

Opportunities for Effective Communication Through the Delivery of an Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnosis: A Scoping Review

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Abstract : When a child is diagnosed with an illness, condition, or developmental disorder, the process involved in understanding and accepting this diagnosis can be a very stressful and isolating experience for parents and families. The healthcare providers' ability to effectively communicate in such situations represents a vital lifeline for parents. In this context, communication becomes a crucial element not only for getting through the period of grief but also for the future. We mobilized the five stages of grief model to summarize existing literature regarding the ways in which the experience of an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis disclosure aligns with the experience of grief to explore how this can inform best practices for effective communication with parents through the diagnosis disclosure. Fifteen publications met inclusion criteria. Findings from the scoping review of empirical studies show that parents/families experience grief-like emotions during the diagnosis disclosure. However, grief is not an outcome of the encounter itself. In fact, the experience of the encounter can help mitigate the grief experience. The way parents/families receive and react to the 'news' depends on their preparedness, knowledge, and the support received through the experience. Individual communication skills, as well as policies and regulations, should be examined to alleviate adverse reactions in this context. These findings highlight the importance of further research into effective parent-provider communication strategies and their place in supporting quality autism care.

Keywords : autism spectrum disorder, autism spectrum disorder diagnosis, diagnosis disclosure, parent-provider communication, parental grief

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