

Mentor Visit Assessment #2

Mentor: Dr. Kayla Covert

Profession: Vestibular Physical Therapist

Location: At Home (Virtual)

Date: February 4, 2022

Time: 12:00 P.M.

Assessment:

Going into my mentor visit with Dr. Covert, I hoped to start the research for my final project, which is exactly what we did. To start off, I created a list of frequently asked questions parents of autistic children are concerned with, and then Dr. Covert and I decided to break the questions down. In doing so, we realized that parents often feel guilty and as though they are the ones to blame for their children's autism, which led us to start researching things such as caregiver guilt and burnout, genetic links, functioning impairments, and ethical dilemmas.

In looking at the ethical side of autism, there lies a challenge in risk and benefits of early intervention and communicating early concerns to families. Often there is a long lag between parents' concern versus actual diagnoses, because of the lack of clear cut research on early diagnosis and high possibility of false positive diagnoses. This highlighted to me that I need to focus on enhancing communication and increasing caregiver knowledge through my project. In doing so, this will reduce parental stress and foster a better relationship with their autistic children. Moreover, I learned that autism is more of a neurodevelopmental condition that results in inherited predispositions that may or may not turn on. Dr. Covert described autism to me as if it is a string of lights, some switched on and others off. Her analogy was really helpful to my

understanding of the research we were analyzing together, because she broke down the medical terminology I was not grasping into easy to digest information.

Furthermore, I learned that early intervention research and programs might nurture parent self blame for having caused the difficulties their autistic children are experiencing. In fact, specific harm might derive from communicating early concerns about a child's development to parents by increasing their anxiety during a time of uncertainty about their child's future. This was very crucial for me to learn because early intervention was something I thought was only positive, but can actually be harmful because of the sensitive nature of autism. I also learned that a common harmful assumption is that past two to three years of age, it is too late to intervene in a child's development. However, this is not the case and can put excessive pressure on parents. Nowadays, recent research is shifting to connect correlations between autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions such as attention deficit disorder (ADHD) in school-age children, and investigating how familial and genetic factors translate to autism diagnosis.

Through my meeting with Dr. Covert we really hit the ground running on the research I needed to conduct for my project. She helped me understand the literature we were reading in easy-to-understand terms, and really helped solidify my learning experience. Through this analysis on parental responses and ethical guides to autism diagnosis, I now know where to shift my focus on for the “parent guide” aspect of my project, and how to relay the information I want to convey in a sensitive manner.