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FROM DISTRESS AND ACCEPTANCE TO WEBS OF AFFECTION – ASD AND FAMILY TIES IN BUILDING BRIDGES FOR INCLUSION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

In a society marked by profound inequalities and the social selection of individuals based on their particularities, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face unique challenges in the process of development and inclusion. These experiences are often limited to the limited support of the family nucleus, which plays a central, but not always sufficient, role in meeting the needs of these children. It is crucial to highlight that, in many cases, there is not even family support, an essential element for the cognitive and emotional development of these individuals. Given this reality, the objective of this research is to analyze the inclusion strategies implemented by parents and family members with the purpose of promoting the integral development of children with ASD. We ask: How do the practices and strategies adopted by family members contribute to the cognitive, emotional and social development of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, considering the challenges and limitations faced in the family and social spheres? The methodological approach adopted is qualitative, based on Minayo (2016) through a bibliographic review, Gil (1999) and a comprehensive analysis in Weber (2006). Dissertations and theses that explore the theme were used, with a focus on studies that demonstrate the positive contributions of family practices to the development of these children. The bibliographic sources were obtained from databases such as the Sucupira Platform, Google Scholar and Scielo. The results indicate that the family nucleus constitutes the primary space for the first steps in the cognitive development of children with ASD. It is in this environment that the first interactions occur, which are decisive for the formation of solid emotional bonds and for the strengthening of the social and emotional skills of these children. In addition, the home is the space where children begin to shape their worldviews, and is therefore a strategic place for the promotion of inclusive and welcoming practices. On the other hand, strengthening emotional relationships in the family environment not only favors the child's individual development, but also contributes to a more harmonious integration into society.

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INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH ASD

In a society that is extensively exclusionary, such as Brazil, having a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a major challenge given the problems that arise daily. Social structures are often not prepared to deal with the specificities of these children, whether in the educational system, health services or public spaces, according to Santos et. al., (2024). This scenario reinforces the importance of the family's role in mediating social relationships and in facing the barriers imposed by society. Exclusion, which is structural, also directly impacts the opportunities for full development of these children, highlighting the need for emotional, cognitive and affective support provided by the family..

> In families with children with special needs (SN), there are numerous sources of tension that influence their dynamics, such as economic, relational, communicative, and health aspects, including disability, which, although important, is an additional variable in this context. Furthermore, regarding the treatment of children with SN, the family's participation evolves from an instrumental to a global and interactive perspective, considering all the individuals affected in this relationship. In the case of children with ASD, special and almost total dedication is required from those involved with the child, due to the varied characteristics and peculiarities of the disorder [...] For parents, one of the most stressful occasions with professionals is the difficulty related to the diagnosis and treatment of autism: what some advise, others do not recommend. It is difficult to find people who will adequately care for the child (our emphasis), so that the parents can have moments of leisure or work during the child's vacation periods. Due to these issues, many parents, especially mothers, give up their leisure and work opportunities to dedicate themselves to their children. (Loureto; Moreno, 2016, p. 308).

Thus, children with ASD need family support in various areas of social life, since living in society requires cognitive and emotional skills that, for the most part, are developed within the family. From an early age, the home is the space where the first contacts with the outside world are mediated, allowing the child to acquire essential skills to interact with other people and understand social dynamics (Santos, et. al., 2024). Family support is essential to stimulate the development of language, the recognition of emotions and the acquisition of basic social skills, essential for these children to be able to face the challenges imposed by society with greater security and autonomy. However, it is known and research shows that the diagnosis of ASD in a child is a moment of great emotional impact for families, especially for mothers. That said, Schmidt and Bosa (2003) endorse that “[...] the results indicate that mothers tend to be at greater risk of crisis and parental stress than fathers, due to the demand of caring for the child” (p. 3). At first, many mothers report feelings of anguish, fear and insecurity when faced with the unknown. This initial

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reaction is natural, as the diagnosis brings to light a horizon of challenges and adaptations that will be necessary for the child's well-being. Over time, however, many mothers begin to accept their children's condition and seek information, support and solutions that can contribute to the child's integral development, transforming the initial anguish into resilience and protagonism.

> Regarding studies on the relationship between autism and family, that is, the interactions of the autistic individual in their family nucleus, most of these are restricted to the maternal figure as the focus of attention, with few studies focusing on the siblings of these individuals. Given the importance of the family in the social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral development of a child, it should be added that the family world goes beyond the mother-child interaction (Loureto; Moreno, 2016, p.308).

