understand their situation, fostering a sense of community and reducing isolation (Gorsky, 2014). A beneficial activity could be to schedule specific times for self-care activities in the calendar. This could be a dedicated time for reading, a relaxing bath, or a phone call with a friend.

Breaking Down Tasks: Large, overwhelming tasks can lead to procrastination. Encourage parents to break down complex responsibilities into smaller, more manageable steps. This can help them feel a sense of accomplishment and maintain motivation (Marks et al., 2003, 52). Visual aids, such as checklists and calendars, can be helpful in keeping track of tasks and appointments. An activity for example could be to role-play breaking down a complex task, such as therapy appointment scheduling, into smaller steps. This can be done individually or as a family activity.

Shared Responsibilities: Discuss and share responsibilities within the family. This can involve involving siblings and other caregivers in tasks related to the child's care. Partners can also share household responsibilities to ensure both have time for self-care and other commitments (Brien-Berard & des Rivières-Pigeon, 2023, 909). One could create a chart outlining household chores and responsibilities for all family members, including age-appropriate tasks for children.

Positive Reinforcement: Acknowledge and celebrate responsible behaviors. Positive reinforcement, such as verbal praise or a shared activity can motivate parents to continue taking care of themselves and fulfilling their responsibilities (Green & Carter, 2014, 257). One, for instance, could decorate a jar and fill it with slips of paper. When someone observes a responsible behavior, they write it down on a slip and add it to the jar. Regularly draw a slip and celebrate the positive behavior together.

3.1.9 Empathy

Children with Asperger's Syndrome, a profile within the autism spectrum disorder (ASD), often experience unique challenges in developing empathy. Empathy, the ability to understand and share the emotions of others, is fundamental for building social connections and navigating complex interactions (Goleman, 2006, 76-78). While individuals with Asperger's may have a desire to connect with others, they may struggle to read social cues, decipher subtle emotional expressions, or reciprocate in emotionally supportive ways (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004, 165-168). For parents, understanding these challenges and employing targeted strategies become essential in fostering emotional intelligence and social competency in their children.

Recognizing the unique perspective of children with Asperger's Syndrome is crucial for parents on this journey. Children with Asperger's often possess strong cognitive abilities and may excel in logical reasoning. However, the realm of emotions and social nuances can feel less intuitive. They may struggle to recognize subtle facial expressions, changes in tone of voice, or the underlying emotional motivations behind the actions of others (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004, 169-175). This can lead to misunderstandings in social interactions and hinder the natural flow of empathy.

To navigate this landscape, parents can adopt several supportive strategies. Firstly, developing emotional literacy is crucial. Explicitly discuss emotions, using picture cards, books, or movies as tools to illustrate a wide range of feelings (Komeda et al., 2015, 145-148). Help your child develop a vocabulary for emotions and encourage them to identify their own feelings and those they observe in others. This lays the groundwork for understanding complex social dynamics.

Open communication and perspective-taking exercises offer valuable opportunities for growth. Engage your child in conversations about their experiences and feelings. Ask questions that prompt them to consider the perspectives of others: "How do you think that made your friend feel?" or "Why do you think they reacted that way?" Role-playing social scenarios allows for a safe space to practice different responses to emotional situations (Goleman, 2006, 77).

Technology can be a powerful tool for supporting the development of empathy. Social skills apps and interactive video games can offer scenarios where children with Asperger's can practice reading emotions and navigating social interactions in a virtual setting (Bouck et al., 2022). These tools allow for repetition, instant feedback, and the ability to experiment in a controlled environment before applying skills to real-life situations.

Social stories offer another effective tool for enhancing empathy. Create short stories depicting various social situations, explicitly outlining expected behaviors and potential emotional responses (Smith, 2001, 337). These stories provide a "script" for children with Asperger's to reference, aiding their understanding of social nuances and fostering empathy in diverse contexts.

Collaboration with educators and therapists plays a vital role in supporting the child with Asperger's. This partnership ensures consistency in strategies between home and school, reinforcing empathy-building techniques (Deschamps, Been & Matthys, 2014, 1750). Therapists can provide targeted interventions to address specific social and emotional challenges, further bolstering the child's skills and confidence.

Importantly, the empathy journey is a gradual one with both successes and setbacks. Celebrate even small achievements, acknowledging progress in understanding emotions and responding to others with greater sensitivity. By consistently modeling empathy, prioritizing open communication, and utilizing tailored strategies, parents become invaluable guides in helping their children with Asperger's navigate the complexities of social interaction with increased understanding and compassion.

3.1.10 Strategies that promote empathy skills

One core aspect of empathy is perspective-taking, the ability to see the world through another person's eyes. Here are some activities designed to strengthen this skill in parents of children with ASD. Sensory journaling encourages parents to document their child's sensory experiences throughout the day. Noting down

situations that trigger overstimulation or discomfort, and conversely, activities that appear calming or enjoyable, can help parents understand the sensory world their child navigates (Chaux, 2010, 145).

Social story creation involves writing narratives from their child's perspective describing social situations that cause them difficulty. By writing the story from their child's point of view, parents can gain insight into their emotional experience and develop strategies to navigate similar situations (Smith, 2001, 338). Finally, emotion charades, where parents act out different emotions while their partner guesses them, is a playful exercise that encourages parents to identify and interpret non-verbal cues, crucial for understanding their child's emotional state (Baron-Cohen, 2000, 172-174).

Another key component of empathy is recognizing emotions in others. Several activities can help parents hone this skill. An emotion matching game with flashcards depicting facial expressions and corresponding emotion words can help parents identify and differentiate between different emotions (Denham, 2007, 11). Watching a movie or reading a book together followed by discussing the characters' emotions and motivations encourages parents to analyze emotional cues and consider the reasons behind them (Stepien & Baernstein, 2006, 524-529). Finally, incorporating real-life scenario discussions into everyday routines, where parents discuss and identify emotions displayed by themselves, their child, and others they encounter, helps parents become more attuned to emotional cues in real-time situations (Marti & Stienstra, 2013).

3.2 The financial and psychological impact of ASD on families and society

Families with a child who is diagnosed with ASD require more health and mental health services, special education programs, and specialized treatments over time (Lavelle et al., 2014, 520). The process can be both overwhelming and expensive, creating stress on the family system (Bhuiyan, Hossain & Islam, 2018, 71).

The cost burden associated with ASD can create financial hardships for many families, especially for families who have a child that has a co-occurring condition,

including intellectual disability, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, or anxiety (Karpur et al., 2021). ASD can significantly impact many of the family members. The parents of children with ASD often pursue fewer hours of work or get lower-paying jobs to manage the demands of caring for a child with an ASD (Hazan-Liran & Walter, 2024, 8).

The lower income that is necessary to accommodate these changes to their career can affect parents and families, including their finances, social well-being, and mental health, long-term (Kamaralzaman et al., 2018, 75). Information regarding the financial losses is important for designing programs relevant to public hygiene, improving benefits, and experiences of parents who have children with ASD (Ou et al., 2015, 5-6). Parents need to learn what programs can help financially, supportively, and legally, and learn how to craft effective financial plans that will not place the child who has ASD in financial risk. Otherwise, the child may be left out of future mental health symptoms, demonstrating the importance of improving these facilities available and helping the kids who have ASD (Marsack-Topolewski & Weisz, 2020, 191-194).

The financial strain on families of individuals with ASD stems from the significant and ongoing need for specialized care. Early intervention services, a crucial component of supporting development in children with ASD, can be expensive. These services may include speech therapy, occupational therapy, applied behavior analysis (ABA therapy), and social skills training. The cost of these interventions can vary depending on location, intensity, and duration of treatment, but can easily reach tens of thousands of dollars per year, with a 2013 study estimating an average annual cost of over \$46,000 for children with ASD (Zane, Davis & Rosswurm, 2008, 44). Beyond early intervention, individuals with ASD often require ongoing support throughout their lives.

This can include educational accommodations, vocational training, residential care, and mental health services. These additional expenses can create a significant financial hardship for families, especially those without adequate health insurance coverage. On the other hand, uneducated and untrained individuals with ASD might never been employed or face employment hurdles (Hendricks, 2010,

126). Many individuals with ASD face challenges securing and maintaining employment.

This can be due to social communication difficulties, sensory sensitivities, or struggles with executive functioning skills like organization and time management. Lower employment rates translate to lost income for individuals with ASD and reduced tax contributions to society. Furthermore, families of individuals with ASD may experience lost productivity if they need to take time off work to care for their loved ones or advocate for their needs in educational settings.

Additional fiscal data revealed that ASD in U.S. solely costs roughly 4.6 trillion, with a significant portion borne by public programs that aim to train, provide treatment and assimilate individuals with ASD in the society. The aforementioned psychological and fiscal burden creates the necessity of creating a parental training that could on the one hand alleviate the stress of the parents themselves and on the other hand, equip them with the weapons of knowledge on how to train their own offspring effectively and prepare them eventually to enter the labor market (Kornack et al., 2014, 168).

3.3 Summary of literature review

The present section of the thesis aims to summarize the literature review analyzed above. To begin with, parenting schools are educational programs designed to equip parents with the skills needed to improve their relationships with their children and address behavioral challenges. These programs typically involve group sessions led by trained facilitators and focus on topics such as communication, problem-solving, and positive reinforcement.

There are three main types of parenting schools: group-based, one-on-one, and self-directed. Group-based programs are the most common, providing parents with a supportive environment to learn and practice new skills. Individual counseling and self-help resources are also available for parents seeking additional support.

The primary goal of parenting schools is prevention. By providing parents with the tools they need to effectively parent their children, these programs can help to prevent future mental health issues and promote positive family outcomes. In addition educating parents that have children with ASD is crucial for their mental health. Parents of children with autism need support and information. By providing them with the right tools, we can help them understand their child's needs and provide better care. This includes information on learning styles, social and emotional skills, daily living skills, and supporting siblings. Effective parent education programs should provide ongoing support, accessible resources, and opportunities for parents to connect with others facing similar challenges.

Another part of the theoretical framework is the impact of parenting in child development. The way parents raise their children is now a key issue of increasing concern to professionals. There is a growing interest in defining successful parenting. McGroder and Hyra, referring also to the work of Shonkoff and Phillips, state that children are influenced by who their parents are for instance in terms of gender, age, origin/ethnicity, intelligence, education, temperament, by what parents know e.g. about child development and behavior, by what parents believe for example attitudes about parenting and what parents value e.g., education, achievement, obedience, interpersonal relationships. Last but not least, having a child with ASD costs government sources and parental funds to cover therapies, medications, and interventions. The last part of the theoretical framework covers the essential leadership skills that could enhance one's ability to handle adverse and stressful situations. It also includes strategies and activities with segments from dialogues that equip parents with applicable knowledge.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current chapter offers an overview of the research methodology and data collection. There is a brief introduction about the selected research method, the research scope and information regarding the collection and the analysis of the data.

4.1 Research method

Scholars like Yin (2018) and Merriam (2015) highlight the value of case studies for in-depth exploration of specific settings. Their strength lies in the flexibility to utilize qualitative, quantitative, or even mixed data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, 10-15). This makes them ideal for investigating the intricate dynamics within parents with different socio-economic backgrounds (Graebner, 2021, 105-107).

Understanding parental behavior requires methods that capture its complexities. Some argue that case studies offer the most robust foundation due to the ongoing interaction between researcher and the research object (Merriam, 2015, 37-38). However, this interaction can introduce subjectivity as a researcher's prior knowledge influences findings (Yin, 2018). Despite this, case studies can still generate valuable hypotheses and research questions for future studies (Graebner, 2021, 99-104).

Given the unique nature of the situation being analyzed – a team of parents with different background – and its close connection of having offspring with neurodevelopmental disorder such as ASD and facing adversaries, a case study approach is deemed the most appropriate research strategy for this thesis.

There are distinct differences between quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, 8-9). Quantitative methods typically involve surveys or observations of a sample population, aiming to generalize the findings to the broader population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In contrast, qualita-

tive approaches focus on understanding subjective experiences like attitudes, behaviors, and opinions. The researcher's interpretations and perspectives play a significant role in qualitative research (Merriam, 2015, 40).

For this study, a mixed methods approach was chosen, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017, 107). An anonymous parent survey served as the quantitative method, capturing the initial situation and changes within the duration of the leadership program using the same questions. To gain deeper insights into the reasons behind these changes, qualitative methods like interviews were employed (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, 20-24).

Due to my dual role as researcher and trainer, ensuring research objectivity and parental openness were crucial considerations. Research by Merriam (2002, 7-11) highlights how a researcher's perspective can influence findings. To address this, I employed anonymous questionnaires with open-ended questions. This approach, as Bryman (2016, 45-60) suggests, promotes honest and candid responses from participants.

Further enriching the data, I discussed the anonymous questionnaire results with the team of professionals itself. Observations gleaned from this discussion were then incorporated into the analysis, complementing the qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, 5-6). Additionally, to gain broader insights, I conducted interviews with the cofounder of the leadership program, and other key figures involved in the process. Their observations, as McMahon and Patton (2002, 51-55) argues, provided valuable perspectives for the research.

4.2 Data collection and analysis

Data collection in research often draws from various methods and sources. As Sekaran and Bougie (2016) point out, a key distinction lies in whether the data is collected specifically for the current research (primary data) or for other purposes beforehand (secondary data). Importantly, secondary data can be both qualitative and quantitative (Bryman, 2016).

For this study, primary data collection included anonymous surveys and interviews. Additionally, relevant observations made during the author's role as founder and trainer of the leadership program were also incorporated. It's important to note that only the surveys yielded quantitative data. Observations, and interviews are inherently qualitative (Polkinghorne, 2018, 45-51). Secondary data, the primary source in this case, came from existing literature. This included books, articles, academic research, webpages, and other reference materials, and is predominantly qualitative in nature (Merriam, 2015, 41).

Unlike traditional research aiming for generalizable findings, case study analysis focuses on in-depth understanding and interpretation of a specific case within its unique context (Yin, 2018). This iterative process involves concurrent data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). Initially, data is organized around themes or research questions. Subsequently, researchers examine how well the data aligns with these categories, with the flexibility to modify them throughout the analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A robust theoretical framework and conceptual foundation are crucial for interpreting the data and ensuring its coherence (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, 23-28).

