



Autism: A family affair

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Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)

Social interaction &
understanding

Autistic Disorder
Asperger's
Syndrome
PDD-NOS

Non-verbal and
verbal
communication

Restricted
behaviors and
activities

Autism Spectrum Disorder

DSM-V Proposed Revision



Social
communication

Restricted
behaviors and
activities

Autism Spectrum
Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)

**1 out of every 110 children is diagnosed
with ASD**

(Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009)

**...a new study of South Korean children
points to even higher rates**

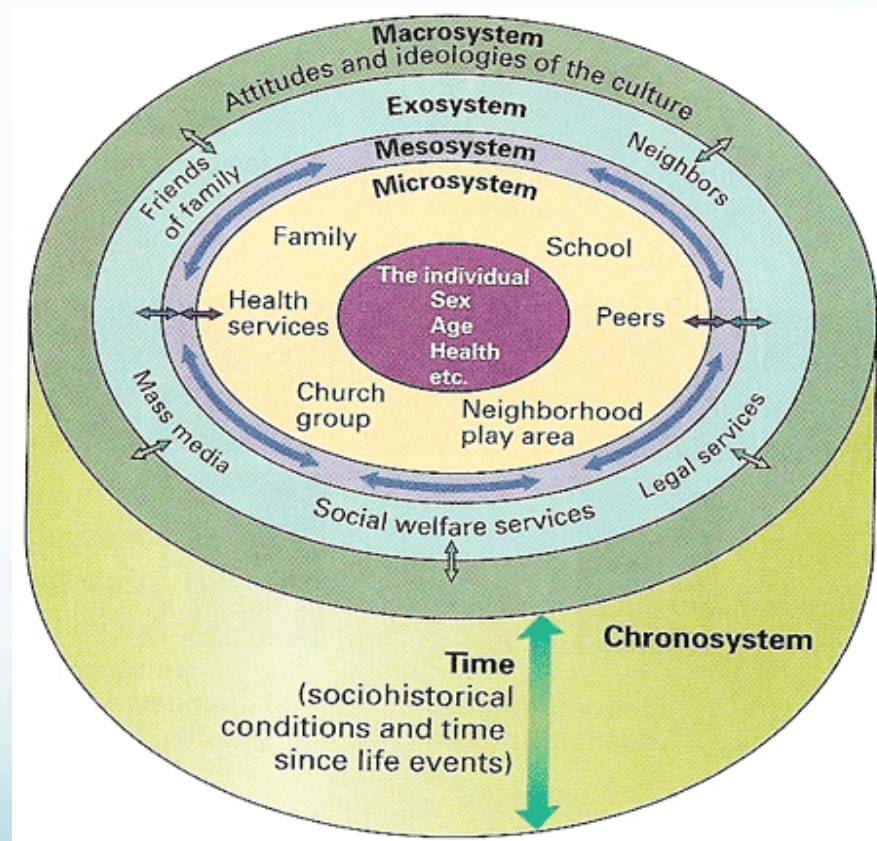
(Kim et al., 2011)