Family support, in this context, transcends the domestic environment, directly influencing the social development of children with ASD. The affective interactions and inclusive practices carried out by the family create the foundation for these children to develop self-confidence and the skills necessary to integrate into other environments, such as school and the community. “The literature indicates that the condition of these families is permeated by ambiguous feelings, so that the coping strategies of each person in dealing with the disability will determine the meaning of the experience and the experiences of the family members” (Loureto; Moreno, 2016, p.308). Consequently, families who have access to information about ASD and specialized resources tend to have a greater capacity for adaptation and implementation of effective strategies to promote the growth and autonomy of their children.

It is important to emphasize that the presence of a support network, including extended family members, health professionals, educators and support groups, can make a significant difference in the quality of life of the child with ASD and their family. This multidisciplinary collaboration helps to create a welcoming and inclusive environment, in which children can explore their potential in a safe and stimulating way. Thus, building a more inclusive society begins in the family, but also requires coordination with other sectors.

The question that guides this research therefore arises from the need to understand: How do support strategies and family practices contribute to the social, emotional and cognitive development of children with ASD in an exclusionary society? This question arises from the observation of the difficulties faced by these families and the lack of studies

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that comprehensively explore family dynamics as a key element in the process of social inclusion of children with ASD.

The relevance of this research extends not only to families who live directly with ASD, but also to professionals in education, health and society as a whole. By investigating how family support can be strengthened and directed to boost children's development, this research contributes to advancing discussions on inclusive practices and to the formulation of more effective and equitable public policies.

> [...] the formulation of public policies has, in theory, guaranteed the expansion of access to the legal rights of these people. In 2012, the National Policy on the Rights of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was established, law no. 12,7646, considering such individuals as people with disabilities for legal purposes. In 2013, the Ministry of Health published the Guidelines for Rehabilitation Care for People with ASD, outlining guidelines for health professionals, focusing on o in the health of the person with ASD and their family members, due to the impacts of the diagnosis on family dynamics (Loureto; Moreno, 2016, p. 308).

In the context of families, the results of this research can offer valuable insights on how to deal with the challenges of ASD, highlighting the importance of acceptance, affection and the search for solutions that promote the well-being and autonomy of children (Santos, et. al., 2024). In the social context, the research highlights the need for greater collective commitment to create inclusive environments that favor coexistence and the appreciation of differences.

Therefore, understanding the role of the family in the context of ASD is essential to advance in the construction of a more welcoming and inclusive society. By recognizing the specificities of each child and valuing family protagonism, it is possible to open paths for effective inclusion, which transcends the barriers imposed by social exclusion and promotes the full development of individuals with ASD.

BETWEEN PLOTS AND MEANINGS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO INTRAFAMILY RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF ASD – METHODOLOGY

The methodology is characterized by the steps that are taken before and during the research, as stated by Kuhn in his work “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions”. According to the author, “[...] scientific research is not a linear process, but a cycle of problem formulation, data collection and interpretation, influenced by existing paradigms” (Kuhn, 2013, p. 45). Thus, research planning involves both the selection of instruments and the theoretical analysis that guides the study. According to Kuhn (2013), “[...] paradigms guide

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the choice of method and delimit the field of investigation, making critical reflection on the epistemological bases of the research essential" (p. 98). This perspective underpins the need for well-defined steps, with a clear understanding of how each stage contributes to responding to the problem. For this research, we initially sought to understand the particularities of family dynamics and their influence on the development of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This process was carried out by defining the object of study and reviewing the literature, articulating different theoretical approaches to build a framework that would guide the investigation. Thus, we adopted a perspective that considers not only the structural aspects of the family, but also its affective and social relationships, in line with Kuhn's theoretical contributions.

This research is configured as being of a qualitative nature, based on the perspective of Minayo (2016), who highlights the centrality of subjects and their social relationships in the production of knowledge. According to the author, "[...] qualitative research values subjectivity and the dynamic relationships between subjects, enabling deeper interpretations" (Minayo, 2016, p. 25). This approach becomes essential to understand how intrafamily dynamics influence the development of children with ASD. Minayo (2016) also points out that "[...] the complexity of social phenomena requires methods that allow us to capture senses and meanings" (p. 42), justifying our methodological choice.

> Qualitative research responds to very specific questions. Within the Social Sciences, it deals with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes. This set of human phenomena is understood here as part of social reality, since human beings are distinguished not only by acting, but also by thinking about what they do and by interpreting their actions within and based on the reality experienced and shared with their peers. The universe of human production that can be summarized in the world of relationships, representations and intentionality and is the object of qualitative research can hardly be translated into numbers and quantitative indicators (Minayo, 2016, p. 20-21).

In this sense, qualitative research is not restricted to numerical data, but seeks to understand the contexts and experiences lived by the subjects. According to Minayo (2016), "[...] it is through narratives and discourses that one can access the symbolic universe of the subjects" (p. 30). Thus, the investigation aims to explore the meanings attributed by family members to their own experiences and the role they play in the development process of their children with ASD.