To ensure ethical research practices and participant confidentiality, this study adhered to several key principles. First, both team members of professionals and parents (participants) were thoroughly informed about the research goals and data usage beforehand. Their informed consent to participate was crucial (Pietilla et al., 2020, 51-58). Second, we agreed to anonymize the results, focusing solely on the findings of the study and excluding any potentially identifiable personal details. Additionally, names of the parents were replaced by fictional names or carefully masked to maintain confidentiality (Arifin, 2018, 30-33). Finally, all participants were informed that the findings of this program might be used for a thesis project, and they might be contacted on summer and give them the opportunity to review and comment on the final thesis, further ensuring transparency and respect for their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, 1-2).

The following sections detail the data collection and analysis for this case study. Beyond the questionnaires and interviews discussed earlier, the author's own field notes were also used. These notes were meticulously documented during

the events themselves, with precise dates attached. They primarily served as the basis for describing the research process in chapter 4.

4.3 Anonymous parental questionnaire

In order to evaluate and assess parents' knowledge on leadership skills, a parental questionnaire was used prior and after the conduction of the leadership program. This questionnaire was constructed from scratch by combining parts of 2 different peer reviewed and standardized questionnaires. The first questionnaire was The Parent Involvement Questionnaire: Measuring Parents' Involvement in Behavioural Intervention for their Children with an autism spectrum disorder, published at ScienceDirect by Solish & Perry (2008) and the second one Quality of Life in Caregivers of Children and Adolescents with Autistic Spectrum Disorder: Development and Validation of the Questionnaire, published at opensource platforms such as PubMed by Pratesi et al. (2021).

The questions from both questionnaires were refined and tailored for the purpose of this program. Consent was given by all authors to use parts of the questionnaires and use them in my master's thesis.

The part included close-ended questions to assess and evaluate leadership skills in parents that have offspring with ASD, and the answers were based on Likert scale from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree.

4.4 Leadership program parental experience survey

This self-administered survey was used to gather comprehensive feedback on participants' experiences with the parent training program (Jenkins & Dillman, 1995). The survey uses a Likert scale format (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) across various sections to assess program content, delivery, and impact (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014).

To achieve overall effectiveness, the survey concluded with a single Likert scale question and a multiple-choice selection allowing participants to identify the factor that most influenced their learning experience (facilitators, content). An open-

ended question invites participants to provide any additional feedback or suggestions regarding the program, and those questions will be answered in the semi-structured interviews presented below.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to understand how parents felt about their leadership program experience after attending the program. The survey focused on leadership skills like responsibility, flexibility, problem-solving, and communication. Questions were taken from Morton et al. (2011) questionnaire, which were influenced by the work Kouzes and Posner and Arnold's & Drasgow's Empowering leadership questionnaire that was highly influenced by Stogdill's leadership traits theory, questionnaires and adapted for parents. Both questionnaires were handed over from the authors, after being contacted in ResearchGate and can be found at the Appendix section.

The survey was divided into four sections: personal growth, team management, team environment, and growth mindset. It was given to 20 parents in June 2024 to measure the program's effectiveness in different areas.

4.5 Interviews conducted

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the parents' knowledge and experience during the leadership program, this study employed a semi-structured interview approach with 20 parents. These interviewees were randomly chosen and had participants from both genders. The duration of the interview was approximately 10-15 minutes.

Semi-structured interviews offer a valuable tool for researchers seeking in-depth exploration of participants' experiences (Adams, 2015, 493-500). Unlike standardized interviews with predetermined questions, this approach utilizes a flexible guide that outlines key topics while allowing for open-ended inquiry (Roulston & Choi, 2018, 235-240). This adaptability provided rich conversations, enabling participants to elaborate on their perspectives and experiences beyond a limited set of pre-defined answers. Researchers can then acquire valuable insight regarding emerging themes while maintaining a degree of control over the interview direction (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews often involve audio recording the conversation for later analysis, supplemented by detailed notetaking to capture non-verbal cues and nuances of the interaction (Kvale & Brinkmann,

2009, 50-51). This combination of structured and flexible elements allows researchers to gather comprehensive qualitative data, gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of their participants.

For confidentiality purposes, interview results and quotes will be presented using anonymized designations such as fictional names with no correlation to the order listed above.

To ensure confidentiality, the interview process for my thesis research began with explaining the project and obtaining agreements to keep all discussions and recordings private. Due to the sensitive nature of the information shared, written transcripts won't be included. Open-ended interview questions were designed to guide the conversation, with minimal intervention from me beyond clarification when needed. This ensured participants felt comfortable sharing freely. It's important to note that none of the interviewees had seen the results of the team questionnaire beforehand. The specific interview questions used can be found in Appendix 2.

Following a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 80-92), the interview data was first examined in relation to the interview questions. Researchers identified recurring responses and categorized them by frequency. This allowed them to compare common themes emerging from the interviews with the findings from the team questionnaire. Finally, these themes were linked to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2.

This chapter had provided insight regarding the research process, outlining the chosen methodology, the practical decisions made along the way, and the rationale behind them. To build on this foundation, the next chapter will shift gears to explore a practical case study. We'll begin by examining the initial stages of the process with the recruitment of the team of the professionals and the parents, the actions taken to facilitate and orchestrate the leadership program.

5 PRACTICAL CASE STUDY: A LEADERSHIP PROGRAM FOR PARENTS WITH ASD

This chapter thoroughly describes the case study, examining parents' initial knowledge and experience on leading and handling adverse situations, the specific actions taken to train them and build an arsenal of leadership skills that will benefit not only parents, and the effectiveness of those efforts. We'll analyze not only the success in achieving these objectives, but also the key factors that, from both parents and external perspectives, incrementally fostered trust restoration. Additionally, the chapter provides a detailed analysis of the data gathered through questionnaires and interviews conducted as part of the study.

5.1 Learning objectives of the program

This program addressed the critical need to empower parents of children with special needs. Situated within 1st primary school in Kalamaria, Thessaloniki, Greece, it provides a platform for parents to cultivate leadership skills. Recognizing the challenges of parenting in this context, the program leverages the expertise of a qualified team comprised of two special education teachers, a speech therapist, and a psychologist.

Employing a multifaceted approach that incorporates workshops, interactive discussions, and peer support, the program equips parents with leadership skills across key domains. A core emphasis lies on effective communication, empowering parents to confidently advocate for their child's needs within diverse settings, encompassing educational institutions and healthcare facilities. Strategies for navigating complex systems and fostering collaborative relationships with professionals form a central component.

The program cultivates to its participants empowerment and self-advocacy. Parents will develop confidence in decision-making specific to their child's situation and acquire valuable tools for navigating challenges. A crucial aspect is the development of robust support networks. Through connection with other parents facing similar experiences, participants can learn to build a network that empowers both themselves and their children.

Finally, the program equips parents to become powerful advocates for the special needs community within Kalamaria. They will develop the capacity to advocate for inclusive educational practices, readily accessible community resources, and a more inclusive environment for all children.

This program transcends mere skill acquisition. It cultivates a supportive learning environment where parents can forge connections with individuals with similar adversaries, share experiences, and celebrate successes. The team of professionals provides tailored guidance and expertise, addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by each parent.

Investing in their leadership potential, parents invest in the future of their children and the broader special needs community in Kalamaria. This program enhances them to articulate voices, become more effective advocates, and true leaders in all aspects of their lives.

5.2 The beginning

The beginning of the process dated back in 2015, when the author was a bachelor student and attended a leadership and pedagogical conference namely Reimagining Schooling in university of Macedonia, Thessaloniki Greece. The conference held different topics including leadership of parents with normally developed children without disabilities and workshops in which children attended and enhanced through a series of tasks how to communicate, collaborate and achieve mutual goals.

The author after attending the conference and considered the rising need of parents that have children with ASD to get educated (Dieleman et al., 2018, 42), the idea of creating a leadership program to educate parents started to flourish. Right after, the author contacted parents that have children with ASD either from the working environment (Children that attend the school) or parents in which the author have collaborated in the past years to ask them questions in the form of an interview. The scope of the interview was to obtain information regarding parents' concerns, views and beliefs about handling their children throughout the day, if they collaborate with others when it comes to their child and simultaneously notes were taken. From the initial unofficial interviews 70% (14) of the parents

(N=20 of total parents) responded that during tantrums they felt lost and helpless, while half of them 50% (10 of the parents) quoted that they feel unable at certain times to use an effective communicative style with their child. The questions are presented as example to display the dire need of creating a parental leadership program since most of the parents have little or no experience on handling stressful and difficult situations with their children. This interview was not included in the thesis and was off the record just to show the need of creating such as a program and some of the challenges that parents faced or suggestions on what they would love to learn from this program.

5.3 Actions taken and process development

Before the author created the leadership program for parents, as mentioned above, contacted parents with children with ASD to ensure that there is a need to create such a program. Afterwards, there was an extensive literature review regarding the terms of leadership skills, parental training and autistic spectrum disorder and how these concepts could be combined to create an applied leadership program that could be theoretical and practical.

In addition, leadership programs require a team of professionals in order be operated and applied to a specific group (Rao et al., 2017, 272), therefore a team must be founded. The final team was comprised of two special education teachers, a psychologist-psychotherapist and a speech therapist. All members are highly educated and equipped with the appropriate knowledge and experience to teach effectively both parents and children.

The next issue that had to be dealt with efficiently was the venue of the leadership program. The 1st primary school of Kalamaria located in Taki Economidi 57 str. in Thessaloniki functioned as a venue for the leadership program. The municipality of Kalamaria and the school's headmaster had given the permission and their consent for this purpose.

Another important issue was the correct selection of the research process development. At first an unofficial interview and discussion was held to learn about what parents need from this program and want to be taught. The second step

was to evaluate and assess parents' knowledge on leadership skills and what challenges they face in their daily routine

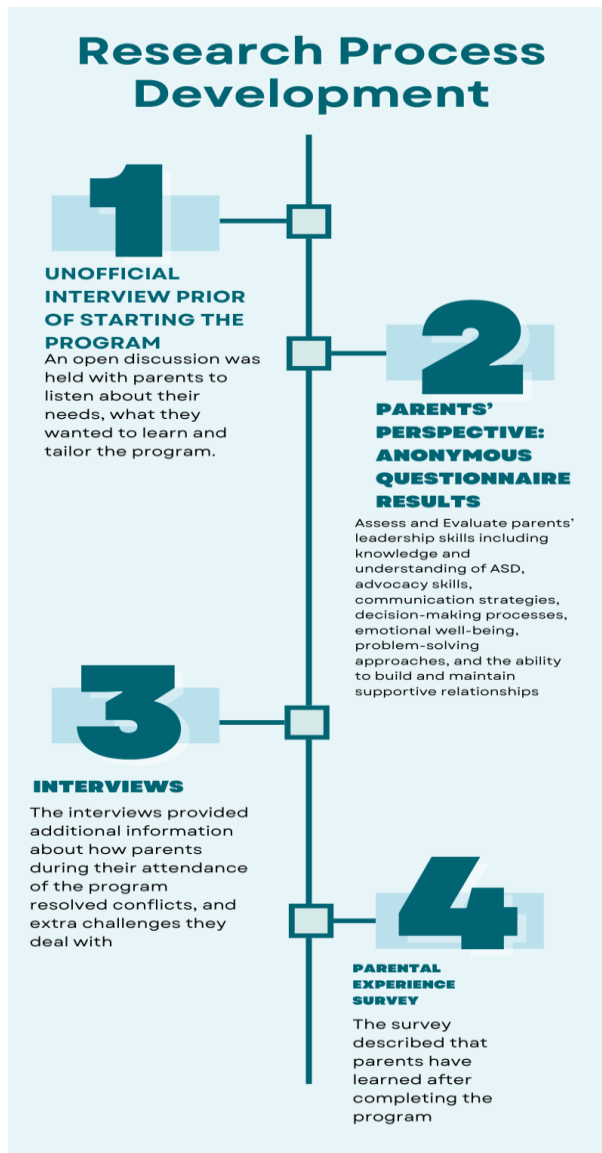


FIGURE 1. Describes the Research Development Plan

5.4 Structure of the leadership program

This program addressed the critical need to equip parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) with leadership skills. Spanning six months from January 1st to June 15th, 2024, it employed a structured curriculum promoting leadership development across key leadership domains. The leadership program was conducted in each weekend and the duration was two to three academic hours, but in some cases in which there were ongoing discussions the time was extended. The initial six weekends focused on effective communication, equipping parents to understand their child's unique communication style (verbal and nonverbal) and tailor their own for optimal interaction if one takes into consideration that each child with ASD is unique and has its own way of communicating. Techniques for active listening and leveraging communication tools like visual aids were also explored.

The following six-weekend modules progressively incorporated further leadership skills. February was about collaborative problem-solving, teaching parents how to identify ASD-specific challenges and develop solutions alongside their children. March emphasized cultivating the skill of responsibility within the household, while April addressed building empathy and understanding a child's emotional state. A mid-program review in May allowed for reflection and individual support.

The final two months empowered parents to become advocates for their children and leaders within the ASD community of Kalamaria and the wider region of Thessaloniki. May focused on exploring legal benefits including grants and allowances that parents of children with ASD are entitled to, identifying local resources, and advocating for policy changes. June culminated in developing a plan for continued leadership, including connecting with other families, mentoring new parents, and building partnerships with local organizations. Most of the parents were in favor of creating an online community through social media pages such as Facebook and stay connected serving as a common link between them.

TABLE 1. Describes the Leadership Program Schedule 2024

Month	Key Domain
January (Weekends 1-6)	Effective Communication
February (Weekends 7-12)	Collaborative Problem Solving
March (Weekends 13-18)	Empowering Responsibility
April (Weekends 19-24)	Building Empathy and Understanding
May (Weekends 25-30)	Advocating for Your Child
June (Weekends 31-34)	Creating a Local Community

TABLE 2. describes the Analytical Timetable of the months and the activities of the applied leadership program.