Research on ASD in Goldberg Family Lab

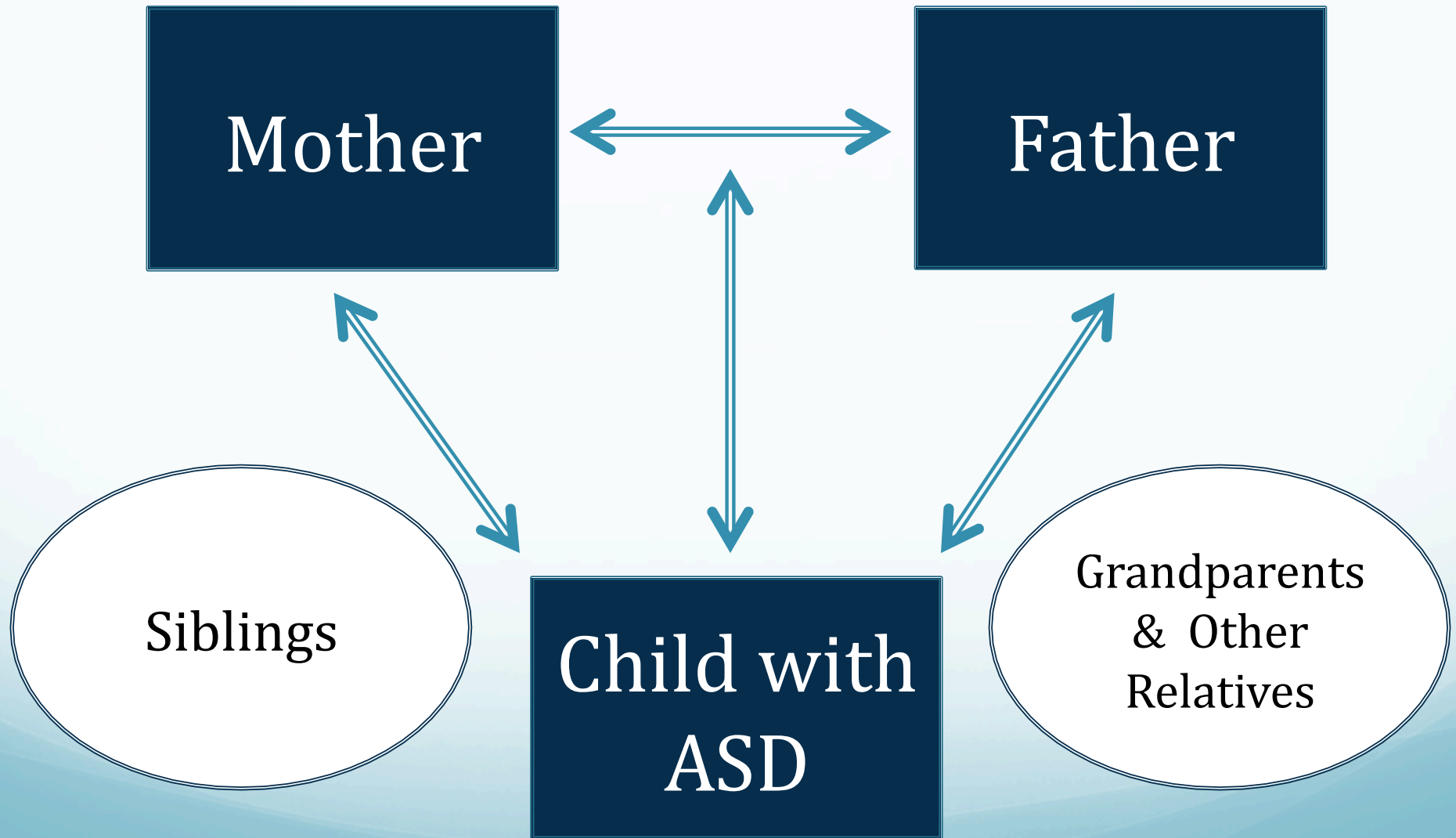
- Conducted since mid 1990s
- Study children with ASD and at risk for ASD from infancy – adolescence
- Comparison groups of typically developing children
- Include parents and other family members
- In-depth methods: interviews, questionnaires, observations, direct testing of child; home and lab settings
- Sample sizes mostly 50-200 per study

Theoretical Underpinnings

- Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model

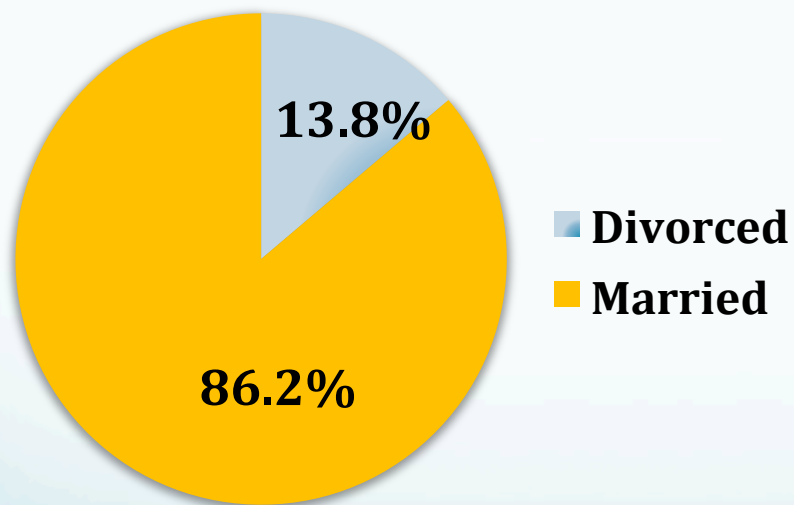


Family Systems Theory

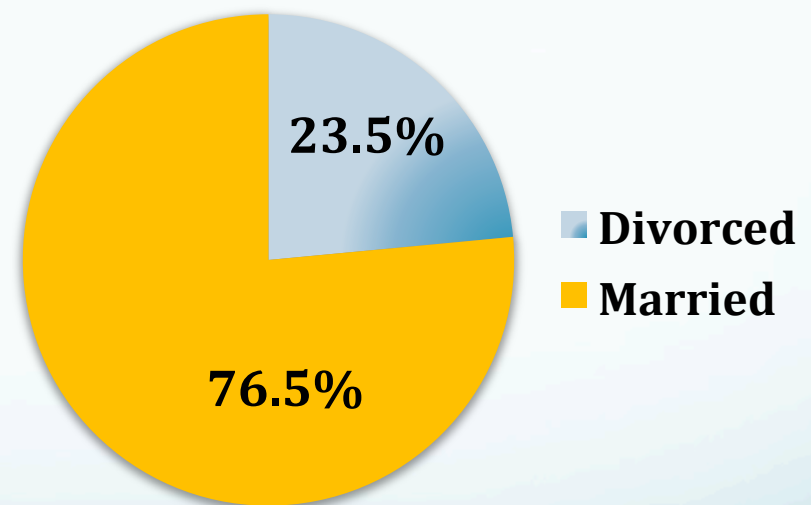


Marriage and Divorce

TD



ASD



Hartley et al. (2010)