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We began our exploratory work from bibliographic research, which, as Gil (1999) warns us, "[...] constitutes an indispensable step for formulating problems and surveying the state of the art" (p. 32). This approach allowed us to map previous studies and identify gaps in the literature. Gil (1999) states that "[...] bibliographic research provides a broad view of the object, bringing together elements to theoretically support the investigation" (p. 40). This perspective guided the careful selection of materials, such as articles, theses and dissertations related to the topic.

> Bibliographic research is developed based on previously prepared material, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles. Although almost all studies require some type of work of this nature, there are studies developed exclusively from bibliographic sources. A large part of exploratory studies can be defined as bibliographic research, as well as a certain number of studies developed using the content analysis technique (Gil, 2011, p. 44).

Bibliographic research also allowed us to explore different theoretical and methodological approaches to ASD and family dynamics. According to Gil (1999), "[...] the bibliographic survey must be systematic and organized, ensuring the relevance and currentness of the sources used" (p. 45). Therefore, we used databases such as Scielo, Google Scholar and the Sucupira Platform to collect materials that theoretically support the research. By appropriating this knowledge, we began to ask several questions about the influence of intrafamily relationships on the lives of children with ASD. How do these bonds contribute to cognitive and emotional development? What are the challenges faced by families and how can they be overcome? These questions arose as we deepened our view of the literature and social dynamics.

Later, we began to write about the subject after analyzing the research from a comprehensive perspective, based on the contributions of Weber (2006). The author helps us reflect on "[...] social action as a result of significant relationships established between subjects" (Weber, 2006, p. 72). Thus, our research sought to understand how the meanings attributed by families shape their practices and attitudes towards children with ASD.

Weber (2006) also highlights that "[...] shared meanings are essential for the construction of social relationships" (p. 80). This reinforces the importance of investigating intrafamily dynamics as a space for the production and negotiation of meanings. Thus, the research adopts a comprehensive perspective to capture the nuances of relationships established within the family.

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Therefore, as Weber (2006) points out, “[...] understanding subjective meanings is essential for the analysis of social action” (p. 95). This theoretical-methodological approach guides our view of family interactions, allowing us to uncover how they influence the development of children with ASD, as well as their perspectives for inclusion in society..

TEA AND FAMILY TIES IN BUILDING BRIDGES FOR INCLUSION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Durkheim states that the family is the embryo of society, being the nucleus where the individual acquires the moral contours necessary to live in a collective. For children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the family assumes an even more significant role, since it is in this environment that the initial support for their development is established. As observed by Morin (1995), the family functions as a dynamic and interconnected system, reflecting the specific needs of its members. Thus, the values and norms learned in this space shape not only the individual, but also their interactions with the world.

> In this scenario, the holographic principle of Edgar Morin's (1995) complexity theory emerges as a valuable perspective. This principle suggests that each part of a system contains the whole, and the whole is present in each part. This means that the experience of autism is collectively shared, experienced, where each individual in the family environment is like a mirror that reflects and is reflected from the interaction of the other, not being isolated only in the diagnosed individual. Each family member, as can be seen, experiences ASD in a unique way, but their individual experiences reflect and are reflected by the family system as a whole. The holographic principle proposes a non-linear and non-reductionist understanding of organization and reality, where systems cannot be fully understood only by analyzing their isolated parts, since each part carries with it aspects of the whole (Morin, 1995, apud Santos et al., 2024, p. 18).

According to Piccinini et al. (2004), the birth of a child within social standards is usually celebrated, but the arrival of a child with ASD can generate reactions of sadness and guilt. These emotions are often intensified by the stigma associated with the diagnosis, as Goffman (1988) explains: “Stigma creates invisible but deeply rooted barriers that make it difficult for the child and the family to be fully accepted in society” (p. 32).

> As indicated by the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized mainly by difficulties in communication and social interaction, in addition to restrictive or repetitive behaviors. This disorder, which varies in its severity, is chronic; however, early identification is crucial to improve the prognosis, mitigating symptoms and improving the quality of life of affected individuals. Historically, studies on autism, which began approximately six decades ago, continue to explore several aspects, such as diagnostic definitions, possible causes, comorbidities, psychological characteristics, brain functioning and intervention strategies, which keeps the

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> scientific community, health professionals and the general public in constant concern (Santos, et. al., 2024, p.11).

For Hofzmann, et. al. (2019: 3-4):

> [...] the literature states that ASD symptoms are recognized between 12 and 24 months of the child's life. When faced with perceptions of behavioral differences in autistic children, family members first seek out a speech-language pathologist, based on the hypothesis of hearing disorders. Despite the initial diagnostic suspicion, deafness is usually ruled out as the investigation progresses.

