



**Welcome!** 

We'll get started soon. If you'd like, type in the chat:

- From where are you joining the Zoom?
- What's your current EI role? How long have you worked in this role?
- What dessert would you most like to eat right now?



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**"UNSEEN BUT IN NEED"**  
IDENTIFYING GIRLS WITH AUTISM IN EI  
**Part II**

Presented by:  
Subarna Dharia, MD FAAP




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**Subarna Dharia, MD FAAP**  
"special interest in development and behavior of young children with an early diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder"

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### BRIEF OVERVIEW

-  Girls present differently than boys, "Female Autism Phenotype"
-  They are diagnosed later and sometimes mislabeled
-  The brains and genetics of girls are different than boys

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What do you see as barriers to diagnosis of girls with ASD?

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### HIGHLIGHTS

-  Case Studies and Videos
-  Supporting and Communicating Concerns with Families
-  What does service delivery look like?
-  Advocacy for Girls

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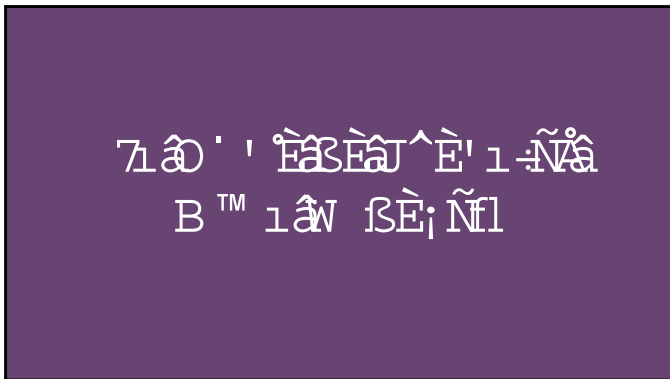
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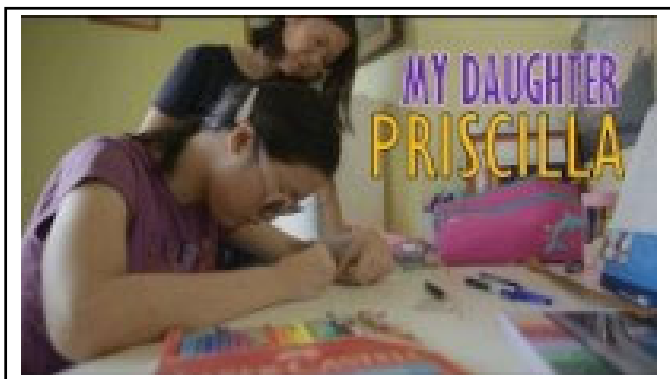
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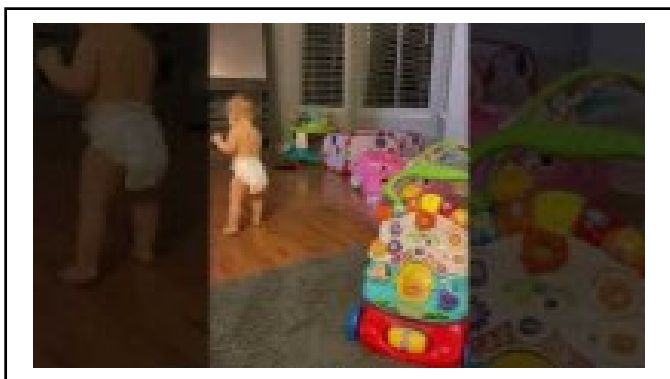
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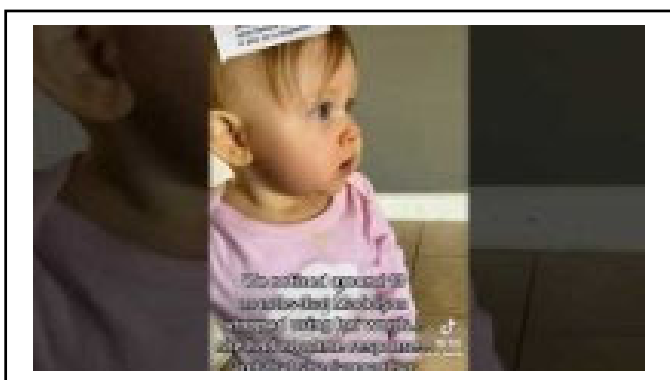
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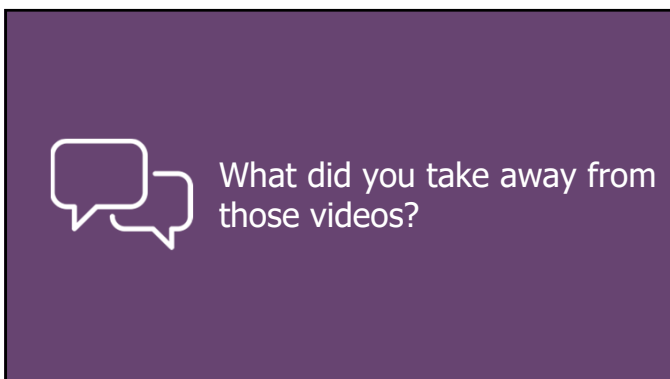
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"She masks really well, ... but in times of stress... has tics, outbursts, and sensory issues. Like when the weather changes and we have to wear different clothes or different shoes."