Month	Skill Focus	Type of Activities	
January	Effective Communication	<p>Understanding Child's Communication Style (Interactive: Body Language, Video Analysis)</p> <p>Speaking Clearly & Connecting Deeply (Role-Playing: Clear Communication)</p> <p>Bridging the Gap: Communication Tools (Creating & Using Visual Aids)</p> <p>Communicating with Professionals (Role-Playing: Meetings with Educators)</p> <p>Advanced Communication Techniques (Exploring Assistive Technologies, Addressing Challenges)</p>	
February	Collaborative Problem-Solving	<p>Identifying Common ASD Conflict Triggers (Group Discussion)</p> <p>Developing Collaborative Solutions (Brainstorming, Visual Action Plans)</p> <p>Utilizing Strengths for Success (Identifying Strengths in Child, Family, Professionals)</p> <p>Implementing Solutions & Conflict Resolution (Role-Playing: Conflict Scenarios)</p> <p>Maintaining Collaboration & Resilience (Strategies for Ongoing Communication)</p>	
March	Empowering Responsibility	<p>Developing Age-Appropriate Independent Skills (Brainstorming & Creating Skills List)</p> <p>Creating a Chore Chart & Assigning Responsibilities (Fair & Age-Appropriate Division)</p> <p>Building a Motivational Reward System (Exploring Different Systems, Tailoring to Needs)</p> <p>Developing Ownership & Accountability (Role-Playing Scenarios: Reinforcement & Consequences)</p> <p>Maintaining Consistency & Adapting Strategies (Addressing Challenges, System Adjustments)</p>	
April	Building Empathy & Understanding	<p>Recognizing Child's Emotions & Sensory Cues (Interactive: Facial Expressions, Sensory Triggers)</p> <p>Effective Communication for Empathy (Validating Emotions & Understanding)</p> <p>Non-Verbal Communication & Social Skills (Role-Playing: Reading Cues & Response)</p> <p>Building Emotional Connection & Social-Emotional Learning (Activities & Resources)</p> <p>Integrating Empathy & Understanding into Daily Life (Implementing Learned Skills)</p>	
May	Advocating for Your Child	<p>Understanding Child's Rights & Legal Protections (Guest Speaker: Lawyer)</p> <p>Identifying Resources & Support Services (Exploring Local Resources, Building Network)</p> <p>Communication Techniques for Advocacy (Effective Communication with Policymakers)</p> <p>Crafting a Personalized Advocacy Plan (Developing a Plan for Individual Needs)</p> <p>Practicing Advocacy Skills & Building Confidence (Role-Playing & Mock Meetings)</p>	
June	Leading the Community	<p>Connecting with Other Parents & Support Network (Discussions & Networking Opportunities)</p> <p>Sharing Expertise & Empowering Others (Mentoring New Parents, Sharing Experiences)</p> <p>Building Partnerships with Organizations (Identifying Organizations & Volunteering)</p> <p>Creating a Legacy of Change & Leading Forward (Developing Plan for Continued Leadership)</p>	

5.5 Implementing the leadership program

This program's first month incorporated activities that promote communication, a fundamental skill for navigating the complexities of raising a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Here, we explore the analytical and descriptive aspects of six engaging activities designed to equip parents with effective communication strategies

Weekend 1: Decoding Child's Language - Beyond Words

The first step in effective communication is for one parent to understand child's unique language. After everyone introduced themselves and provided background information, the program started by playing an interactive game of Charades or as we say it in Greek 'Παντομίμα'. Parents will be challenged to act out emotions, sensory experiences, and daily routines – but without using spoken language. Not all children diagnosed with ASD have a structured and spoken speech and many of them cannot express themselves.

This activity goes beyond mere guessing; it encourages parents to become keen observers, analyzing facial expressions, body language, and subtle cues that may indicate specific needs. The atmosphere of having such an activity sparked discussions about the diverse ways children with ASD communicate, raising awareness of the importance of recognizing and interpreting nonverbal communication in everyday interactions. As we have said in the training, listening truly to your child's need can improve both their lives.

The second part of this weekend's training included an activity namely Beyond words. Parents were prompted to brainstorm situations or sensory experiences that typically trigger communication challenges for their child. This analysis helped them recognize patterns and anticipate potential difficulties. For example, a parent might have identified crowded environments or loud noises as triggers for their child's communication breakdowns. Through analysis, parents identified common triggers – crowded spaces, loud noises – that might lead to com-

munication breakdowns. Building on these observations, parents were encouraged to create a list of their child's specific nonverbal cues for different emotions. Clenched fists and furrowed brows might signal frustration, while a wide smile and jumping could indicate joy. Parents had the opportunity through this activity to identify their child's preferred communication.

Weekend 2: Speaking Clearly, Connecting Deeply - Building the Bridge

Weekend Two was about establishing crafting clear and concise communication strategies. We shifted gears by engaging in a collaborative activity called "Building a Sentence Tower." This activity resembled the Jenga game where each block represented a word or phrase. Parents took turns adding to a growing tower, focusing on using simple language and avoiding figurative speech. This activity went even further than vocabulary selection; it encouraged parents to analyze sentence structure and consider the overall clarity of their communication. The collaborative nature creates a supportive environment for feedback and exploration, allowing parents to refine their communication style and build the bridge for deeper connection with their child.

The second activity later conducted that day namely the Scavenger hunt of senses divided parents into small groups. Each group was assigned to a specific sensory category – sight, sound, touch, taste, or smell. Parents through this experience could later observe their children's reactions and interactions with various stimuli within their assigned category. The "sound" group, for instance, noticed their child covering their ears in response to loud noises, indicating a potential auditory sensitivity.

While observing these reactions, parents documented any accompanying nonverbal communication cues – facial expressions, body language, or even vocalizations. While parents observed these reactions, documented any accompanying nonverbal communication cues – facial expressions, body language, or even vocalizations. The analysis of these cues alongside the sensory stimuli helped parents to understand how their children communicate their sensory needs. For instance, one of the attendee parents brought his child to our workshops, and the child became withdrawn due to the spotlights that were using to light up the rooms.

The child exhibited no eye contact and became restless due to probably to visual overstimulation. The goal of the scavenger hunt activity is to share observations and collaborate on creating a basic sensory profile for their child. This analytical process helps identify both preferred sensory experiences and potential triggers, equipping you to create a more sensory-supportive environment for your child.

Weekend 3 communication Tools (Creating & Using Visual Aids)

The creation and implementation of a visual schedule is a fundamental strategy for enhancing communication and independence in individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This activity involved a systematic approach to developing a personalized visual support system that aligned with the child's daily routine and individual needs.

The initial phase entailed a comprehensive analysis of the child's daily activities, including wake-up time, mealtimes, school or therapy sessions, and leisure time. Parents held a discussion about their children's routine plans, how things are done in their daily activities and reached to mutual conclusions.

The use of visual supports, such as pictures, technological application, symbols, or written words, facilitated comprehension and reduced anxiety associated with uncertainty. In our case, we have used various applications but also paper-work materials. The design of the visual schedule prioritized clarity, simplicity, and flexibility. The use of consistent visual cues promotes predictability and enhances the child's ability to anticipate upcoming events. Parents were prompted to install the application Goally Therapy Suite both in App store and Google Store. Through visual programs, timers and behavior tracking, children can learn valuable emotional, language and health skills with Goally's range of support apps. In addition, children could earn rewards by completing app routines that can be redeemed at Goally's game center.

Implementing the visual schedule required consistency and patience. Parents modeled the use of the schedule and encouraged the child to refer to it independently. Positive reinforcement provided for successful use of the schedule to promote motivation and generalization of the skill. Regular review and adjustment

of the schedule were essential to ensure its ongoing effectiveness and alignment with the child's evolving needs.

The second activity that took place was the creation of social stories. Social stories are narrative tools designed to enhance understanding of social situations and expectations. This activity involved creating personalized social stories that addressed specific challenges faced by the child. By breaking down complex social interactions into smaller, sequential steps, social stories provide a structured framework for comprehending and responding to social cues.

The development of a social story began with identifying a specific social situation that presents challenges for the child. This included according to parents' testimonies attending a birthday party, interacting with peers, or managing emotional responses. The narrative should be written in simple, clear language, using age-appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure. The use of visuals, such as pictures or symbols, can enhance comprehension and engagement. As a first sample, we have used the social story provided freely by the Greek ministry of education and religious affairs and the theme that story was attending a birthday part.

The story included descriptive information about the situation, perspective-taking opportunities, and guidance on appropriate behavior. By incorporating these elements, the social story could provide a comprehensive approach to understanding social expectations. Regular practice with the social story was essential for promoting generalization and skill development. Role-playing activities based on the social story can further enhance learning and application.

Segment from the sample preparing for a birthday social story presented at the workshop. The whole social story can be found at: <https://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/el/koinwnikes-istories-sxolikes-kai-koinwnikes-ekdhlwseis>



FIGURE 2. Printed material of Birthday invitation

Weekend 4 Communicating with Professionals (Role-Playing: Meetings with Educators)

The 4th weekend included various activities regarding the parents' collaboration with professionals including teachers, speech therapists and psychologists. This activity namely parent-teacher simulation conference aimed to replicate the dynamics of a parent-teacher conference, providing parents with an opportunity to practice effective communication and advocacy skills. Below there is a segment between a parent and a teacher which functioned as a demonstration and translated in English for the purpose of this thesis.

Segments from our workshop: A simulated school conference room. Alexandros's mother, Maria, and his teacher, Mr. Papadopoulos, are seated across from each other.

Mr. Papadopoulos: Good afternoon, Maria. It's good to see you.

Maria: Good afternoon, Mr. Papadopoulos. Thank you for meeting with me.

Mr. Papadopoulos: Of course. Alexandros is a bright young boy, but I've noticed some challenges lately. His math grades have slipped a bit, and he seems to be having trouble focusing during class.

Maria: I'm concerned about his grades too. He seems to be struggling with his homework as well. I wasn't sure if it was just a phase.

Mr. Papadopoulos: It's possible. Sometimes kids go through periods where they need extra support. We've been working on some strategies in class, like using visual aids and breaking down problems into smaller steps.

Maria: That's great. I can try those at home too. I've noticed he gets easily distracted. Any suggestions on how to help him focus?

Mr. Papadopoulos: We've been experimenting with different seating arrangements and short breaks. It seems to help some students. We could try a behavior chart to reward on-task behavior.

Maria: That sounds like a good idea. I can reinforce that at home. Maybe a reward system would motivate him.

Mr. Papadopoulos: Absolutely. Working together is key. We can schedule another meeting in a few weeks to see how things are going.

Maria: That sounds good. I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me.

Papadopoulos: It's my pleasure. Let's work together to help Alexandros succeed.

The role-playing exercise began with the distribution of detailed character profiles for parents and teachers. These profiles outlined the child's strengths, challenges, and educational goals. Participants were encouraged to immerse themselves in their assigned roles and to consider the perspectives of the other party. The simulated conference focused on open and honest communication, active listening, and problem-solving.

To enhance the authenticity of the experience, parents prepared a list of questions or concerns related to their child's progress. This preparation allowed for targeted communication and demonstrated a proactive approach to collaboration. Additionally, the use of role-playing prompts or scenarios introduced specific challenges or topics for discussion. Following the role-playing session, participants were engaged in a debriefing process to reflect on their communication strategies and identify areas for improvement. This reflective component was crucial for developing self-awareness and refining communication skills.

The second activity focused on developing collaborative problem-solving skills in the context of educational challenges. Participants were presented with hypothetical scenarios that required collaboration between parents and educators to find solutions. These scenarios involved academic difficulties, behavioral challenges, or social interactions. The problem-solving process began with a thorough analysis of the situation, including identification of key stakeholders, relevant information, and potential obstacles. Participants were prompted to brainstorm a variety of solutions and to consider the potential consequences of each option. The emphasis was on finding common ground and developing mutually agreed-upon strategies.

To enhance collaboration, participants engaged in role-playing exercises where they took turns advocating for different perspectives. This approach promoted empathy and understanding between parents and educators. Additionally, the use of collaborative problem-solving tools, such as mind mapping or decision matrices, facilitated the generation and evaluation of ideas.

Similar mind maps were created to brainstorm and generate ideas towards parents' identified problems.

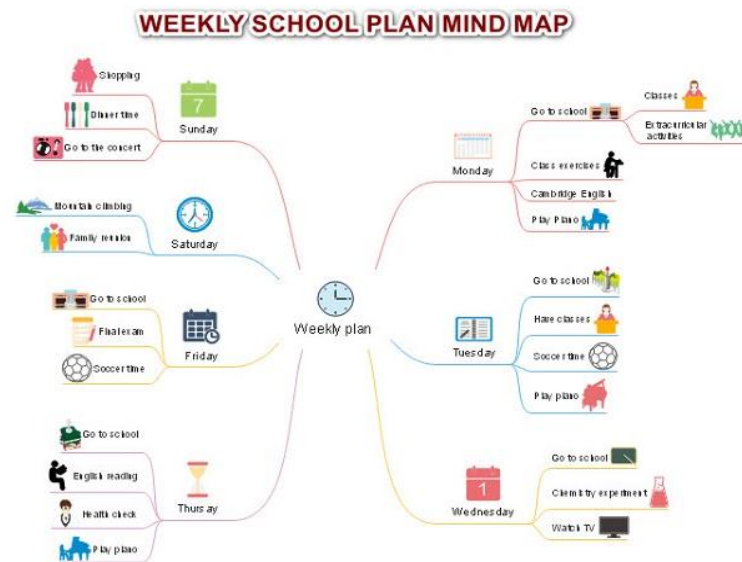


FIGURE 3. Mind Maps that were designed during the program.

Below there is a dialogue regarding the second activity.

A school conference room. Sofia's teacher, Mrs. Katerina, and her mother, Tonia, are meeting to discuss Sofia's behavioral challenges.]

Mrs. Katerina: Sofia has been having difficulty focusing on class lately. She often interrupts the lesson, and it's disrupting the learning environment for the other students.

Tonia: I've noticed some similar behaviors at home. She seems easily frustrated and has trouble following through on tasks.

Mrs. Katerina: I completely understand. We're both concerned about her well-being and academic progress. Perhaps we can brainstorm some strategies together.

Tonia: Definitely. I'm open to anything that might help.

Mrs. Katerina: Maybe we could try a behavior chart to reward positive behaviors. We could also explore some sensory-based strategies, as sometimes sensory issues can contribute to behavioral outbursts.

Tonia A behavior chart sounds like a good starting point. I can reinforce positive behaviors at home too. And I'll look into sensory activities that might help.

Mrs. Katerina: It would be great to stay in close communication and share what works. Maybe we can schedule weekly check-ins to monitor her progress.

Tonia: That sounds like a good plan. I'm committed to working together to help Sofia succeed.

After the dialogue was over. All participants were handed over a behavior chart.