Thus, the birth of a child with ASD can represent a significant emotional challenge for parents, who, as Piccinini et al. (2004) state, often face feelings of sadness and guilt, feelings intensified by the lack of understanding and the social stigma associated with the diagnosis. In everyday family life, these reactions can manifest themselves in different ways, from mourning the diagnosis to fear for the future. For example, parents of autistic children may feel unable to meet society's expectations regarding child development. This can be reflected in everyday situations such as difficulty in celebrating traditional developmental milestones, such as speaking or interacting with other children, which are expected in a linear way by society. Instead of shared pleasure, moments like these can generate frustration, insecurity and a sense of failure, not only because of the challenges the child faces, but also because of the fear that society will see them as “different” or “less capable”.

> Regarding experiences in family life after the diagnosis of ASD [...] changes were diagnosed in the daily lives that family members had to establish after the diagnosis. Some studies report that the family is faced with feelings of grief, denial, sadness and guilt that, associated with the lack of knowledge about the disorder, can aggravate the denial regarding the diagnosis (Hofzmann, et. al., 2019, p. 4).

These feelings of sadness and guilt are often exacerbated by the lack of adequate support, which is a reflection of the stigma surrounding the diagnosis. with ASD. Goffman's (1988) theory on stigma illustrates this situation well when he states that “[...] stigma creates invisible but deeply rooted barriers that make it difficult for the child and family to be fully accepted by society” (p. 32). In everyday life, this perception of “difference” can be experienced by the family in everyday interactions with other people. For example, when taking the autistic child to public spaces, such as a park or supermarket, parents may notice curious looks, whispered comments or even attitudes of isolation on the part of other people. These reactions generate discomfort, increasing the feeling of exclusion and

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loneliness. Parents may then isolate themselves socially or limit the child's activities, creating a more restrictive environment, both for the child and for themselves.

> As for the difficulties arising from the diagnosis of autism, financial difficulties stand out, followed by reports of difficulty in attending environments different from the child's usual ones and acceptance by other people. The literature states that, above all, the maternal figure recognizes in the autistic child the difficulty in relating, inflexibility to noise, lack of bonding and difficulties in communication. This situation forces the family to adapt to the demands that the autism spectrum disorder brings, requiring constant attention from caregivers, culminating in withdrawal from social life (Hofzmann, et. al., 2019, p.4).

In addition, families often face the challenge of dealing with the community's lack of knowledge about ASD. Often, friends and family, even with good intentions, may minimize the diagnosis or suggest simplistic solutions, such as “just pay more attention” or “it's just a phase”. These responses, in addition to not helping, reinforce the stigma that ASD is something “abnormal” or “less”, denying the complexity of the disorder. In a family context, parents may feel helpless, faced with many difficulties, as they do not receive the necessary support to deal with the specificities of the diagnosis. Thus, when faced with difficulties in the child's behavior, such as agitation or difficulty socializing, parents may be seen as “incompetent” or “exaggerated,” a distorted view that further reinforces the weight of the stigma.

Another everyday example is related to the search for inclusive education for children with ASD. In many cases, families face resistance from schools, which, due to prejudice, preparation, and structure, are not ready to adequately welcome these children. “Promoting inclusion means, above all, a change in attitude and perspective regarding disability. It implies breaking paradigms and reformulating our education system,” say Santos, et. al. (2024). The enrollment process, for example, may be marked by frustrated attempts to convince school administrators to accept the child. For parents, this can be a stressful experience, in which the stigma of the ASD diagnosis is reflected in exclusionary educational practices. In some cases, the school may suggest that the child be placed in a separate class, which reinforces the perception of “differentiation” rather than seeking inclusive solutions.

> Much has been said about the inclusion process, and almost always with the connotation that inclusion and school integration are synonymous. In fact, integration inserts the subject into the school, expecting him/her to adapt to the already structured school environment, while school inclusion implies resizing the school’s physical structures, the attitudes and perceptions of educators, curricular adaptations, among others. Inclusion in a broader sense means the right to

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> exercise citizenship, and school inclusion is only a small part of the process that we need to go through. Citizenship for people with special needs is a recent path that has evolved timidly, as it only took shape in the 1990s with the “Education for All” movement, despite having begun in the form of political guidelines at least since 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approved (Santos, 2001).