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"We have seen MORE of the typical signs of Autism come out as she gets older, and at the same time her social skills have also increased significantly" - like making good jokes, but not knowing how to respond appropriately sometimes-



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"She has more repetitive movements than when she was younger. She needs comfort/stim items more often and uses them longer periods of time."



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"Precocious ability of use of language, noise sensitive, little more rigid in play but creative (self-directed)—controlling, not as interested in joining peers socially"



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What do you see when evaluating or supporting these girls?

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### What EI providers report when seeing girls with ASD

- More language, but used rotely or echolalia
- Better imitation, may not be only motor or verbal
- Rigidity
- Self-directed eye contact or engagement more common
- Inconsistency across environments/people
- Parents are "working too hard"

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### Parent's Observations of Social Interactions (POSI)

**POSI:**  
Parent's Observations of Social Interactions (POSI)  
© 2014 by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Observations of Social Interactions (POSI)	Many times a day	A few times a week	A few times a month	Rarely	Never
Does your child bring things to you to show them to you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you child respond or play with other children?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other children talk to you when you hand, set your child to to play you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your child look at you when you hand the ball to them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your child look at you when you hand the ball to them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How does your child usually show something to or show you?	Says a word or the words	Points to it with one finger	Reaches for it	Pushes me away	Grunts, cries or screams
Does your child bring things to you to show them to you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What are your child's favorite play activities?	Playing with blocks or stuffed animals	Reading	Climbing	Looking up or around and being active	Watching things around the farm or playing
Does your child look at you when you hand the ball to them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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### Tips for Providers

- Open Dialogue
- Highlight Positives
- Use Specific Examples
- Support Findings
- Listen and Watch
- Encourage
- Remind



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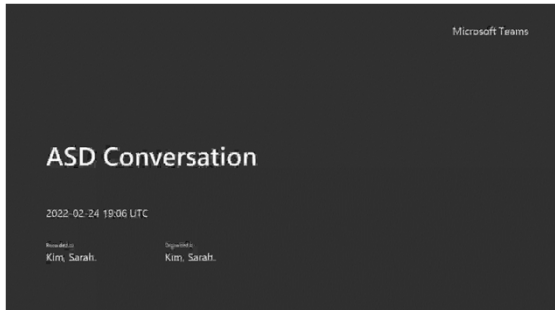
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How do we talk about our concerns with Parents?




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What does your conversation look like with families?

What resources do you use to help guide your conversations with parents about this topic?

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Lens of Neurodiversity

- Highlight strengths of child
- Goals focused on how child meaningfully included in activities
- Not focused on changing child but allowing them to meet full potential
- Respecting family and cultural perspective
- Meet caregivers where they are emotionally and empower them
- Focus on child quality of life
- Be honest and make expectations clear

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**Neurodiversity in Practice**

Celebrating each individuals unique brain function **without judgement.**

**Autism Spectrum**  
 The Autism Spectrum is NOT linear

less autistic                      very autistic

The Autism Spectrum looks more like:

- social differences
- interests
- repetitions
- sensory sensitivities
- emotional regulation
- perception
- executive functioning
- other

Terms like "high functioning", "low functioning" and "Asperger" are harmful and outdated.

*Autism-sketches*

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**Service Delivery in EI**

- Focus on strengths
- Use repetitive behaviors (naturally motivating) to teach new skills
- Be curious about how "non-functional" play could benefit child
- Question our own beliefs of what is "normal"
- Continue to ask the family- What areas of development would benefit your family and child most?

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How do you approach helping a child with characteristics of ASD?

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Getting an Evaluation for ASD



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How Parents Can Advocate for a Diagnosis

- Use the right terminology
- Ask provider their experience with girls
- Parent can use letter/report from EI provider
- Second opinion?

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TO SUMMARIZE...



Parents see concerns with their girls early on. Girls usually helped by knowing their diagnosis



Providers notice behaviors and need helpful ways to share with parents



We can support families while holding a Neurodiverse approach but also advocate for early diagnosis

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**Thank you!**

Many thanks to my amazing team at ITC Fairfax for providing me your input and content as well as brave parents online helping others in their communities!



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☎ 703-863-3431

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