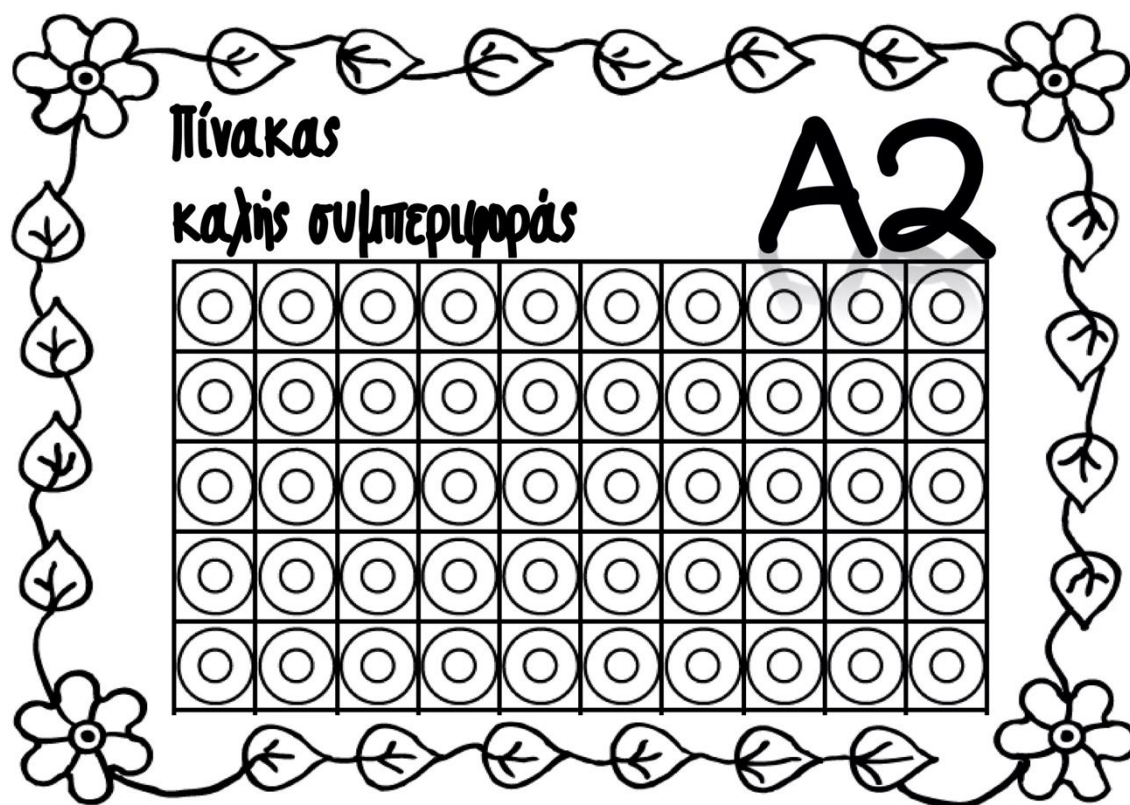


FIGURE 4. Appropriate behaviour chart

Weekend 5 Advanced Communication Techniques (Exploring Assistive Technologies, Addressing Challenges)

This activity focused on introducing parents to a variety of assistive technologies that could enhance communication for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The exploration phase involved researching and gathering information about different types of such technologies, including speech-generating devices, augmentative and alternative communication systems, and mobile applications. In addition to Goally app mentioned in the previous weeks, parents were introduced to Proloquo2Go. Created for children, teenagers and adults with speech difficulties, Proloquo2Go is an Augmentative and Alternative Communication app that can be used as an everyday communication tool to help them develop language skills. It can be fully customized for each individual and is designed to develop the person's motor and visual skills. It has a vocabulary of over 10,000 words and has customizable vocabulary levels, as well as text-to-speech conversion in all languages. Users can add their own buttons, symbols and pictures to aid learning or choose from 25,000 symbols already in the app to help with using the app.

The evaluation process required a critical analysis of each technology's features, benefits, and limitations in relation to the specific needs of individual children. Parents considered factors such as the child's developmental level, communication skills, physical abilities, and cognitive abilities when selecting appropriate assistive technologies. Furthermore, it was essential to evaluate the ease of use, durability, and cost-effectiveness of each technology.

To maximize the effectiveness of assistive technologies, parents engaged in hands-on exploration and experimentation. By actively using different devices such as android tablets and cellphones and iPads, parents gained firsthand experience with their functionalities and identified potential challenges. It was crucial to consider the child's preferences and motivations when introducing new technology. By involving the child in the selection process, parents gained a sense of ownership and encouraged engagement with the device.

Weekend 6 Identifying Common ASD Conflict Triggers (Group Discussion)

The 6th week incorporated two activities that promoted This activity involved a structured approach to identifying and analyzing common conflict triggers in individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). By visually representing conflict situations, parents gained a deeper understanding of the underlying factors contributing to these challenges.

The process began with a group discussion to generate a list of common conflict situations experienced by participants. These situations included transitions, changes in routine, social interactions, or sensory overload. Once a comprehensive list was compiled, participants categorized the conflicts based on underlying triggers, such as sensory sensitivities, communication difficulties, or emotional regulation challenges.

Workshop Segment: A support group meeting for parents of children with ASD

Coordinator: *Good morning, everyone. Today, we're going to focus on identifying common conflict triggers. Let's start by brainstorming situations that often lead to conflicts with your children.*

Giorgos's parent: *My son, Giorgos, gets really upset during transitions, like when it's time to stop playing and get ready for dinner.*

Marina's parent: *My daughter, Marina, has trouble sharing with her peers, which often leads to tantrums.*

Dimitris's parent: *My child, Dimitris, gets overwhelmed in crowded places and starts to meltdown.*

Coordinator: *Thanks for sharing. Let's try to categorize these triggers. Giorgos's issue seems related to routines and change, while Marina's involves social interactions, and Dimitris's is sensory-based.*

Giorgos's parent: *That's interesting. I hadn't thought about it that way.*

Facilitator: *Let's try creating a simple map. We can use post-it notes to represent different triggers and connect them to common outcomes.*

Marina's parent: *Looking at this map, I can see a pattern. Many of our conflicts seem to stem from unexpected changes in routine.*

Dimitris's parent: *Yes, and sensory overload appears to be a common denominator for meltdowns.*

Facilitator: *Exactly. By identifying these patterns, we can start developing strategies to address these underlying issues.*

Giorgos's parent: *I think creating visual schedules for transitions might help Giorgos.*

Marina's parent: *Maybe we can practice social skills with Marina using role-playing.*

Dimitris's parent: *I'll try to find quieter places for Dimitris when we go out.*

Facilitator: *These are all great ideas. Remember, it's important to be patient and consistent when implementing new strategies.*

To visually represent the identified conflict triggers, parents created conflict map on class's whiteboard, on papers or in their iPads/tablets on sketching apps. The diagrams were simple flowcharts or more complex mind maps, depending on the group's preference. The map illustrated the relationships between different triggers and their potential outcomes. Through analyzing the conflict map, parents identified patterns and commonalities among their children's experiences.

The second activity was a sequel from the first one analyzing further the sensory profile of children with ASD. This activity focused on the relationship between sensory processing differences and conflict triggers. We created detailed sensory profiles through mind maps for their children, in order for parents to identify potential sensory-related factors contributing to conflict situations.

Sensory profiles involved observing and documenting a child's responses to various sensory stimuli, including sights, sounds, touch, taste, and smell. Parents used sensory checklists or observation logs to gather information about their child's sensory preferences and sensitivities. Once sensory profiles were developed, parents analyzed the data to identify potential connections between sensory processing differences and specific conflict triggers.

For example, after the completion of this weekend's workshop according to a parent's testimony a child with auditory sensitivities experienced heightened anxiety and frustration in noisy environments, leading to increased conflict. Understanding these sensory-based challenges, parents could develop strategies to reduce sensory overload and prevent conflict escalation. Additionally, parents could share their findings with educators and other professionals to create a more sensory-friendly environment for the child.

Weekend 7 Developing Collaborative Solutions: Brainstorming and Visual Action Plans

The 7th weekend of this leadership program for parents delved into promoting collaboration and cultivating problem solving skills. This weekend's first activity focused on creating a collaborative environment where parents could collectively brainstorm and develop solutions to common challenges faced by children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). When one is sharing experiences and perspectives, could generate a wide range of potential strategies to address specific problem areas.

The workshop began with an open-ended discussion to identify common challenges, such as difficulties with transitions, social interactions, or sensory processing. Then the parents created list of challenges and engaged in a structured brainstorming process to generate potential solutions. To encourage creativity and divergent thinking, a variety of brainstorming techniques were employed, including mind mapping, brainstorming cards, or the "popcorn" method which is dynamic group activity where participants share ideas in a spontaneous and unstructured manner and named after the way popcorn kernels pop randomly. The Popcorn method was used broadly during this session since it was something

new even for the coordination team. Below there is an example of the popcorn method. Parents' real name were covered due to privacy and personal data protection.

Coordinator: *Let's start our popcorn brainstorming session on overcoming tantrums. Remember, any idea is welcome! Who wants to start?*

Parent 1: *My son has terrible tantrums when it's time to leave the park.*

Parent 2: *I know that feeling! My daughter loses it when I turn off the TV.*

Parent 3: *Maybe we can try giving them a warning before transitions.*

Parent 4: *Visual schedules might help too.*

Parent 5: *I've heard of using deep pressure to calm kids down.*

Parent 6: *What about creating a calming corner with sensory toys?*

Parent 1: *We could try a reward system for good behavior.*

Parent 2: *I think it's important to stay calm ourselves during a tantrum.*

Parent 3: *Maybe we can practice coping skills together, like deep breathing.*

Facilitator: *Great ideas everyone! Let's discuss these further and see how we can implement them.*

To facilitate collaboration and idea sharing, participants can form small groups to delve deeper into specific challenges. Within these groups, members can discuss potential solutions, build upon each other's ideas, and develop action plans. The use of visual aids, such as whiteboards or flip charts, can help in organizing and visualizing the brainstorming process.

The goal of this weekend's second activity was how to train and teach parents on creating effective actions plans towards facing various problems in their daily routine and as an example we used one's parents' concerns regarding his son's sleeping routines and partners.

An action plan should include clear and measurable goals, specific steps to achieve those goals, and designated responsibilities for each participant. To make the experience more vivid and understood we have used visual tools, such as flowcharts or Gantt charts, to illustrate the sequence of steps and timelines for implementation and made a thorough discussion to consider the individual needs and resources of each family when developing action plans.

Below there is a dialogue segment among the facilitator and the parents' discussion about sleep patterns.

Coordinator: *Let's discuss strategies for improving our children's sleep patterns. Who wants to start?*

Parent 1: *My son has trouble falling asleep. He's always full of energy at bedtime.*

Parent 2: *My daughter wakes up multiple times during the night. It's exhausting.*

Parent 3: *I've tried everything, but nothing seems to work consistently.*

Coordinator: *It sounds like we're all facing similar challenges. Perhaps we can brainstorm some solutions together.*

Parent 1: *I think a consistent bedtime routine might help. Maybe a warm bath followed by a quiet story.*

Parent 2: *I agree. Creating a calming environment is crucial. A dark, quiet room might help.*

Parent 3: *I've heard about using white noise machines. They're supposed to block out distractions.*

Coordinator: *Great ideas! We could also consider using visual sleep charts to track progress and make it a fun game for the kids.*

Parent 1: *I'm worried about screen time affecting their sleep. Maybe we should establish a screen-free zone before bed.*

Parent 2: *That's a good point. I'll try to unplug all electronics an hour before bedtime.*

Coordinator: *Remember, consistency is key. Even on weekends, try to maintain a regular sleep schedule.*

Parent 3: *I'll do my best. It's tempting to let them sleep in on weekends.*

Coordinator: *Let's plan a follow-up meeting to discuss how these strategies are working. We can share our experiences and offer support.*

Weekend 8 Utilizing Strengths for Success: Identifying Strengths in Child, Family, and Professionals

At that point of the program, focus was emphasized on explore one child's strengths and build up a profile. The activity focused on identifying the unique strengths and abilities of the child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), their family, and relevant professionals.

The assessment process involved gathering information through various methods, including observations, interviews, and standardized assessments. Parents created a strengths profile for their child, highlighting areas of competence, interests, and talents and were promoted to write down all this data to mind maps. This profile included cognitive abilities, social skills, communication skills, fine and gross motor skills, and sensory processing strengths. Later parents were encouraged to present their findings of their children into a group discussion and below there is a segment of our constructive discussion.

Furthermore, this weekend's second activity namely collaborative strength-based planning focused on boosting the strengths of their children. However, this is not a job for one but a collective approach in which parents need to collaborate with a set of professionals. There was an extensive follow-up discussion on how to identify the strengths of a child, spot them and take advantage in order for parents to ease their daily life. A recurring topic that kept appearing in every discussion was about the importance of the other professionals and their role.

A parent from the group quoted: *'My child excels in visual learning'* and our team responded that: *'We should create a plan incorporating visual supports into educational and therapeutic interventions'*. This could include the use of technology

such as tablets, laptops and the use of applications and from a therapeutical standpoint, psychologists could include visual games or social stories with images. Below we present a segment from our discussion among one parent and 2 professionals from our team.

Ms. Tania: Tasos has shown a real talent for visual learning. He responds well to visual aids and often picks up on details that escape other students.

Tasos's mom: That's so true! He loves puzzles and can spend hours putting them together.

Dr. Lee: It sounds like Tasos has strong spatial reasoning skills. We can leverage this strength in various areas of his learning.

Ms. Tania: I've noticed he also enjoys routines and predictability. Perhaps we can incorporate visual schedules to support his learning and reduce anxiety.

Tasos's mom: I've tried using visual schedules at home, and it seems to help. Maybe we can create a consistent system between home and school.

Dr. Giorgos: Absolutely. Collaboration is key. Let's discuss specific strategies to incorporate Tasos's strengths into the classroom and home environments.

Ms. Tania: We could use visual organizers for subjects like math and science. It might help him break down information into smaller, more manageable steps.

Tasos 'mom: I can reinforce these strategies at home by using similar visual aids during our homework time.

Dr. Giorgos: We can also explore the use of technology, like educational apps or software, that incorporate visual elements.

Ms. Tania: It's important to celebrate Tasos's successes and provide positive reinforcement.

Tasos 'mom: I agree. Recognizing his strengths will boost his confidence and motivation.

Dr. Giorgos: By focusing on Tasos's strengths, we can create a more positive and engaging learning experience for him. Let's schedule follow-up meetings to assess his progress and make necessary adjustments.