Furthermore, a common example in the daily lives of many families is the impact on interpersonal relationships, especially marital relationships. Piccinini et al. (2004) describe how the arrival of a child with ASD can generate tensions within the family itself. Responsibilities related to the intensive care of the child can overwhelm parents, resulting in a lack of time for themselves or their relationship. This can create a tense environment and even generate guilt and frustration, as parents may feel torn between the child's needs and maintaining their emotional bonds (Santos, et. al., 2024). Living with stigma and emotional overload can thus affect parents' mental health, making it even more difficult for them to cope with the child's needs. The most difficult part is dealing with the day-to-day life of a child with ASD.

Cynthia Sarti, in her work The Family as a Mirror, emphasizes that the family reflects the conflicts and demands of society, being a space for learning and negotiation. For autistic children, this metaphor gains strength, since it is in the intra-family dynamics that both the welcoming and the challenges of initial learning in relationships are found. According to Sarti (2004, p. 32), “[...] the family is a microcosm where the mirrors of the soul reveal themselves, reflecting and being reflected in everyday relationships.” This is especially true for families living with ASD, where the complexity of relationships challenges the conventional pattern of sociability.

> By taking the family as a reference, the author ratifies the notion that it is in the private space that we should seek the sources of organization of culture. It is within the family that the symbolic world of individuals is structured and that psychosocial patterns of relationships are established, which will be reproduced in society (Muszkat, 1996, p.223).

As stated above, the family plays a central role in the development and adaptation of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In the early stages of diagnosis, parents often become the first educators, adapting the environment and their care practices to meet the child's needs. One example of this is the creation of structured routines at home, a strategy widely recommended by professionals who deal with ASD, as suggested by Wing and Gould (1979). They state that children with autism often benefit from a

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predictable routine, as this provides them with security and minimizes anxiety. Parents then adopt regular schedules for daily activities, such as feeding, playing, and sleeping, which contribute to the child's emotional stability. By predictably organizing daily life, the family provides the child with a more controlled environment, helping to reduce possible outbursts or challenging behaviors.

> Studies indicate the high memory capacity of autistic children, observed through mechanical learning, whose tasks do not require understanding the global context. Autistic people have “islands of special abilities”, areas with high ability, developing specific interests, and associated with an excellent visual memory (Hofzmann, et. al., 2019, p.4).

Another common strategy is the use of visual communication systems, which have been highly effective for children with ASD, especially for those who have difficulties in verbal communication. For Loureto and Moreno (2016: 308), “[...] autism consists of a neurodevelopmental disorder, characterized by stable impairments in social interaction, changes in communication and limited or stereotyped patterns of behaviors and interests”. Thus, the use of communication cards or routine charts, for example, can facilitate the expression of the child's needs and desires. Researcher Lovaas (1987), in his studies on behavior analysis, suggests that interventions based on positive reinforcement, which include the use of visual communication, can promote significant advances in the communication and socialization of autistic children. At home, parents often resort to these tools as a means of facilitating interaction and mutual understanding, in addition to alleviating the frustration that may arise due to the lack of effective communication. This initial adaptation provides an important starting point for the development of the child's communication skills, reflecting the importance of family support in the inclusion process.

In addition, families often become the first to identify and adapt to the sensory sensitivities of the child with ASD, one of the central aspects of the disorder. Hypersensitivity to sounds, lights, or textures can cause great discomfort, and parents, upon noticing these reactions, adapt the environment to minimize these stimuli. As emphasized by Baranek (1999), many children with ASD present altered sensory processing, which can lead to avoidance or agitation behaviors in response to common sensory stimuli. In their daily lives, parents seek strategies such as creating quiet spaces in the home, using clothes made of softer fabrics, or dimming the lights to provide comfort to their children. These daily adaptations help prevent situations of sensory overload, allowing the child to feel more comfortable and integrated into the family environment.

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The emotional and affective strategy, which involves ongoing psychological support from the family, is also essential. Often, parents, faced with difficulties, can experience high levels of stress and insecurity, which can affect their ability to deal with the child's emotional needs. Therefore, psychological support and searching for support networks, such as parent groups or professionals, are essential. Specialized, are recurrent practices in families (Santos, et. al., 2024b). Schopler (1997) points out that emotional support is crucial for parents to deal with the impact of the diagnosis and daily demands, in addition to providing the necessary emotional stability for the child. Families that seek external help or participate in guidance programs tend to adapt more effectively to the needs of the child with ASD, ensuring that emotional and affective strategies are implemented consistently and carefully. Thus, the social inclusion of autistic children also begins within the family environment, with parents often being the first to seek appropriate socialization strategies. This may include encouraging interaction with siblings, family friends, or other members of the community. As Santos (2006) highlights, social support in the development of children with ASD is essential for these children to develop essential social skills for their inclusion in society. Parents, aware of their child's limitations, should often take the initiative to include the child in group activities and create opportunities for social interaction in a safe and welcoming environment. These family initiatives are essential for children with ASD to begin to develop social skills gradually and within a supportive context, reflecting the importance of family action in the process of inclusion and adaptation.

