

Experiences and Roles of Stepfathers in the Routines and ADLs of Stepchildren with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Kyle Keahey, OTS

Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



Background

- Limited data on stepparents and fathers of children with ASD.
- Healthy & adaptive routines support the well-being of children and families with ASD.^{1, 2}
- Caregiver stress frequently caused by unexpected ASD behaviors, such as tantrums.³

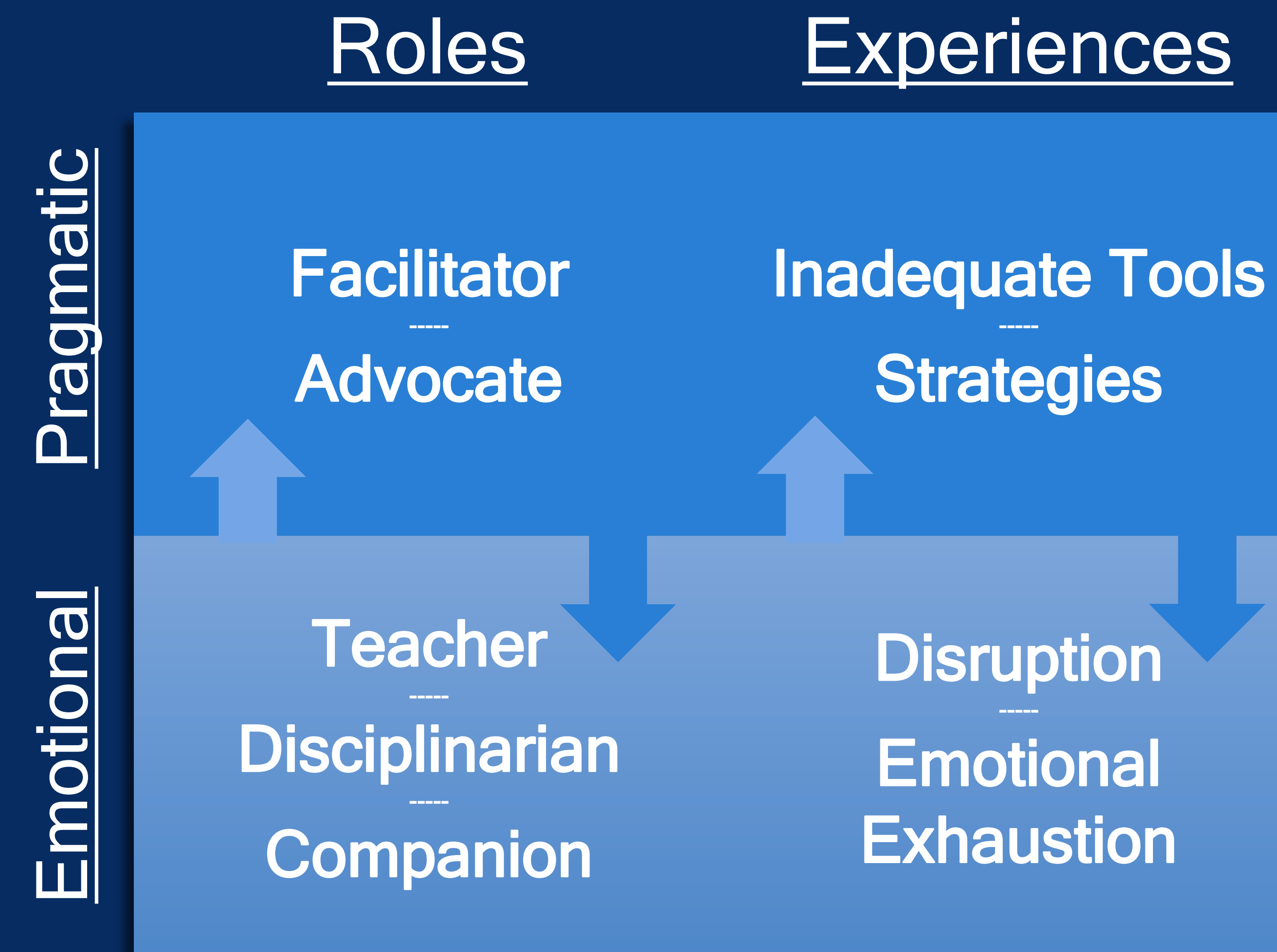
Project Aim

- Describe the experiences and roles of stepfathers in the routines and ADLs of their stepchildren with ASD.

Methods

- **Design:** Qualitative descriptive, semi-structured interviews (2 phone & 1 in-person)
- **Analysis:** Thematic coding
- **Participants:** 3 stepfathers of 3-6 y.o. stepchildren, 2 in early 30s, 1 in early 40s, all Caucasian
- **Sample:** Purposive

Results



“I wake him up, get him dressed, potty trained him ... teach him to brush his teeth. Everything, you name it.”

“Ask for help ... Go find it. Resources, resources, resources ... I couldn't have done this on my own.”

“She loves to swing ... she likes to feel that rush ... So I take her and she swings for hours.”

“Can't hardly go to church, the nursery isn't equipped to handle kids like that ... b/c she causes a scene ... It wears on you.”

Discussion

- Participants' described their roles & experiences largely in pragmatic or emotional/relational terms.
- Similar to biological caregivers, ASD symptoms during routines triggered emotional turmoil.
- Tantrums led to fear of public judgment and disruptions in child and participant routines.
- Participants noted the need to build parenting skills and acquire professional help.

Implications for OS/OT

- To maximize family-centered plans, OTs need to evaluate stepfathers' roles & experiences.
- OTs are equipped to enhance child and family routines, as well as advocate for the needs of blended-families in clinical settings.
- Call for more research.

References

1. Potter, C.A. (2017). Father involvement in the care, play, and education of children with autism. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 42*(4), 375-384.
2. MacDonald, E. & Hastings, R. (2010). Mindful parenting and care involvement of fathers of children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 19*(2), 236-240.
3. Hillman, J.L., Wentzel, M.C. & Anderson, C.M. (2017). Grandparents experience of autism spectrum disorder: identifying primary themes and needs. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47*(10), 2957-2968.