Weekend 7: Empowering Responsibility - Building Independence

This activity aimed to establish a visual framework for understanding and executing age-appropriate responsibilities. The creation of a chore chart served as a foundational tool for developing a sense of independence and routine.

The process began with a comprehensive analysis of the child's developmental stage and capabilities. This assessment informed parents about the selection of suitable chores that are both challenging and achievable always in correlation with their mental capacity. The subsequent task involved breaking down these chores into smaller, more manageable steps, if necessary. This approach facilitated a gradual increase in responsibility and prevented potential frustration from both parents and children perspective.

The visual representation of the chore chart is crucial for children with autism. The use of clear and consistent visuals, such as pictures or symbols, enhances understanding and reduces anxiety associated with ambiguity. The arrangement of chores on the chart should be logical and visually appealing to maintain engagement. Furthermore, the chart should be placed in a prominent location to serve as a constant reminder of expectations and accomplishments. Below we present the handout that parents used during this activity.

✓ Η ΠΡΩΙΝΗ ΜΟΥ ΡΟΥΤΙΝΑ ✓

Βάζω ✓ κάθε φορά που ολοκληρώνω μια δραστηριότητα.

	Πλένω τα χέρια μου με σαπούνι	Φοράω τα ρούχα μου	Τρώω το πρωινό μου	Μαζεύω τα πιάτα	Πλένω τα δόντια μου	Χτενίζω τα μαλλιά μου	Γεμίζω το μπουκάλι μου νερό	Βάζω το φαγητό μου στο τάπερ	Ετοιμάζω την τσάντα μου	Παίρνω κατάλληλα ρούχα για τον καιρό
										
Δευτέρα										
Τρίτη										
Τετάρτη										
Πέμπτη										
Παρασκευή										

FIGURE 5. shows the Responsibility Chore Chart.

The second activity that was conducted was the reward system sheet. The design of a reward system is pivotal in motivating desired behaviors and reinforcing a sense of accomplishment. This activity involved a structured approach to creating a system that is both effective and equitable.

The initial step was to identify specific behaviors that warrant rewards. These behaviors should align with the overall goal of parents making their children independent and responsible. It was essential to establish clear and consistent expectations regarding the performance of these behaviors. The reward system was designed to provide positive reinforcement for achieving these goals.

The selection of rewards was crucial to the success of the system. Rewards were age-appropriate, motivating, and attainable. A variety of rewards offered to cater to individual preferences. The establishment of a clear relationship between behavior and reward is essential for understanding cause and effect.

The implementation of the reward system requires consistency and adherence to established guidelines. It is important to monitor the effectiveness of the system and make adjustments as needed. Regular evaluation and data collection can help refine the reward system and ensure its ongoing success.

Είμαι υπεύθυνος να κάνω μέσα στην εβδομάδα:

 Όνομα _____

	Δ	Τ	Τ	Π	Π	Σ	Κ
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9. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Συγκέντρωσα ☐ πόντους επιβράβευσης

FIGURE 6. displays the printed material of points and rewarding system.

Weekend 8: Building Empathy and Understanding

The development of emotional literacy is a cornerstone of social competence. This weekend's activity aimed to enhance children's ability to recognize and express emotions through facial cues. We presented a variety of facial expressions; parents were taught how to identify the complex nuances of human emotion. The use of visual aids, such as pictures or flashcards depicting different emotional states, facilitated recognition and understanding.

To deepen the learning experience, parents engaged in role-playing activities, simulating various emotional scenarios. This interactive approach enabled children to practice identifying emotions in real-time situations. Later that day, during the recess parents were encouraged to apply what they have learned to their children. Some of the brought them to all our sessions while other parents took the lessons to apply them at home.



PICTURE 1. depicts the author and co-founder of the leadership programs explaining the usability of flashcards

The duration of the program was 34 weeks, and only the nine were included in this thesis to avoid the extensive length.

5.6 Practical research conducted

This section presents the findings of our practical research. The initial chapters offer a perspective by analyzing anonymous questionnaire responses and interviews with the parents. The third chapter shifts focus by analyzing parents experience of attending a leadership program. A comprehensive analysis of these combined results will be conducted in Chapter 5.

5.7 Parents' perspective: anonymous questionnaire results

Before starting this program around early January, parents were handed over an anonymous questionnaire that can be found in the appendix, to assess their knowledge regarding leadership skills that would help refining and making minor adjustments to the structure of the program. The questionnaire consisted of 35 questions and to measure respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with statements, a Likert scale format was employed, allowing for in-depth data collection.

The primary objective of this questionnaire was to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the strengths, challenges, and support needs of parents and caregivers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In specific this questionnaire sought to explore a wide range of parental competencies and experiences, including knowledge and understanding of ASD, advocacy skills, communication strategies, decision-making processes, emotional well-being, problem-solving approaches, and the ability to build and maintain supportive relationships. It is also designed to capture information about the challenges parents encounter in their daily lives, such as managing behavioral difficulties, accessing appropriate services, and balancing the needs of their child with those of other family members.

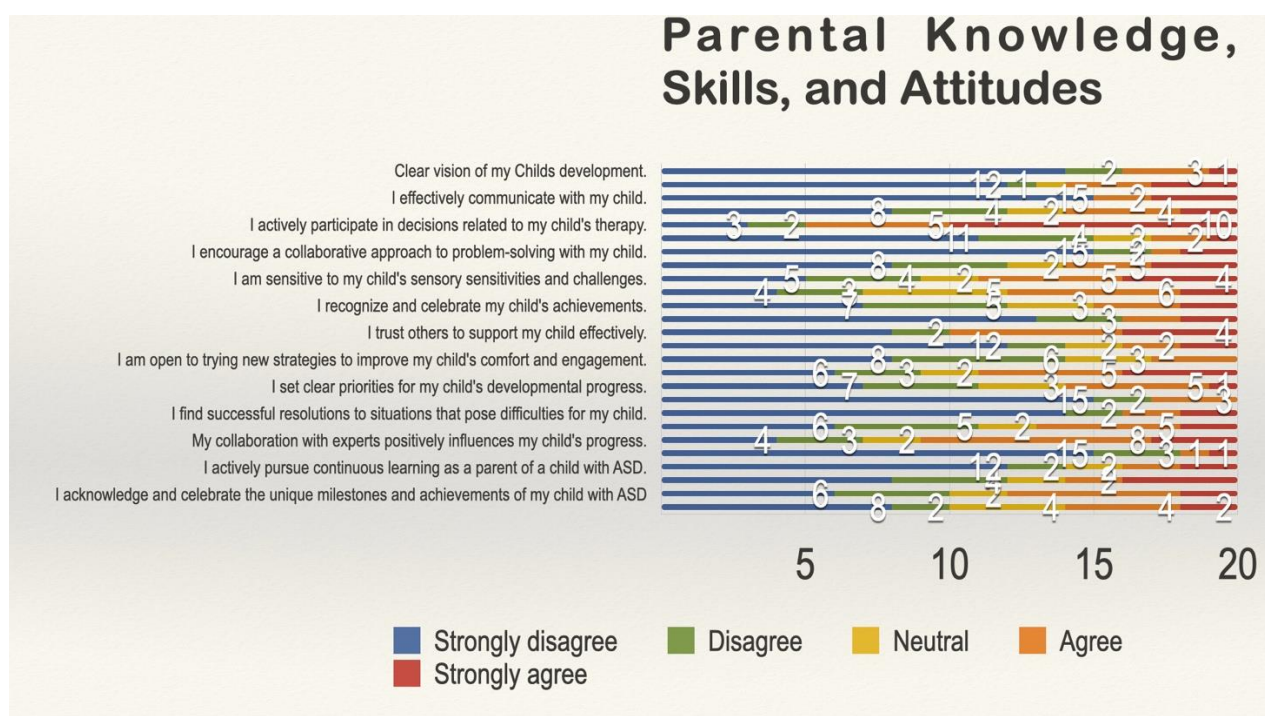
To achieve its objectives, the questionnaire encompassed a broad spectrum of topics relevant to the parental experience of raising a child with ASD. It shed light into both the cognitive and emotional aspects of parenting, exploring parents'

knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Additionally, the questionnaire examined the impact of ASD on family dynamics, including the roles and experiences of siblings and other family members.

The questionnaire is divided into four primary categories to comprehensively assess parental experiences and competencies in raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The first category focuses on parental knowledge, skills, and attitudes, exploring their understanding of ASD, parenting techniques, and problem-solving abilities. The second category sheds light into advocacy and collaboration, examining parents' involvement in their child's care, their ability to navigate support systems, and their partnership with professionals.

The third category focuses to the family and social impact of ASD, assessing the influence on siblings, family dynamics, and overall well-being. Finally, the fourth category examines child-related outcomes, evaluating the child's progress, achievements, and resilience in the face of challenges.

TABLE 3. depicts the results of the first part of the questionnaire



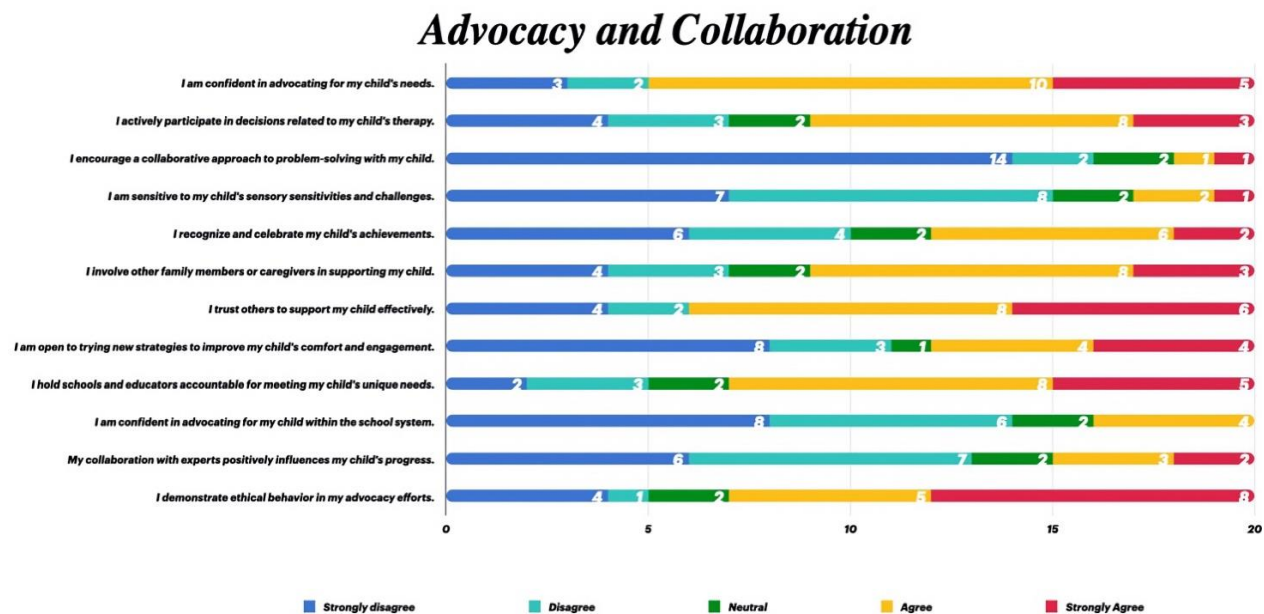
The table above offers an overview of parental self-reported knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The data is structured as a matrix, with parental statements forming the rows and a Likert scale from 1 to 5 measuring agreement level across columns.

A cursory examination reveals a complex interplay of parental perceptions and experiences. While a significant proportion of the participants express lack of confidence in understanding their child's unique needs, advocating for their rights, and employing positive reinforcement strategies, the data also highlights areas of potential challenge. For instance, responses to items related to communication, decision-making regarding therapeutic interventions, and problem-solving in daily routines exhibit a wider range of opinions, suggesting that these domains may require additional support or resources.

Interestingly, the data indicates a strong emphasis on parental involvement and collaboration. A substantial majority of respondents reported involving family members in caregiving and collaborating with professionals. This underscores the importance of social support networks in managing the complexities of raising a child with ASD.

Moreover, the table highlights a commitment to continuous learning among parents. The high levels of agreement with statements about staying informed about ASD and pursuing ongoing learning reflect a proactive approach to parenting. This suggests that parents recognize the dynamic nature of the condition and the need to adapt their parenting strategies accordingly.

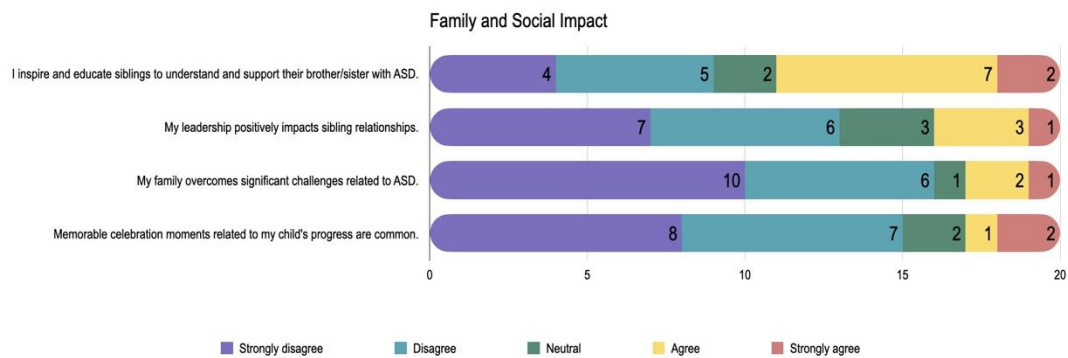
TABLE 4. depicts the results of the second part of the questionnaire



The findings of the second part of the questionnaire reveals a predominant trend of a strong inclination towards parental advocacy and collaboration. The majority of respondents expressed confidence in advocating for their child's needs, both within the family and external systems. Furthermore, there is a clear emphasis on collaborative practices, with parents reported hesitant attitude to engage with other caregivers and professionals and one cause might be the lack of trust towards the professional.

The third part of the questionnaire includes questions regarding family and social impact of parents' that have children with ASD.