> The importance of a robust support network for families cannot be underestimated. The presence of a social support network, made up of friends, family, and the community, provides vital emotional and practical support. These support systems not only help to mitigate the impact of ASD on family life but also promote an environment of understanding and inclusion, essential for the well-being of everyone involved. However, the opposite is also true in the view of some researchers, that is, factors external to the family can imply situations of “stress” in intra-family sociability (Santos et al., 2024).

In addition, family relationships directly impact the child's progress or stagnation. As Santos et al. (2024) point out, “[...] care and interaction are crucial in the development of children with ASD, and can either enhance their skills or hinder them in the absence of adequate support” (p. 15). The role of the family is therefore crucial in shaping the possibilities of autonomy and social inclusion.

The impact of family relationships on the development of a child with ASD manifests itself intensely in everyday life, shaping both progress and the challenges faced. As

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highlighted by Santos et al. (2024), “[...] care and interaction are crucial in the development of children with ASD, and can either enhance their skills or hinder them in the absence of adequate support” (p. 15). In everyday life, this means that family actions, decisions, and interactions can create a more welcoming and inclusive environment or reinforce barriers to development. For example, when the family establishes a structured routine, with consistent schedules and activities adapted to the child's needs, this practice facilitates the creation of a predictable environment that helps minimize crises and promote emotional security.

Many children with ASD have difficulty expressing themselves verbally, and the family can develop specific strategies to deal with this, such as the use of alternative communication systems, including pictures, apps, or gestures (Santos, et. al., 2024). When parents and siblings are dedicated to learning and using these resources, the child is encouraged to interact and feel understood. However, in the absence of this intentional interaction, the child may feel isolated or frustrated, which reinforces socialization challenges and may even aggravate challenging behaviors.

Another essential aspect is adapting to the social environment. Many families report the challenge of including their children in social activities such as birthday parties or family gatherings. Situations like these, although they may seem simple, can be extremely complex for children with ASD due to excessive sensory stimuli or changes in routine (Santos, et. al., 2024). Parents who understand these difficulties usually adopt strategies such as preparing the child in advance, gradually introducing him/her to the environment, or explaining what will happen. However, the lack of this care can make these moments stressful for both the child and other family members, making social inclusion difficult.

In addition, relationships between family members are also fundamental. Siblings of children with ASD often take on roles as caregivers or mediators in social interactions. This coexistence can be enriching, promoting empathy and skills. Problem-solving skills can also generate tensions, especially if the needs of the child with ASD are perceived as an absolute priority. For example, an older sibling may feel that they have less attention from their parents, which can negatively impact their relationship with the child with ASD. Therefore, parents must seek balance, dedicating time and attention to all family members.

In this way, decisions about education and therapies illustrate the direct impact of family relationships on the child's progress. Choosing the right school or an appropriate intervention program often requires a collective effort. Families that work together,

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discussing the best options and adjusting their expectations, can create a more solid plan for the child's development. On the other hand, families that face internal conflicts or that do not have access to adequate information may feel lost, which can result in stagnation in the child's progress. Thus, as Santos et al. (2024) point out, “[...] the family is the basis where the possibilities of autonomy and social inclusion begin to be shaped” (p. 16).

That said, many parents experience a real drama when they receive the diagnosis that their child has ASD. This moment is described by Piccinini et al. (2004) as a period of “emotional reconfiguration,” where idealized expectations give way to the need to face reality (p. 24). This transition from distress to acceptance requires support that must come from both professionals and the family support network itself. “According to the literature, affection is extremely important for autistic people, as it provides closeness and the creation of bonds with family members, supporting the child's good development and strengthening the emotional health of the entire family” (Hofzmann et al., 2019, p. 4).

The diagnosis of ASD is a milestone that profoundly transforms family dynamics, bringing about an emotional reconfiguration described by Piccinini et al. (2004) as a moment of rupture and rebirth. Parents often go through a period of mourning over their idealized expectations, needing to redefine their dreams and goals for their child's future. This process can involve feelings of sadness, guilt, and even fear of the unknown, which directly affect the family's ability to act practically and proactively. Emotional support from professionals and a support network, such as other family members and friends, is crucial for this transition to occur more smoothly and constructively.

In everyday life, this transformation is reflected in actions such as seeking information about ASD. Many parents immerse themselves in reading, participate in support groups, or attend lectures to better understand what the diagnosis means and how they can help their children. This search for knowledge, although exhausting, is also a time of strengthening, where parents become the main advocates for their children's needs. However, the overload of information and the difficulty in discerning which information is reliable can generate anxiety and stress.

