



Country Specific Reports

Integrative Parents' Autism Training

2020-1-EL01-KA204-079195

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



CONTENTS

1. Introduction and description of the IPAT training activity
2. Strengths and Weaknesses of the IPAT training activity
3. Challenges encountered
4. Points raised by participants and moderators of the IPAT training activity
5. Suggestions for modification

1. Introduction and description of the IPAT training activity

The IPAT training activity took place in 8 sessions lasting approximately 3 hours from 12 March to 15 June 2022 in Catania. In the months preceding the start, we did all the work of recruiting parents of children with ASD through our organisation's social channels and telephone contacts. Wanting to extend this possibility to as many people as possible, we contacted not only parents whose children are part of our cooperative but also parents whose children are followed by other organisations that collaborate with us. The response was positive and we received a total of 16 applications. However, already by the second meeting, the number of participants had decreased to 11 (9 mothers and 2 fathers) and remained constant over the weeks, although some were absent 1-2 times for personal reasons.

The moderators who conducted the Parent Training were Dr. Federica Failla, a psychologist and psychotherapist in training, and Dr. Federica Campanella, Pedagogist, Behaviour Analyst undergoing BCBA certification, and specialising in CAA; both of them are long-standing experts in the field of ASD. Moderators respected the Consortium's shared indications for the conduct of activities, alternating 15 minutes of lectures, 10' for questions, 10' for coffee breaks and 45 – 60' devoted to reflections and experiential activities, but above all they tried to make the meetings less didactic and as interactive as possible. From the outset, the

IO2: Integrative Parents' Autism Training Activity - COUNTRY SPECIFIC REPORT ITALY

relationship between moderators and parents was serene and the atmosphere relaxed and open to sharing. In this regard, the moderators noted that the training process also served as group therapy and that parents needed this 'window' during which they could have the opportunity to tell their stories and, above all, exchange opinions, experiences, advice. In fact, as time went by, the group became more cohesive and this made it possible to deal with important and intense topics of life.

In general, the IPAT training aimed to provide a comprehensive psycho educational programme for parents with children diagnosed with ASD, to provide them with new knowledge so that they have the right tools to deal with moments of crisis and challenges affecting their family. Although the group was heterogeneous, in that both parents of children and adolescents participated, the structure of the IPAT training ensured that all topics were relevant to the parents, the content accessible and, above all, applicable and spendable in their daily lives.

2. Strengths and weaknesses of the IPAT training activity

Strengths:

- Informal structure of the IPAT training boosted parents' confidence in attending the meetings and participating through the share of their experiences.
- The interaction between parents opened up other windows and helped the merge of other important topics.
- The IPAT interactive activities supported parents in developing knowledge and skills in areas important to better understand ASD.
- The IPAT Power Point presentations designed for each meeting helped the parents not to lose focus on the issue at hand. Parents also requested that presentations be sent as they have been interested in bibliography.

IO2: Integrative Parents' Autism Training Activity - COUNTRY SPECIFIC REPORT ITALY

- Participants were open- minded and prone to the discussion, this made the interaction among group members and between participants and moderators easier.
- The long-standing expertise of the moderators in the field of ASD was crucial as they were able to answer any further questions that arose even outside the topics specifically addressed in that lecture.
- The topics covered were of interest to parents.
- The topics covered complemented the participants' skills on the important points related to ASD.

Weaknesses:

- Parents sometimes complained that the content was too academic.
- Given the content of the presentations and the discussion topics they stimulated, the time available was not always sufficient.
- Some topics were redundant for participants who, conversely, would have liked others to be explored in more depth.
- As it happened that the Power Point presentations came almost close to the training, the moderators felt some pressure due to the short time available to prepare the lectures.

3. Challenges encountered

- The moderators found it difficult to deal with some topics (e.g. sexuality), as the participants were not so prone to discussion there.
- Despite the initial enthusiasm, it was difficult to maintain and ensure the presence of participants for all the meetings.

IO2: Integrative Parents' Autism Training Activity - COUNTRY SPECIFIC REPORT ITALY

- More time was needed to allow more interaction among parents.
- There was a high prevalence of mothers, while only two fathers took part.

4. Points raised by participants and moderators

Participants:

Overall, the feedback from participants was positive. Parents were happy with the content of the topics discussed, although they wished less time had been devoted to points they were familiar with, in order to devote more space to topics they were unfamiliar with. As proof that they were willing and eager to learn, the participants requested that they be given Power Point presentations so that they could retrieve and consult the bibliography. The general feedback that emerged is positive, parents say they are satisfied and hope that more parent trainings will be organised. In addition to the lectures, discussion and interaction with other parents was important to them. One of the negative factors that the parents emphasised during the training concerned the 'marginalisation' of their family from society and, from the very beginning, parents created a WhatsApp group as proof that they needed to network with other people dealing and living the same situation.

Participants also gave their suggestions in order to improve the IPAT training, such as the creation of an online chat/groups, where parents and coordinators could present problems and solutions. It would also be useful to give the possibility to connect via online platforms, where it is not possible to attend one or more meetings in person. Parents asked to analyse other topics as well, but no specification as to which topic to cover.

IO2: Integrative Parents' Autism Training Activity - COUNTRY SPECIFIC REPORT ITALY

Moderators:

For the moderators, the training was a continuous human and professional enrichment, so their general feedback is more than positive. During the lectures there were some difficult moments to overcome, silences to fill and specific questions to answer, but they were all overcome perfectly thanks to the relaxed atmosphere that accompanied the training and the professional skills of the moderators,

In terms of time management, this was more complex for some of the presentations, which would have required more time both for in-depth discussion of the topics and for discussion among the participants.

5. Suggestions for modification

- The IPAT training could be carried out over a period of several months, with shorter 2-hour lessons so that topics are covered in more depth and macro topics that require more time to be explained are divided up.
- Include parents' feedback and suggestions to the Power Point presentations.
- Revise the PPT presentations giving them a less academic and therefore accessible aspect for non-professionals in the field of autism.

In addition, there could have been added the future perspectives for people with ASD, so to say employment and adult life management.