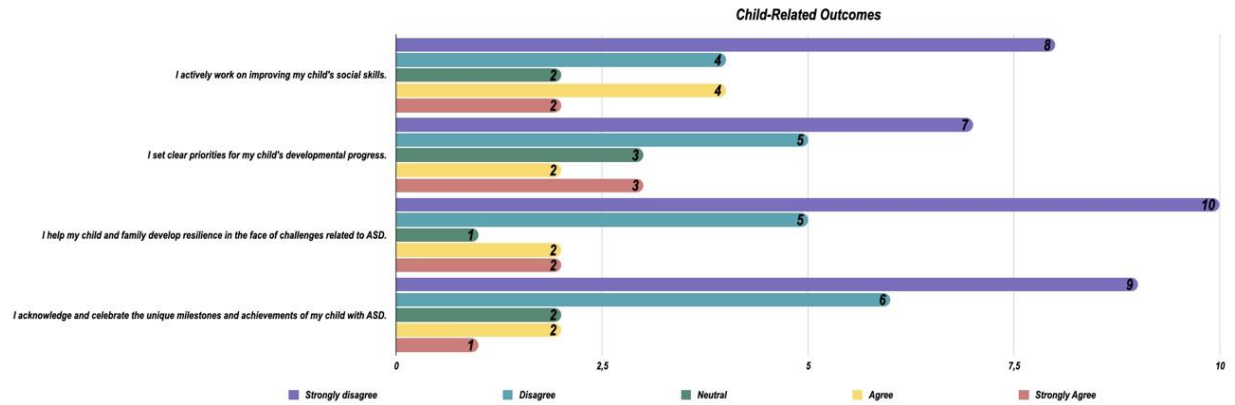
TABLE 5. depicts the results of the third part of the questionnaire



As it is described, there is a positive impact of parental leadership on sibling relationships. A significant majority of respondents strongly agree that their leadership positively influences sibling dynamics, suggesting a crucial role for parents in fostering supportive sibling bonds. Furthermore, the data indicates a low level of resilience within families affected by ASD, as evidenced by the substantial number of respondents reporting inability to overcome significant challenges in parents’ daily routine.

On the other hand, while there is a notable proportion of respondents who doesn’t report frequent celebratory moments related to the child's progress, a smaller but significant group indicates frequent celebrations. This suggests potential disparities in parental experiences and coping mechanisms.

TABLE 6. depicts the results of the third part of the questionnaire



The findings indicated that a significant proportion of respondents answered that they strongly disagree regarding the improvement of their child's social skills, indicating that parents might not be capable of or no having the expertise in this area. Additionally, a 12 of the participants noted of not setting clear priorities for their child's developmental progress, demonstrating not active parental engagement.

In addition, the majority of the parents filling the questionnaire reported passively contributing to their child's and family's resilience. Moreover, a strong emphasis on acknowledging and celebrating the child's achievements is far from being evident, indicating that parents might be aware of the developmental milestones of their children.

The collective analysis of the four datasets provides a multifaceted perspective on the experiences of parents raising children with ASD. A recurring theme is the resilience and adaptability demonstrated by parents in navigating complex challenges and generally emphasis should be given in developing the aforementioned skills. The data underscores the significance of parental knowledge, skills, and support networks in fostering optimal child outcomes.

While the findings illuminate areas of strength and resilience, they also highlight disparities in parental experiences. These disparities underscore the need for tailored interventions and support services to address the unique challenges faced by different families. In conclusion, the results pinpoint that 60-65% of the participants are not equipped with sufficient knowledge on handling challenging and adverse situations, do not set clear goals when it comes to development and vision and have challenges at establishing clear communication and collaborate with other family members or with professionals.

5.8 Interview results

Twenty interviews were conducted in April of 2024. Interviews were focused on questions of daily challenges and conflict resolution and lasted approximately 15 minutes. The type of the interviews was semi-structured and included ten open-ended questions. From each of the questions will be presented some cumulative findings and some segments from the interview questions from random participants. In the end of this chapter, a thematic analysis will be presented revealing the emergent codes and themes.

At the first question of the interview: ***Could you describe a typical day in your household? What are the main activities and routines you follow?*** The majority of the parents answered that introducing a new food to their children's diet was a challenging task, whereas individuals with ASD tend to stick to a specific food for instance potato chips with Ketchum. In addition, 15 out of 20 parents answered also that bedtime is a serious challenge since most children with ASD want to sleep together with their parents. On the other hand, half of the parents reported that their children have difficulties and facing challenges when it comes to clothing, the challenge in this situation is that many individuals with ASD wear only cotton cloths and feel discomfort when wearing wool or linen cloths. The names used in the segments are fictional to avoid privacy and safeguard data protection.

Maria one of the participants quoted:

Our days revolve around structure and predictability. Mornings can be quite hectic. We start with a visual schedule to prepare Tasos for the day ahead. Getting

dressed can be a challenge, so we often lay out clothes the night before. Breakfast is a quiet time, where we try to introduce new foods gradually. After breakfast, it's time for Tasos's therapy session. This is followed by a structured play period, which helps burn off energy and develop social skills.

The afternoon is dedicated to household chores and preparing for the evening. We often incorporate Tasos into simple tasks to foster independence. Dinnertime can be a sensory challenge, so we stick to familiar foods and routines. Evenings involve a calming routine to prepare for sleep. Bath time, followed by a story and a soft light, help create a relaxing atmosphere. Bedtime can be difficult, but we maintain a consistent routine to minimize disruptions. Our days are filled with patience, flexibility, and a deep love for our child.

At the second question: ***What are the biggest challenges you face in balancing your personal and professional life with parenting responsibilities?***

Many of the participants have replied that having normally developing children requires many hours daily, but having children with ASD is like working around the clock. One of the challenges that parents face is planning and visualizing the day, extra-curricular activities, and therapies with professionals. In addition, parents mentioned that they are having minimal or zero free time for social interactions with friends or pursue their careers.

Dimitris one of the parents mentioned: *Balancing work and family is a constant struggle, but it's magnified exponentially when you're parenting a child with autism. Every day feels like a tightrope walk. The demands of a full-time job often clash with the intensive care my child needs. There are endless appointments, therapies, and specialized educational needs that require constant attention. It's a juggling act that leaves little time for me, let alone for maintaining a social life or pursuing personal interests. The guilt of not being able to give my child or my career the attention they deserve is a heavy burden to carry.*

The next question ***Could you elaborate on the specific challenges your child is currently facing? Are there any particular developmental stages or school-related issues that are causing stress?*** Many of the participating parents revealed that their children face social interactions issues and the process of stimuli from the environment. Specifically, 14 out of 20 parents described that their children cannot make friends with other children or due to their inability to

process loud noises or intense colors, they meltdown in public places, which in turn stresses the child and undermines social relationships with other children.

Tonia one of the parents answered: *Right now, Vassilis (her son) is facing significant challenges with social interactions and sensory processing. He is at that age where peer relationships are becoming increasingly important, but he struggles to understand social cues and engage in reciprocal play. It's heartbreaking to see him on the sidelines. Additionally, sensory overstimulation can be overwhelming, leading to meltdowns in unfamiliar environments. School is a constant source of stress, especially during transitions and group activities. We're working closely with his school to develop strategies to help him cope, but it's an ongoing challenge.*

The transition from childhood to adolescence is also bringing new complexities. We're starting to see mood swings and increased anxiety, which can be difficult to manage. It's a constant balancing act between providing support and allowing him to develop independence.

The fourth question: ***How do these challenges impact your family's emotional well-being and overall dynamics?***, revealed that these challenges puts a heavy burden on family's mental and emotional state and many of the parents mentioned that even their marriage is affected. In addition, a few parents mentioned that their relationship with extended family (Grandparents, cousins, friends) were also affected by having a child with developmental difficulties. On the contrary, according to respondent, their family ties among the couple were boosted and one reason might be the enhances of communication among the members.

Antonis answered that question by quoting: *The challenges our son faces undoubtedly impact our family's emotional well-being. There are days filled with joy and pride in his progress, but there are also moments of sadness and frustration. The constant worry about his future and the fear of the unknown can be challenging. It has put a strain on our relationship, as we both grapple with different coping mechanisms. We've had to learn to communicate openly and honestly about our feelings, which has strengthened our bond in some ways but also highlighted areas where we need to grow.*

Our extended family has also been affected. While they are incredibly supportive, there's a sense of helplessness and sometimes even judgment. This can create

additional stress and isolation. It's essential for us to maintain open communication with them, but it's also important to set boundaries to protect our emotional health. Overall, the challenges we face have forced us to become incredibly resilient, but it's an ongoing process.

The fifth question: ***Can you share a common type of conflict or disagreement that arises between you and your child?***, revealed that parents more or less face the same issues with their children. For instance, transitions from one place to another or breaking the habits, routines or rituals create situations with tense feelings or meltdowns. Many times, in order to gradually make a transition between activities or venues parents prepare the ground by discussing and using flashcards but there is also a chance that children resist and as a result make tantrums.

Sofia to that question replied: *One of the most frequent conflicts between Kate-rina my child and me circles around transitions or when we deviate from the standard timetable. She have a strong preference for routines and find it incredibly challenging to adapt to changes. This often leads to meltdowns or resistance when we need to deviate from our usual schedule. For example, if we have to leave a favorite activity early or change plans unexpectedly, it can trigger significant distress. It's a constant balancing act between maintaining structure and flexibility, and it often leads to misunderstandings and frustration. This situation creates a fuss and negative feelings and many times me and my husband cannot handle it.*

When it comes to the 6th question: ***How do you typically handle stressful situations with your child? What strategies have you found to be effective,*** the interviewees replied that parents should have huge repositories of consistency, patience and understanding towards their children. Most of the parents mentioned that in order to steam off their children, they usually attempt to minimize the external stimuli such as loud noises or intense colors or remove them from the room. Other participants try to use visual supports, such as iPad applications that have flashcards which show how children should behave in certain situations or hung at the refrigerator short social stories of appropriate behavior.

In some cases, participants, in order to help their children to manage stress and their emotions replied that working out e.g swimming or having a cat and dog alleviated the stressful symptoms.

Giannis one of the participants quoted: *Handling stressful situations with Periklis requires a combination of patience, understanding, and consistency. When he becomes overwhelmed, I try to create a calm environment by minimizing sensory input. Often, removing him from the stressful situation to a quiet space can help him regulate his emotions. Visual supports and clear communication are also essential. Using simple language and providing visual cues can help him understand what is happening and what is expected of him.*

I've found that deep breathing exercises and physical activities can be beneficial in helping them manage his emotions. Sometimes, a short break for sensory input, such as a weighted blanket or listening to calming music, can help him regain composure. It's important to remember that every child is different, and what works for one may not work for another. Finding what helps my child manage stress has been a process of trial and error.

The 7th question: ***Are there any specific parenting techniques or approaches that you have found particularly helpful in resolving conflicts?*** The majority of the participants stated that positive reinforcement through positive comments and reward made their children to repeat the same set of behaviors in the future. Another important aspect according to the responses of the participants were social stories and visual supports. They claimed that when their children knew how the day will continue, prevented misunderstandings or reduced stress. However, the most important key is the prevention of conflicts, and to achieve that parents should focus on creating clear timetables with activities and expectations from their children.

Marianna, a parent from our leadership program quoted: *I've found that using positive reinforcement has been incredibly effective in managing conflicts with my child. Recognizing and rewarding positive behaviors helps to encourage his repetition. For example, when Sakis my son is able to calmly express his frustration or compromise during a disagreement, I make sure to praise his efforts.*

Additionally, visual supports have been invaluable. Using picture schedules or social stories can help prevent misunderstandings and reduce anxiety. By providing a visual representation of what will happen next, my child feels more in control and is less likely to become upset. It's important to remember that consistency is key. Establishing clear routines and expectations can help prevent conflicts from escalating.

The 8th question of this interview: ***How does your child's age and developmental stage influence your conflict resolution strategies***, had to do with parents' conflict strategies in accordance to their children's developmental stage. 10 of the parents replied that their children are relatively young and have hard times at expressing their feelings. For that reason, parents focusing more on the use of visual aids such as videos, social stories, images and animated timetables.

The rest of the parents mentioned that they implement clear communication strategies such as simple sentences and direct. They avoid using complex vocabulary or metaphors to avoid confusion. In addition, they attempted to teach them problem solving skills and basic life skills such as cleaning, cooking, solving conflicts peacefully, and managing emotions.

Angelos one of the participants mentioned: *Eleni my daughter is still relatively young, so my conflict resolution strategies are primarily focused on building understanding and providing support. At this age, she has difficulty expressing her feelings verbally, so I rely heavily on nonverbal cues and patience. I often use visual aids and simple language to help her understand the situation.*

As she gets older, I anticipate needing to adjust my approach. I'll likely focus more on developing problem-solving skills and teaching her effective communication strategies. It's important to involve her in finding solutions to conflicts, while still providing guidance and support. I believe that building her independence, autonomy and self-advocacy skills will be crucial for her future success.

The 9th question: ***Have there been instances where your conflict resolution strategies haven't worked as planned? How did you handle those situations?*** Participants regarding this question replied that they had implemented several times trial and error techniques until they found which one matches more

with their children. In addition, there were times which made parents to feel overwhelmed including moment of meltdown in public places, negativity to get up from the bed, that made them feel embarrassed.

The majority of the parents, when it comes to the second part of the question, answered that they attempted to step outside from the conflict/difficult situation and reassess. While a small number of parents sought help from professionals on how to handle adverse situations.

Tania, a participant quoted: *There have definitely been times when my carefully planned strategies have failed. It's incredibly sad when you feel like you've exhausted all your options and nothing seems to work. Meltdowns, particularly in public, can be overwhelming and embarrassing. In those moments, I try to remember that my child is experiencing intense distress, anxiety and that their behavior is not intentional.*

It's important for me to take a step back and focus on my own emotional well-being. Self-care is crucial in these situations. I've learned to recognize my own stress levels and to take breaks when needed. Sometimes, simply removing myself from the situation for a few minutes can help me regain perspective. Ultimately, I try to approach these challenges with empathy and understanding, remembering that we're in this together.

In the last question: ***Looking back, what do you consider to be the most significant lessons you've learned about parenting and conflict resolution?***

Unanimously the parents replied that patience and self-care were the most important traits about having a child with ASD, which often creates meltdown and tantrums and destabilizes one's mental and emotional well-being. Other participants also mentioned that a strong social network support from both families and team of professionals could alleviate the burden and promote strong bonds of friendship.

Two parents **Nikos & Stavros** quoted:

Nikos: *Looking back, the most significant lesson I've learned is the importance of self-care. Parenting a child with autism is incredibly demanding, and it's easy*

to put your own needs on hold. I've realized that taking care of myself isn't selfish; it's essential for my ability to be a supportive and patient parent.