Another everyday example is the adaptation of the family routine. Many children with ASD depend on structured and predictable schedules to feel safe, which requires rigorous planning on the part of parents. This includes organizing therapy schedules, school sessions, and extracurricular activities that respect the child’s sensory and emotional needs. On the other hand, the unpredictability of everyday life, such as unexpected events

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or changes in plans, can be a source of stress for the entire family, requiring resilience and adaptability.

Social interactions also pose daily challenges for the family. Going to the supermarket, visiting a park, or attending a social event can be a test of patience and planning. For example, many parents report the need to anticipate possible sensory or behavioral triggers and prepare the child for these situations. Using strategies such as social rehearsal or creating “comfort zones” such as headphones or favorite toys can help reduce the impact of these events, but they require constant effort and dedication.

Finally, the need to balance the demands of ASD with other aspects of family life is a daily struggle. Parents often report the difficulty of dividing their attention and energy between their children with ASD and their siblings, while also maintaining their marital relationship and their own careers and well-being. This struggle, although challenging, can also lead to moments of great learning and unity, where family ties are strengthened through jointly facing challenges.

The concept of stigma, presented by Goffman (1988), helps to understand the social impact of this diagnosis. For him, “[...] stigma marks the individual and his/her family with characteristics that are devalued by society” (p. 32). This social mark intensifies the challenges posed by families of children with ASD, often leading to social isolation. As observed in the research by Nazir Rachid Filho (2019), the role of the support network is essential to prevent stigma from further aggravating the difficulties of these families.

In addition, classical authors such as Kanner (1943) point out that acceptance upon diagnosis must be accompanied by clear information about the child's development possibilities. According to the author, “[...] information is the key to transforming distress into acceptance, enabling parents to be active participants in their children's progress” (Kanner, 1943, p. 27). Thus, professionals and family members play complementary roles in building this path to acceptance.

According to Santos et al. (2024), the presence of a child with ASD in the family demands a reconfiguration of intra-family relationships. These changes, although challenging, can also promote collective learning. According to the authors, “[...] families that can understand the complexity of their interactions generally adapt better to the needs of their members with ASD” (p. 8).

Living with a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) transforms family life, requiring significant reconfigurations in intrafamily relationships. As stated by Santos et al.

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(2024), the presence of a child with ASD requires a joint effort to meet specific needs, promoting both challenges and learning opportunities. The authors highlight that "[...] families that can understand the complexity of their interactions generally adapt better to the needs of their members with ASD" (p. 8). This adaptation involves the development of practical and emotional strategies that affect the routine of all family members.

In day-to-day life, one of the first changes occurs in the organization of the family routine. Children with ASD often need structured and predictable schedules to feel safe. Thus, parents begin to carefully plan activities such as meals, leisure time, and therapies. According to Guralnick (2011), predictability in routine helps reduce disruptive behaviors and create a more stable environment, which is essential for the child's well-being. However, this need for planning can overwhelm caregivers, especially when unforeseen events require quick and unexpected adjustments.

Another striking example is the adaptation of physical spaces in the home to meet the child's sensory demands. Many parents report the need to create specific areas that promote sensory comfort, such as quiet corners with dim lighting or soft sounds. According to Dunn (1997), changing the environment can minimize excessive stimuli and promote the emotional balance of children with ASD. These changes, however, can generate tension, especially when there are other family members with different needs.

Social interactions are also challenging in the daily lives of families with children with ASD. Going to a social event, participating in a family celebration, or even performing simple tasks, such as going to the grocery store, requires planning and preparation. Many parents use strategies such as social rehearsals or visual narratives to help children anticipate situations and deal with changes in the environment. According to Gray (2000), "[...] these strategies not only help children develop social skills but also help reduce family stress" (p. 14). However, these situations often cause anxiety, especially when there is a lack of knowledge or understanding on the part of others.

> The lack of knowledge or misconception about autism [...] highlights the importance of disseminating information about ASD to society, especially to the lay population, who may have to deal with the disorder daily. For autistic people to be welcomed, the concept, characteristics, and forms of treatment must be known to everyone, facilitating acceptance by the family, specialists, and society, ensuring that the individual receives the necessary support for their cognitive, personal and social development (Hofzmann, et. al., 2019, p. 4).

Parents' emotional management is also a fundamental aspect. According to Piccinini et al. (2004), the diagnosis of ASD often triggers feelings of guilt and anxiety in parents,

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which need to be addressed so that they can fully support their children. Emotional support from the support network, including family members and professionals, is essential to overcome this moment of mourning due to idealized expectations. In addition, open communication within the family can strengthen bonds and promote a mutual understanding of shared responsibilities and challenges.

