



# Illinois Developmental Therapy Association

## Talking to Parents about Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders

Dr. Nasiah Cirincione Ulezi

As a Developmental Therapist, you may be the first person to notice that a child is exhibiting some characteristics commonly associated with autism spectrum disorders. If you see these characteristics, it is important to talk with parents about them. This can be very difficult, and sometimes very challenging for parents to hear. If you are sensitive when you talk to parents, it will help them understand the developmental concerns you have for their child.



**Plan.** Before you talk to the parents, get your own thoughts together and decide what it is you would like to communicate to the family.

**Take thorough therapy notes.** Write down the behaviors you feel to be characteristic of an autism spectrum disorder. Include the dates and the places where you saw the events. This way you can be accurate and honest. The information you provide to the family is more meaningful to them if they see that you have kept a careful record.

**Share the information when both parents/ caregivers are available.** It is good to talk to all the important caregivers of the child. Then one parent doesn't need to understand

and remember everything to tell the other about the meeting.

**Put yourself in the parents' situation.** Try to think about what it must be like for the parents. Think about how you would feel if you were told that your child had characteristics of an autism spectrum disorder. This will help you understand and get ready for the parents' feelings and reactions.

**Find out how ready the parents are to hear the information.** It is easier to talk to some parents than to others. Try to get a sense of how easy it will be for the parents to hear the information you need to relay. Some parents will not be surprised to hear there is a problem. Others may never have thought about it

---

IDTA

Volume 3, Issue 1

Summer/Fall 2008

[www.illinoisdta.org](http://www.illinoisdta.org)

---



---

### Inside this issue:

Talking to Parents about Characteristics of ASD	2
Meet IDTA's Newest Member Chair	3
Call for Interest	4
Member Application (insert)	

# Talking to Parents about Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders Cont.

and will need some time to get used to the idea.

**Be honest without being unkind.** Give parents correct information, but try to use kind words. Say, "your child appears to be showing some characteristics that are commonly associated with autism spectrum disorders.... ." Don't say, "your child will never be able to . . . ." When you use words that sound scary or harsh, parents will be more frightened and anxious.

**Use common words.** When you use complicated names and words, it may scare parents. They will not be able to understand what you are saying. Use words you can all understand.

**Be calm but concerned.** When parents see that you are handling the situation calmly, they will probably stay calm, too. When you look tense and worried, they might think something terrible will happen. No one will be able to think or talk very clearly if everyone is upset. On the other hand, if you are too calm, the parents might think you do not care. Show concern, but try to be in control so that you can support the parents.

**Talk positively.** Encourage the parents to take the child to a professional. Make sure they know that your concerns may not be accurate. Talk about all the possibilities and choices that might be open to the family. Don't focus on the negative side. Talk about all the things the child can do the strengths of the child.

**Expect different reactions from parents.** Every parent will react to your concerns in a different way. Some may become angry and refuse to believe what you are saying or refuse to discuss it. Others may cry and talk only about the negative side. Still others may have been worried for some time. They may be glad that they can talk with you about the problem and share their feelings and concerns with you. These are all very natural reactions. It is not easy to hear that a child is displaying characteristics of an autism spectrum disorder. Parents love their children and want the best for them. Don't argue with parents when they tell you that you are wrong. Encourage them to talk to a professional who can find out if the child does have an autism spectrum disorder.

**Listen to the parents.** Parents know their child best. They will want to tell you what they know or what they have noticed with

their child. Listen carefully to what they tell you. You may have made a mistake in understanding what the child is doing or saying. It's OK to tell the parents that you made a mistake. It is better to be honest with parents about their child than to avoid talking to them.

This information was taken from the Provider-Parent Partnership Website (<http://www.ces.purdue.edu/providerparent/Parent-Provider>) from an article titled:

**Talking to Parents about Problem in Development**, by Saraswathy Ramamoorthy with Judy Myers-Walls, Ph.D., CFLE



# Meet IDTA's Newest Membership Chair!

**Dr. Nasiah Cirincione-Ulezi** is an assistant professor at CSU. She received her Master's Degree in Education, specializing in special education, from University of Illinois at Chicago and her doctorate from Loyola University of Chicago, with dissertation research focused on the inclusion of special needs students. Additionally, she earned a certificate in Infant

and Toddler Studies from Erickson Institute of Chicago. Dr. Cirincione-Ulezi has worked extensively in the field of early childhood special education since 1995, as both a classroom teacher and a developmental therapist. She specializes in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and believes in working from a strength based, family-centered philosophy.



## **IDTA**

### **Executive Committee**

President: Lisa Lampman, [LisaLampmanDT@aol.com](mailto:LisaLampmanDT@aol.com)  
1st Vice President: Angela Searcy, [asearcy@aol.com](mailto:asearcy@aol.com)  
2nd Vice President: Natalie Farmer, [nmfarmer@hotmail.com](mailto:nmfarmer@hotmail.com)  
Treasurer: Eileen Woosley, [woosley\\_dt@comcast.net](mailto:woosley_dt@comcast.net)  
Secretary: Ronnie Kodish, [ronniemk@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ronniemk@sbcglobal.net)  
Past President: Elizabeth Benney, [elizbenney@sbcglobal.net](mailto:elizbenney@sbcglobal.net)

### **Regional Representatives**

Region I: TBA  
Region III: TBA  
Region IV: Barb Utz, [bnbutz@mchsi.com](mailto:bnbutz@mchsi.com)

### **Advisory Committee**

Sharon Syc, Ph.D.  
Therese Wehman, Ph.D.  
Jennifer Barrett-Zitkus MS Ed  
Linda S. McPhee M.Ed

### **Committees**

#### ***Professional Development:***

Chair: Sally Wilson-Gamble,  
[sally.gamble@hhrehab.org](mailto:sally.gamble@hhrehab.org)

#### ***Continuing Education:***

Chairs: Amy Cocorikis,  
[acocorikis@ucpnet.org](mailto:acocorikis@ucpnet.org)

***Publications:*** Chair: Cathy Bosse,  
[cathyb13@hotmail.com](mailto:cathyb13@hotmail.com)

***Legislative:*** Chair: Melisa Alaba-Yusouf,  
[melisaa@melicenter.com](mailto:melisaa@melicenter.com)

***Membership:*** Chair: Nasiah Cirincione-Ulezi  
[nasia999@msn.com](mailto:nasia999@msn.com)

***Finance:*** Chair: Eileen Woosley;  
[woosley\\_dt@comcast.net](mailto:woosley_dt@comcast.net)

IDTA

3712 N BROADWAY  
#248 CHICAGO, IL  
60613

Postage



---

## CALL FOR INTEREST!

**\*OPEN POSITIONS:** Secretary, Legislative Chair and Regional Representatives!  
-If members are interested in participating on the IDTA Board as a **Secretary, Legislative Chair** or a **Regional Representative**, please contact Lisa Lampman, IDTA President, at [LisaLampmanDT@aol.com](mailto:LisaLampmanDT@aol.com)

**\*IDTA is looking to add an Attorney and/or CPA to our Advisory Committee!**  
-Members and potential members, spread the word and look to your families, friends, and husbands/fathers to be considered for this great addition. Please contact Lisa Lampman for more information or for nominating.

---