Another crucial lesson is the power of building a strong support network. Connecting with other parents who share similar experiences has been invaluable. Sharing stories, advice, and simply knowing that you're not alone can make a world of difference.

Finally, I've learned to celebrate small victories. Every step forward, no matter how small, is a cause for celebration. Focusing on progress, rather than setbacks, helps to build resilience.

Stavros: *Reflecting on my journey, I've realized that patience is the cornerstone of effective parenting, especially when raising a child with autism. It's about understanding that progress happens in small steps, and celebrating those milestones, no matter how small. I've also learned the importance of building a strong support network. Sharing experiences and challenges with other parents has provided invaluable insights and emotional support.*

The interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis to identify patterns and develop overarching themes that reflected participants' experiences and perspectives. This method was selected for its capacity to uncover the underlying meanings and realities embedded within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring patterns or motifs and categorizing them into distinct themes (Bryman, 2016). This approach is particularly suited for exploring participants' views and experiences on a given topic. To conduct the analysis, the author adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) four-phase approach:

1. Immersed the author himself in the data, including detailed examination of field notes.
2. Identified and coded recurrent words and phrases relevant to the research. Additionally, analyzed the tone of voice to capture emotional nuances.
3. Developed initial codes based on the identified patterns within the data. These codes were related to Work-life balance, routines, Sensory issues, social and unplanned challenges, emotional impact, conflict with child and school challenges, resolution, conflict and positive reinforcement

and self-care.

4. Critically evaluated the established code framework to ensure its comprehensiveness, identify potential overlaps, and refine code definitions as needed.

TABLE 7. Codes and themes table

<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>
<i>daily activities, strict same routine, same diet every day</i>	<i>Routine & Predictability</i>
<i>unplanned challenges, work-life balance,</i>	<i>imbalance and stress of work life-integration</i>
<i>Emotional impact, unplanned challenges, emotional regulation</i>	<i>Emotional toll</i>
<i>Conflict, developmental, school, age</i>	<i>Complexities of parent-child interactions</i>
<i>Resolution, positive reinforcement, self-care</i>	<i>Adaptation and resilience</i>
<i>Friends, family, other parents, professionals</i>	<i>Seeking support</i>

A thematic analysis of the provided data revealed several themes and codes that describe the experiences of parents raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The first theme is the Routine and predictability, and this is evident from the code routine. Children with ASD need to follow a strictly routine including their everyday activities, nutrition plan and the people that interact with. Routine is usually the same and any change that might happen will create distress to the child. The second theme is imbalance and stress of work-life integration. This is evident in the code "work-life balance," which underscores the challenges parents face in balancing their professional responsibilities with the intensive care required for their children. This theme is further complicated by the "unplanned challenges" code, highlighting the unexpected disruptions and demands that often arise in caring for a child with ASD.

The third major theme is around the emotional toll of parenting a child with ASD. The code "emotional impact" describes the emotional challenges parents encounter, including feelings of stress, anxiety, and isolation. These emotional difficulties are exacerbated by the unpredictable nature of the child's behavior, as reflected in the "unplanned challenges" code. Parents played a significant role at attempting to teach their children how to regulate their emotions on stressful situations.

The fourth theme analyzes the difficulties among parent-child interactions. The codes "conflict," "developmental," and "school" show the multifaceted challenges parents face in navigating their relationships with their children. These challenges are compounded by the child's developmental stage, as indicated by the "age" code, which suggests that conflict resolution strategies evolve over time.

The fifth emerging theme is adaptation and resilience. As it results from the analysis, the code "resolution" highlights the various strategies parents employ to manage conflicts and challenges. The emphasis on "positive reinforcement" and "self-care" suggests that parents actively seek to develop effective coping mechanisms and prioritize their own well-being. This theme emphasizes the importance of support systems and personal resilience in navigating the challenges associated with parenting a child with ASD.

The last theme that came up from the thematic analysis was Seeking support. The codes 'friends', 'family', 'other parents', and 'professionals' emphasized that parents get help from other people and share their burden of having a child diagnosed with ASD.

5.9 Leadership program parental experience survey

This chapter aims to investigate the leadership program experience of attendant parents. This survey explored various aspects of leadership, including accountability, adaptability, problem-solving, and communication skills. The present survey was constructed by taking questions from Kouzes and Posner (2019) questionnaire, and Stogdill's (1963) Likert-scale 74 items questionnaire. The questions were modified and edited to fit with the current research group of parents.

The questionnaire was divided in 4 sub-categories including personal development, team management, team environment, and growth mindset. The present survey was handed over in June to evaluate and assess the program's effectiveness in various domains. 20 parents answered the following survey.

TABLE 8. shows the Leadership parental experience questionnaire first part



This table quantifies participants' perceptions of the impact of a personal development training on various leadership competencies. Responses are labelled on a Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

There is a positive evaluation of the training's influence on communication and collaboration skills. A significant majority of participants reported that the leadership program helped them to enhance their abilities in communicating goals, actively listening, and engaging in collaborative problem-solving. This might suggest that the program effectively addressed these critical leadership aspects.

Moreover, the data exhibits a positive impact on decision-making skills. Participants reported increased confidence in their decision-making abilities and a greater inclination to involve team members in the process.

On the other hand, in each of the questions answered, there were also parents that might have not found the overall program beneficial for them, while in a few questions there were neutral responses.

The second part of the questionnaire included questions regarding team management.

TABLE 9. shows the Leadership parental experience questionnaire second part.

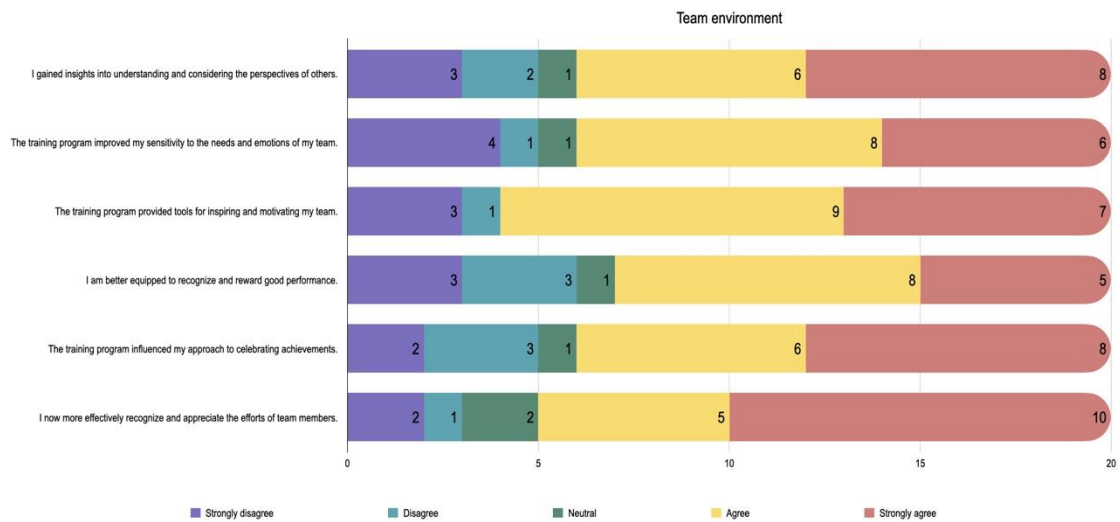


The data reveals a generally positive inclination towards the program, with a clear emphasis on its influence on delegation, trust, accountability, and collaboration. The biggest portion of the respondents reported that they have learned how to delegate tasks effectively, implying that the training provided useful tools and strategies for distributing workload. In addition, it's worth mentioning that the program cultivated a sense of trust among the parents, as indicated by the high number of respondents agreeing that the training increased their trust in colleagues' abilities.

When it comes to accountability, participants expressed confidence in ensuring accountability within their working groups, demonstrating that the program equipped them with strategies for establishing clear expectations and responsibilities within the team. Furthermore, the training seems to have strengthened participants' collaborative skills, with many reporting improved teamwork and cooperation within their teams.

On the contrary, it's important to note that a small percentage of participants expressed neutrality or disagreement with some statements. This proposes that there might be activities or strategies, or forms of teaching that need adjustments in order to address specific needs of all participants.

TABLE 10. shows the Leadership parental experience questionnaire third part.



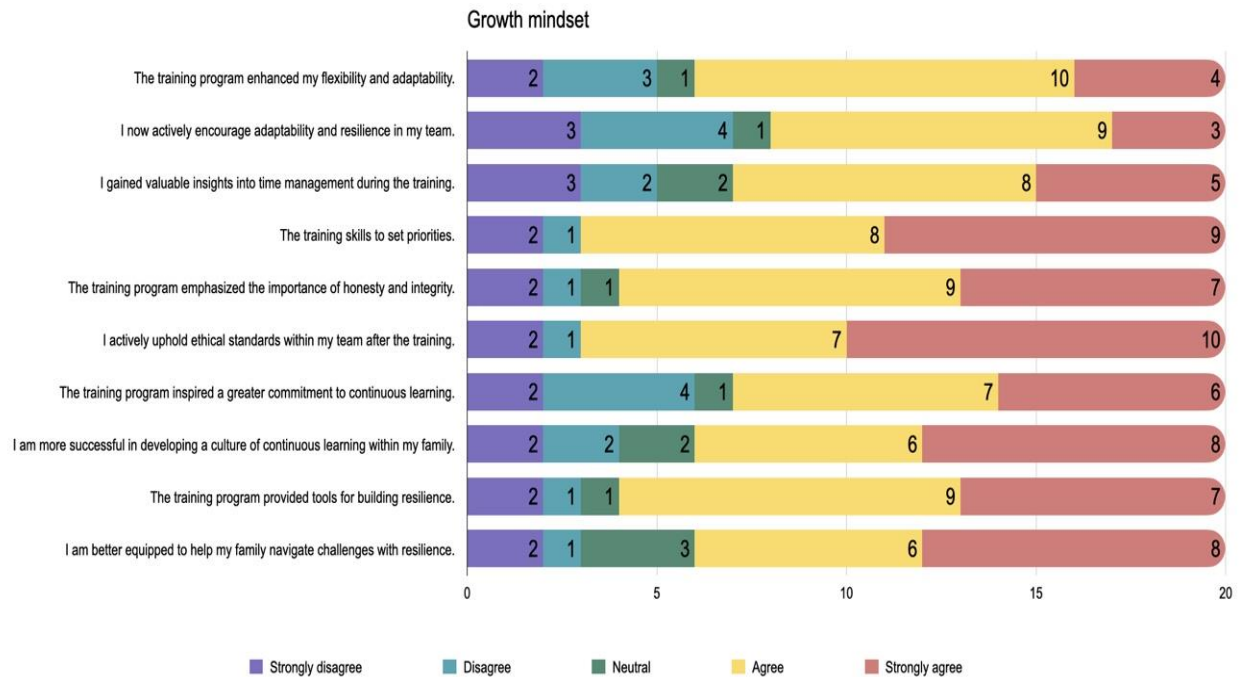
According to the table, a significant majority of the respondents reported enhanced understanding and consideration of others' needs, and that implies probably the program equipped the participants with empathetic and interpersonal skills. Besides that, participants felt more attuned to their team members' needs and emotions, indicating an improved ability to create a supportive work environment.

The program also appears to have equipped participants with tools for inspiring and motivating their teams. Teams could be their family or an extended group of teachers, therapists and parents that work together towards a common goal.

A notable increase in the ability to recognize and reward performance was observed, suggesting the training emphasized the importance of positive reinforcement. Additionally, participants demonstrated a heightened awareness of the significance of celebrating achievements, indicating a shift towards a more appreciative and supportive team culture.

On the other hand, there was a small minority of the participants that either remained neutral or disagreed with the statements. Further research including interviews might shed light onto their negative responses.

TABLE 11. shows the Leadership parental experience questionnaire last part.



The graph depicts a significant majority of participants that reported high levels of flexibility, adaptability, and resilience after attending the leadership program. Other than that, the program helped instilling a culture of continuous learning both personally and within families. One of the most important characteristics that was enhanced was prioritizing tasks and building resilience.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current research emphasized at training parents that have children with ASD to develop their leadership skills. The background of this research derived from author's personal involvement in prior leadership programs and the dire need of parents with ASD, according to numerous scholars (Derguy et al., 2015, 156-162), to get educated on handling adverse and emotional, and stressful situations. Parenting programs in Greece is not a new concept and it has been researched a lot; a parental leadership program for parents with ASD on the contrary was less discussed among scholars.

This case study dated back to 2015, which was merely an idea and hadn't take flesh and bones, when the author realized a gap in the Greek society with no existing parental programs focusing solely on the needs of parents that had children with ASD. From that point and onwards, the author operated extensive literature reviews on how to create a leadership program, understand thoroughly the needs of a child diagnosed with ASD and parents' needs. Moreover, finding a venue to conduct the program was an initial obstacle, which was later overcome, when the mayor of municipality in Kalamaria offered school classrooms.

While there were substantial sources for concepts of leadership and parental educational programs, finding literature regarding implementing a leadership program to parents that have children with ASD was much harder. The majority of the literature in this case was fixated on educating parents that had normally develop children instead of children with special educational needs, although one could argue that most of the same strategies that are applied in parenting programs for normally developed children, could also be implemented to children with ASD with a few adjustments. Taken into consideration the aforementioned fact, the prior research of leadership skills and techniques especially for parents with ASD were relatively scarce and for this reason strategies and activities for parents that have normally developed kids were applied with refinements.

The research questions for the current thesis were:

- 1) What are the greatest challenges that parents and their children with Autism faced in their daily routine?**
- 2) In what ways did parents resolve stressful situations and conflicts with their children with Autism?**
- 3) How did this leadership program help parents to develop their leadership skills to support their children with Autism?**

Regarding the first question: **What are the greatest challenges that parents and their children with autism faced in their daily routine?**

The analysis of the first survey attempted to answer the first question of this thesis. One of the greatest challenges encountered by parents was acquiring and implementing the necessary knowledge and skillset to successfully support their child's development. The majority of the parents expressed difficulty in grasping their children's unique needs and establish a communication with them. Similar research conducted by Gentles et al. (2020, 478) found that parents expressed difficulties at communication and identifying their offsprings' needs. Eventually the lack of understanding could lead to frustration and uncertainty, and as a result impact the quality of life for both the child and the parents. Reddy, Fewster & Gurayah (2019, 46) supported the previous statement, that parents felt 'in vain' when they failed to acknowledge understanding with their children, and have severe consequences to the quality of life.