Therefore, living with a child with ASD requires a balance between between the individual and collective demands of the family. According to Santos et al. (2024), family resilience is built on joint learning and cooperation, allowing each member to develop skills to face challenges. It is in this dynamic that, despite the difficulties, many families report moments of unity and growth, showing that the challenges of ASD can also be catalysts for positive transformations. Lord et al. (2008) reinforce that active family participation is essential for the social and emotional development of the child. “Families that invest in intervention strategies and specialized support demonstrate greater effectiveness in promoting social skills and autonomy” (Lord et al., 2008, p. 430). On the other hand, the lack of adequate support or knowledge can lead to stagnation or worsening of ASD symptoms. The coexistence of families with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is full of challenges and moments of adaptation, which directly impact the routine and family relationships. As Lord et al. point out, (2008), the role of the family in the social and emotional development of the child is essential. “Families that invest in specialized intervention and support strategies demonstrate greater effectiveness in promoting social skills and autonomy” (Lord et al., 2008, p. 430). This investment often requires continuous learning on the part of parents, who seek ways to balance their personal and professional demands with the specific needs of their children.

A daily example involves using routine activities as learning moments. According to Gray (2000), families often transform simple activities, such as preparing meals or organizing toys, into opportunities to teach social and motor skills. For example, while preparing a meal, parents can encourage the child to identify utensils, help with simple tasks, or interact with other family members, promoting interaction and practical learning. These activities, although simple, require patience and planning to be adapted to the child's sensory and behavioral needs.

Another significant aspect is participation in specialized therapies, which often require complex reorganizations in the family routine. As Piccinini et al. (2004) point out, engaging in therapeutic interventions not only benefits the child but also provides the family

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with a space for learning and exchanging experiences. The authors state that "[...] participation in therapy sessions strengthens family bonds by creating an environment of collaboration and mutual support" (Piccinini et al., 2004, p. 25). This collaboration is essential so that the strategies developed in the therapeutic environment can be applied in the family's daily life.

Social relationships also present specific challenges. Going to a supermarket or park, for example, can be a complex task for families with children with ASD. Dunn (1997) observes that "adapting the external environment to the child's sensory needs is essential to minimize challenging behaviors and promote well-being" (p. 28). Many families learn to anticipate the child's reactions to intense sensory stimuli, using strategies such as preparing the child in advance for the environment or bringing items that provide comfort, such as headphones or favorite toys.

Furthermore, parents' emotional management is a crucial factor in coping with ASD. According to Santos et al. (2024), parents often experience a "process of emotional reconstruction" when adjusting to the demands of the diagnosis (p. 10). This can include dealing with feelings of guilt and frustration and developing skills to act as mediators between the child and the outside world. Family resilience becomes a central element, as everyday challenges can be both sources of tension and opportunities for collective growth.

Therefore, continuous learning and emotional support within the family are pillars for promoting child development and family harmony. The literature highlights that, although challenges are significant, they can also strengthen family bonds and create a solid foundation for overcoming barriers. As Lord et al. (2008) reinforce, active participation and engagement of the family are crucial to transforming everyday life into a space for welcoming, learning, and development.

CONCLUSION

The practices and strategies adopted by family members of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are fundamental to the cognitive, emotional, and social development of these children, even in the face of the numerous challenges faced in the family and social sphere. As highlighted throughout the article, the family is a space for learning and negotiation, playing a central role in the formation of the individual and in mediating their interactions with the world. This perspective is reinforced by Durkheim, who

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identifies the family as the embryo of society, and by authors such as Edgar Morin, who offer a systemic view of family dynamics.

The emotional challenges, such as feelings of sadness and guilt, often experienced by parents after a diagnosis of ASD, highlight the importance of family support and acceptance. In addition, social stigma and cultural barriers make it difficult to fully accept the child and limit the possibilities of social integration, reinforcing the need for interventions that promote awareness and inclusion. Strategies such as implementing structured routines, using visual communication systems, and adapting the environment to meet the child's sensory sensitivities are practical examples of how families can contribute to more balanced and harmonious development.

In addition, seeking emotional and psychological support is crucial for family members to strengthen themselves in the face of the intense demands of care. Support networks, such as groups of parents and specialized professionals, provide valuable guidance, allowing families to develop resilience and adapt their practices more effectively. These efforts, in turn, promote not only the child's well-being but also the cohesion and balance of the family unit.

Finally, the initial question – how do family practices contribute to the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children with ASD, considering the challenges they face – finds an answer in recognizing the family as the protagonist of this process. Building a welcoming, adapted environment guided by affection is essential to overcoming barriers and promoting the child's comprehensive development. Thus, the family not only supports the child in his/her uniqueness but also transforms its values and dynamics, strengthening itself as a space of love, learning, and resistance to social stigma.

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