

# Family Leisure as a Context to Support Communication for Children with ASD: Case Study

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## Case Study

### Family Composition

- WK- 11 years old, diagnosed with ASD
- SK- 9 years old, sister
- AK- 20 years old, brother, college student
- MK- university professor



### Communication and Literacy Skills

- Communicates verbally using words and short phrases
- Uses gestures
- Communicates frequently to request
- Makes some comments (e.g., about the weather)
- Uses visual supports at school (e.g., visual schedule)
- Knows sound-symbol correspondences
- Recognizes a number of sight words

### Education and Speech and Language Services

- Educated in a "substantially separate specialized classroom"
- Receives speech and language services 3 times per week

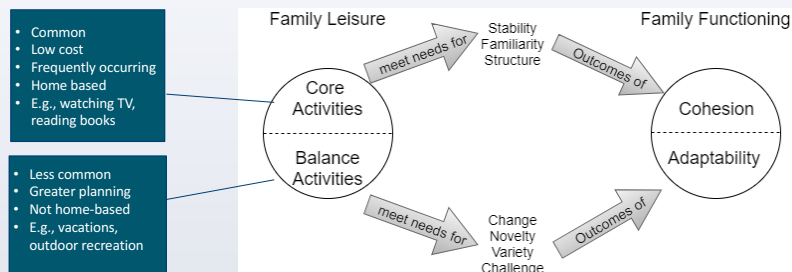
## Why family leisure?

- Family leisure activities provide a naturally supportive context for communication
- Leisure activities are highly valued by families, are associated with a wide variety of positive family outcomes, and provide rich opportunities for communication (Dodd, Zabriskie, Widmer & Eggett, 2009)
- Working with families to support communication surrounding highly-valued family activities is consistent with recommended family-centered practices, as it supports respect for family choice and family decision-making (Mandak, O'Neill, Light, & Fosco, 2017)

## Previous Research

<b>Definition</b>	• "A form of purposive leisure which is planned, facilitated, and executed by parents in order to achieve particular short- and long-term goals" (Shaw & Dawson, 2001, p. 228)
<b>Benefits</b>	• Satisfaction and quality of family life (Agate et al., 2009) • Family communication (Smith et al., 2009) • Child socialization • Family closeness • Opportunities for children to develop skills and experience positive affirmations (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004)
<b>Constraints</b>	• Juggling schedules • Finding common interests across ages and abilities of various family members • Ensuring activities are accessible for the child with a disability (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004)

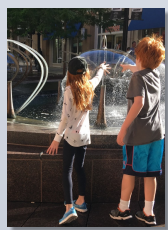
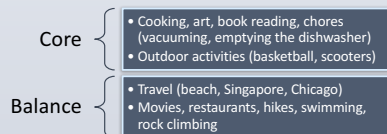
## Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning



## Family Leisure from the Perspective of One Family

A semi-structured interview was conducted with MK. An interview guide was used that included questions in order to gain information regarding: (a) her family's definition of family leisure, (b) the types of family leisure activities they participated in; (c) her perceptions of the benefits and constraints of family leisure, and (d) her family's communication during these activities. The results are summarized below.

*"Family leisure is time when we are together as a group (now minus my college aged son) doing something other than errands, school or work related."*



## Benefits

- Common experience to reminisce about**  
*"I think just having the commonality of the experience of our trips that they can refer to. His sister will ask him questions about Bermuda or about Singapore."*
- Time to decompress for the whole family**  
*"We can decompress, get exercise, be together in places that are less stressful."*
- Increased opportunities for communication**  
*"Also, for my son, especially he benefits by having more to 'talk about'. When we are out and about, he is more engaged in the world."*
- Family closeness**  
*"I think that the experience of having these positive kinds of experiences together has made their [sibling] relationship better... They are very close."*

## Constraints

- Cost of activities**  
*"Well, as a solo mother, finances are tight, so I have to pick and choose carefully."*
- Challenging behaviors**  
*"He used to dump the books off people's bookcases or go into the cabinets and look for food ... all of those types of things made me really not want to go out and explore that much."*
- Lack of predictability**  
*"When he was little and I had my daughter 2 years after he was born, it was hard to do simple activities, even grocery shopping because he would bolt off, and I had to hold my newborn daughter... and that was just so difficult. Just not knowing what was going to set him off."*
- Hypersensitivity**  
*"I find the sensory sensitivity to be so salient. The auditory world can be so aversive for him. He wears ear plugs just to get through the day sometimes."*

## Advice to Families and Implications

*"Don't be afraid. Don't sit in your house. Don't think your child can only stay on their routine. Expose your family to as many different kinds of activities as you can. Just don't be afraid of the consequence in public."*

- Identify your family's leisure activities
- Use everyday activities (e.g., reading books together) to promote family closeness
- Engage in balance activities outside of the home to promote positive adaptability
- Take photos and short videos during leisure activities
- Reminisce about activities afterwards using photos and videos

Ideas for using family leisure photos to support various goals:



Program into an app (e.g., Pictello) for storytelling

Promote sibling communication



Use to support emerging communication functions (commenting)

**hiking**  
Target meaningful leisure words during literacy instruction

## Advice to Professionals and Implications

*"Don't go down the path of being so focused in on goals and objectives and outcomes. Facilitate the exploration of different ideas and activities."*

- Talk to families about leisure activities and the benefits and challenges they experience surrounding leisure
- Demonstrate sensitivity to the family's unique needs, priorities, and preferences surrounding communication and family leisure
- Use a checklist, such as the Child Interests Activity Checklist (Dunst, Raab, & Trivette, 2013) to identify leisure activities that families are participating in
- Ask families if they would like any supports to facilitate communication during leisure activities
  - Visual schedules
  - Social stories
  - Communication apps that support the use of photos (e.g., Snap Scene, Go Talk NOW)
- Use photos from leisure activities during therapy and in the classroom in order to:
  - Create a shared context for communication
  - Target relevant vocabulary
  - Facilitate communication with peers
  - Connect to literacy instruction (e.g., sight words)

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