In addition, it was found that parents faced challenges to secure support and appropriate services for their children. Specifically, there was a substantial number of parents that were not aware that they are entitled to grants from the state and have a number of free of charge services by therapists. Moreover, there are public services such as 'ΚΕΝΤΡΑ ΨΥΧΙΚΗΣ ΥΓΕΙΑΣ' (mental health centers) which provide psychotherapeutic and counseling services without any additional cost. According to the literature review, there were no relevant scholars who found that a certain parental training could educate parents about their legal rights such as grants and free of charge therapies.

Moreover, the analysis of the first survey have found that raising a child diagnosed with ASD could impact the power dynamics and the social relationships of the whole family. To be specific, parents reported difficulties in balancing their parental responsibilities with other life demands such managing the equilibrium between siblings' relationships, and parents' social life with friends and extended family. Another interesting finding, according to parents, had to do with the developmental challenges that a child with ASD has including deficit in social skills, lack of control of behavior, and sensory processing (intense colors, loud noises or the texture of a material could disorganize the child).

In a nutshell: Based on the analysis of the four tables of the first survey, the following key challenges emerge:

1. ***Communication and Understanding:*** Parents often struggle to effectively communicate with their child and understand their unique needs.
2. ***Decision-Making and Planning:*** Navigating the complex landscape of services and making informed decisions about interventions can be overwhelming.
3. ***Balancing Responsibilities:*** Balancing caregiving demands with other life commitments, such as work and family, presents significant challenges.
4. ***Social and Emotional Well-being:*** Managing the emotional toll of raising a child with special needs and maintaining social connections can be difficult.
5. ***Child-Related Challenges:*** Addressing behavioral issues, sensory sensitivities, and social difficulties can significantly impact daily routines.

Regarding the second question: **In what ways did parents resolve stressful situations and conflicts with their children with autism?**

According to the interview responses, the majority of the parents quoted that one of the greatest strategies of conflict resolution is preventing a meltdown or a tantrum from taking place. To ensure that, parents reported that establishing consistent routines and predictable activities could help their children to 'know' about their day and how thing will go. Parents replied that used visual schedules such as iPad applications that had the weekly timetable with images, timers to control

leisure time or lunch time or drew paintings about the transitioning to the next activity.

In addition, parents mentioned that using clear and concise communication help them resolve unplanned and stressful situations. They avoided using abstract concepts and the commands were simple sentences of a few words. One of the key aspects of clear communication was active listening, parents attempted to teach their children to identify their feels and try to describe. A small number of parents stated that they used visuals aids to communicate, since their children struggled with verbal communication.

According to the thematic analysis in the previous chapter, positive reinforcement was a commonly mentioned strategy, with parents noting its effectiveness in encouraging desired behaviors and refusing stressful ones. The reinforcements were verbally e.g. 'I am so proud of you that you managed to control yourself and not raise your hand on other children', acknowledgement of a good deed for instance 'Well done Tasos! You have placed all the toys back to the basket, and now we can play have more time at playing.

Moreover, parents attempted to teach their children how to regulate their emotions, especially in stressful situations. For instance, a parent quoted: 'Whenever Vassilis gets upset, I try to calm him down by tell him to take deep breaths or to run a couple of laps around our house yard to steam off and calm down. Other parents reported mindfulness techniques and many of them used one that have been taught in the program named 'grounding' technique 5-4-3-2-1 with the mere purpose of refocusing in the present moment. Below the image presents the sheet that was handed over to parents, in order for them to use it in their children when they are upset. Kizilkaya et al. (2021, 105) argue that ground techniques are effective at changing one's emotional state and bringing it back to the present moment and is highly effective on individuals diagnosed with ASD.



FIGURE 8. describes the sheet that was handed over to the participants. The goal of this sheet is to ask their child to name 5 objects around you, identify 4 object that you can touch, 3 items that could be heard, 2 object that could be smelled and one item that could be tasted.

Last but not least, parents employed seeking support strategies as a way to resolve their challenges with their children. There were parents who have built a social network of other parents with similar problems, shared their problems with friends or sought help from professionals to resolve their problems.

Regarding the last research question: **3) How did this leadership program help parents to develop their leadership skills to support their children with autism?**

The majority of the participants, according to Leadership program parental experience survey, enhanced their abilities to communicate effectively, listen actively, and engage more in collaborative problem-solving. From a leadership perspective these principles are fundamental to facilitate teamwork, build trust, and drive positive outcomes. Similar intervention programs conducted by Beuadoin, Sebire

& Couture (2014) found that parents with asd had their communication and collaboration skills enhanced after attending a similar intervention-leadership program.

Moreover, participants reported that are more likely in the future to involve more members in the decision about something important and felt more confident regarding decision-making. Participate leadership or democratic style of leadership involves all the members of team in the decision-making process which lessens the burden of the leader, in our case the parents, from taking all the decisions or the responsibilities. In addition, participants mentioned that this program helped them to increase empathy, motivation, and recognition of team members' contributions. Last but not least, this leadership program according to the last table of the leadership program experience survey, helped participants to increase flexibility, adaptability and resilience. However, one of the most commendable improvements was in parents' ability to prioritize tasks and enhance resilience.

6.1 Recommendations for future studies and limitations

This research was conducted as a case study of implementing a leadership program to parents that have children diagnosed with ASD, thus the validity of this research is limited only to this project, and this is one limitation of this study. Autism spectrum disorder is a multi-factorial syndrome and for this reason conclusions, results and suggestions cannot be replicated and applied fully in other similar case studies or situations since the projected symptoms/exhibited behavior of the disorder varies and this is what makes the spectrum autism a unique disorder (Courchesnme et al., 2019, 90-95). However, both the theoretical framework and the results of this study could act as a study guide for one who desires to equip parents with leaderships skills and enhance their life. This program contains helpful ideas, activities, and strategies for parents to become the best versions of themselves.

When it comes to future suggestions, a bigger sample of 100 parents could provide increased validity, while as mentioned above the results could have been only applied in the present study. In addition, the current study was conducted in Greece, in which the predominant culture is western, and there is a set of norms

and values, for instance both parents are contributing at raising their children. On the contrary, if the program was implemented in Asiatic and eastern countries that have different culture, there might be other cultural factors that have different impact on the effectiveness of the program and a different approach, and refinements should be made. As Shorey et al. (2020) argues, compared to western culture, parents with an eastern-Asiatic cultural background divide the roles in the family, whereas father is the breadwinner, and mother is responsible for child-upbringing. In the latter case, a similar program might be tailor made only for mothers.

When it comes to limitations of the current study, the surveys even though they are constructed by standardized questionnaires and then tailored for the purposes of this program, are self-reported data and one limitation could be the biases participants might have had to elicit socially desirable responses or underestimated their own shortcoming.

6.2 Personal reflections

From a co-author point of view, building from scratch and implementing a tailored made leadership program for parents with children with ASD is a time-consuming and stressful process, yet is extremely rewarding to observe individuals who struggled in their daily routine to develop and become gradually leaders of their own lives. Looking back to 2015 when this project was just an idea and the author was attending leadership conferences, that had definitely a great leap forward. In the beginning of this program in January 2024, parents were stressed and hesitant from joining a program, since many of them mentioned that they were 'deceived' in the past and received little or no help from other professionals. Around May 2024, the mistrust had completely gone, and a spirit of collaboration, communication, and empathy was established among the team of professionals and the parents.

That kind of process was not for everyone. There was an extensive literature review, hours of meetings among the team of professionals to set up the program, the activities, and the venue of the project. This project would have not succeeded without the municipality of Kalamaria and the immersive support of the community. From my point of view, this process elicited tons of positive feelings, yet the timetable was strict and only 5-6 hours per weekend were available to conduct

the program. Moreover, there were many times that parents questioned our methods or exhibited their anger, probably the cause was from home, which burden the team with frustration, and anger.

To sum up, the whole process requires nerves of steel and willingness to lead a team of parents who are everyday put through and tested in very stressful situations. To do this effectively, one should be able to not take the collateral damage (anger, blames) from the parents personally and keep moving forward.

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8 APPENDICES

Appendix.1 Anonymous Parental Questionnaire

(1)

1. I have a clear vision for my child's development.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

2. I effectively communicate with my child.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

3. I am adept at identifying and solving problems in daily routines.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

4. I understand and consider my child's unique needs.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

5. I motivate and reinforce positive behaviors in my child.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

6. I actively work on improving my child's social skills.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

7. I make informed decisions regarding therapeutic interventions for my child.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

8. I encourage a collaborative approach to problem-solving with my child.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

9. I am sensitive to my child's sensory sensitivities and challenges.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

10. I recognize and celebrate my child's achievements.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

11. I involve other family members or caregivers in supporting my child.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

12. I adapt my parenting approach to accommodate my child's sensory sensitivities.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

13. I manage and prioritize the time dedicated to therapies, school, and activities.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

14. I hold schools and educators accountable for meeting my child's unique needs.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

15. I inspire and educate siblings to understand and support their brother/sister with ASD.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

16. I handle conflicts or challenges effectively in the daily routines of my child with ASD.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

17. I collaborate with therapists and professionals to enhance my child's development.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

18. I maintain honesty and integrity in advocating for my child's rights and needs.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

19. I stay informed about the latest research and strategies related to ASD.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

20. I help my child and family develop resilience in the face of challenges related to ASD.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

21. I acknowledge and celebrate the unique milestones and achievements of my child with ASD.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

22. I engage in self-reflection to continuously improve my leadership skills as a parent of a child with ASD.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

23. I am confident in advocating for my child's needs.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

24. I actively participate in decisions related to my child's therapy.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

25. I trust others to support my child effectively.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

26. I am open to trying new strategies to improve my child's comfort and engagement.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

27. I set clear priorities for my child's developmental progress.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

28. I am confident in advocating for my child within the school system.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

29. My leadership positively impacts sibling relationships.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

30. I find successful resolutions to situations that pose difficulties for my child.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

31. My collaboration with experts positively influences my child's progress.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

32. My family overcomes significant challenges related to ASD.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

33. Memorable celebration moments related to my child's progress are common.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

34. I demonstrate ethical behavior in my advocacy efforts.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

35. I actively pursue

continuous learning as a parent of a child with ASD.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

Appendix 2. Semi-structured interview questions

Could you describe a typical day in your household? What are the main activities and routines you follow?

What are the biggest challenges you face in balancing your personal and professional life with parenting responsibilities?

Could you elaborate on the specific challenges your child is currently facing? Are there any particular developmental stages or school-related issues that are causing stress?

How do these challenges impact your family's emotional well-being and overall dynamics?

Can you share a common type of conflict or disagreement that arises between you and your child?

How do you typically handle stressful situations with your child? What strategies have you found to be effective?

Are there any specific parenting techniques or approaches that you have found particularly helpful in resolving conflicts?

How does your child's age and developmental stage influence your conflict resolution strategies?

Have there been instances where your conflict resolution strategies haven't worked as planned? How did you handle those situations?

Looking back, what do you consider to be the most significant lessons you've learned about parenting and conflict resolution?

Appendix 3. Parental Leadership Experience survey

(7)

I have gained additional insights into effective vision and goal setting.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

I feel more proficient in actively listening to the concerns and ideas of others.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

I am more inclined to involve team members in decision-making after the training.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

The training program positively impacted my approach to collaborative problem-solving.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

The training program improved my sensitivity to the needs and emotions of my team.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

I am better equipped to recognize and reward good performance.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

The training program increased my trust in team members' abilities.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

I now actively encourage adaptability and resilience in my team.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

The training program positively influenced my ability to set priorities.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

I feel more confident in ensuring accountability within my team.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

I am more effective in promoting teamwork and cooperation.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

I actively uphold ethical standards within my team after the training.

(9)

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

I am more successful in fostering a culture of continuous learning within my team.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

I am better equipped to help my team navigate challenges with resilience.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

I now more effectively recognize and appreciate the efforts of team members.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

16. I actively seek feedback to continuously improve my leadership skills.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

Appendix 4. Morton et al. (2011) transformational parenting leadership (10)

Questionnaire Items

Acts as a person that I look up to

Is optimistic about what I can accomplish and celebrate achievements

Gets me to think for myself

Displays a genuine interest in my life

Behaves as someone that I can depend on and ensuring accountability

Demonstrates that s/he believes in me and communicates effectively

Encourages me to look at issues from different sides and understand perspectives of others

Helps me when I am struggling

Behaves as someone that I can trust

Is enthusiastic about what I am capable of achieving

Encourages me to freely express my own ideas and opinions and appreciate other members' efforts

Shows comfort and understanding when I am upset/frustrated

Treats me in ways that build my respect for him/her

Encourages me to achieve my goals and seeks for feedback

Shows respect for my ideas and opinions

Displays genuine care and concern for me

Appendix.5 Empowering leadership questionnaire Arnold & Drasgow (2000) (11) ELQ items

Leading By Example

Sets high standards for performance by his/her own behavior
Works as hard as he/she can
Works as hard as anyone in my work group
Sets a good example by the way he/she behaves
Leads by example

Participative Decision-Making

Encourages work group members to express ideas/suggestions
Listens to my work group's ideas and suggestions
Uses my work group's suggestions to make decisions that affect us
Gives all work group members a chance to voice their opinions
Considers my work group's ideas when he/she disagrees with them
Makes decisions that are based only on his/her own ideas

Coaching

Helps my work group see areas in which we need more training
Suggests ways to improve my work group's performance
Encourages work group members to solve problems together
Encourages work group members to exchange information with one another
Provides help to work group members
Teaches work group members how to solve problems on their own
Pays attention to my work group's efforts
Tells my work group when we perform well
Supports my work group's efforts
Helps my work group focus on our goals
Helps develop good relations among work group members

Informing

Explains company decisions
Explains company goals

Explains how my work group into the company
Explains the purpose of the company's policies to my work group
Explains rules and expectations to my work group
Explains his/her decisions and actions to my work group

Showing Concern/Interacting with the Team

Cares about work group members' personal problems
Shows concern for work group members' well-being
Treats work group members as equals
Takes the time to discuss work group members' concerns patiently
Shows concern for work group members' success
Stays in touch with my work group
Gets along with my work group members
Gives work group members honest and fair answers
Knows what work is being done in my work group
Finds time to chat with work group members