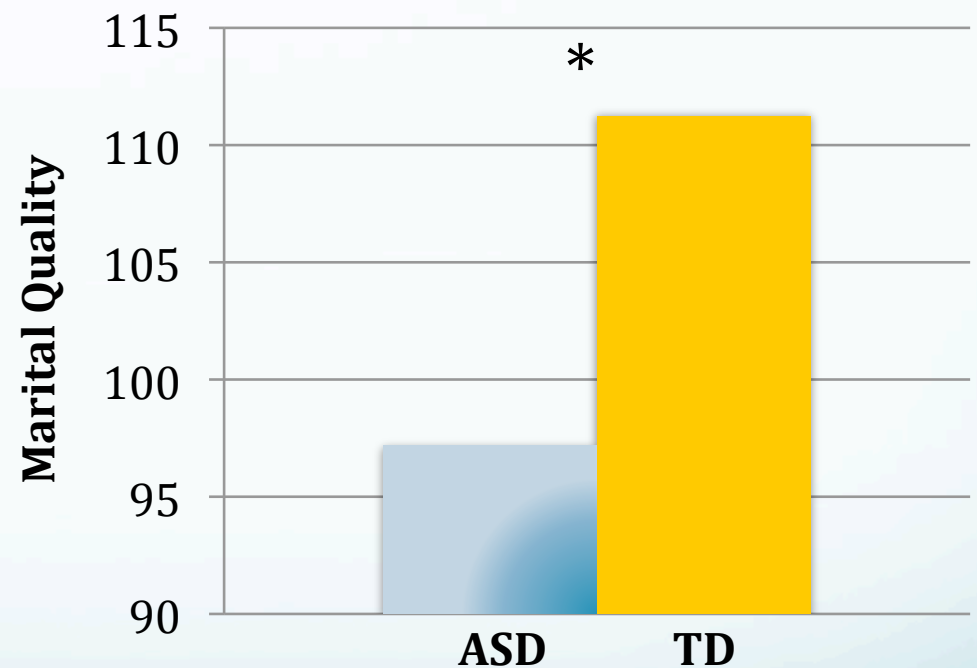
Challenges for Marriages

Compared to mothers of TD children, mothers of children with ASD report:



levels of marital quality, intimacy, & satisfaction

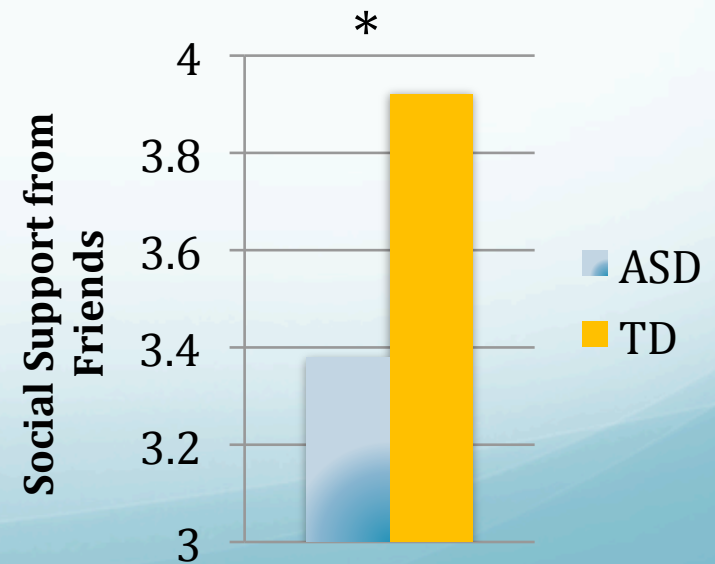
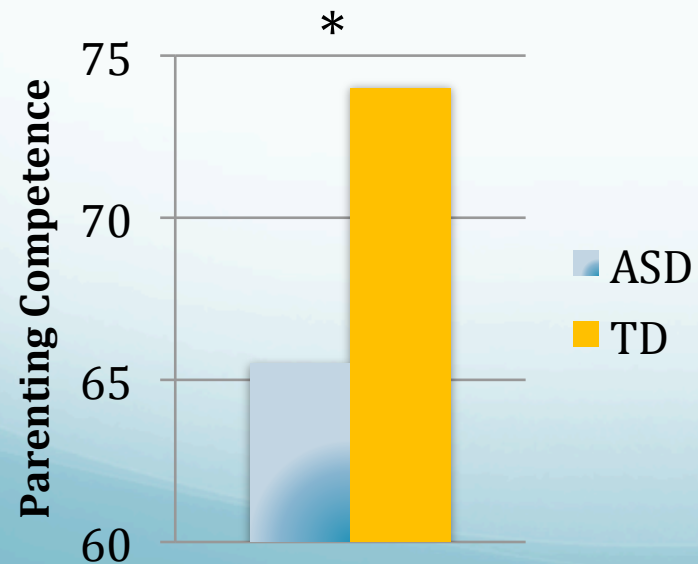
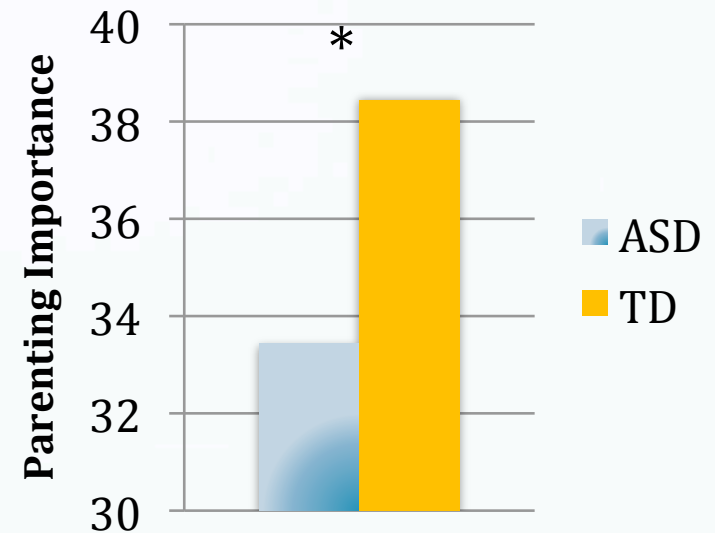
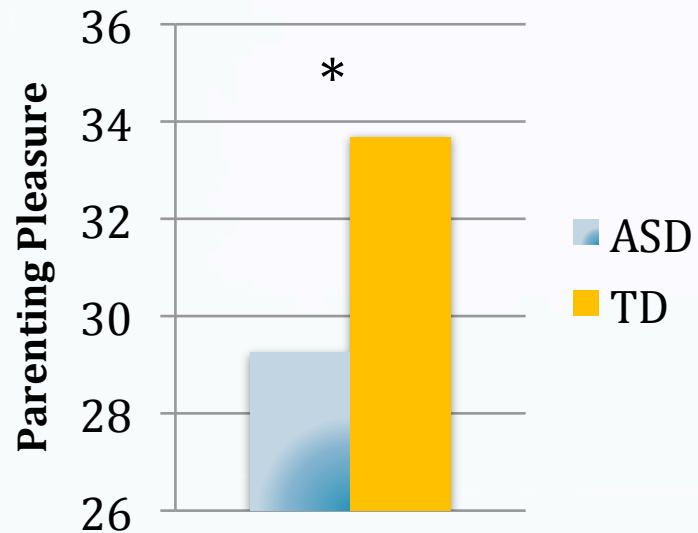
Brobst et al. (2009); Fisman et al. (1989); Rodrigue et al. (1990)



$*p < .05$

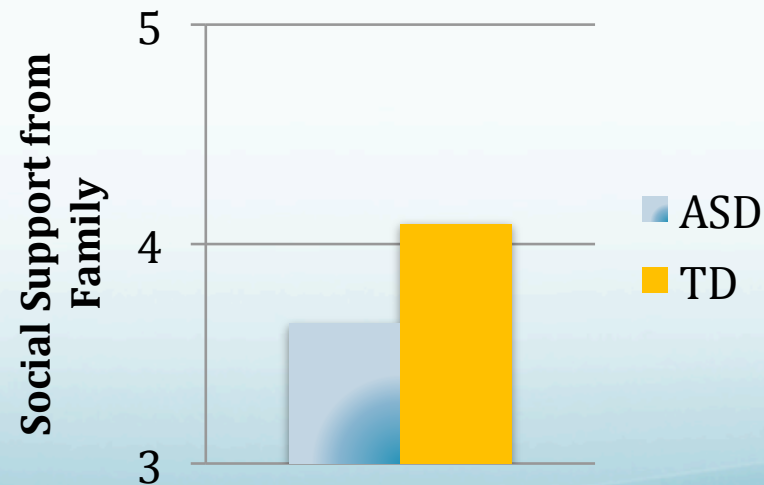
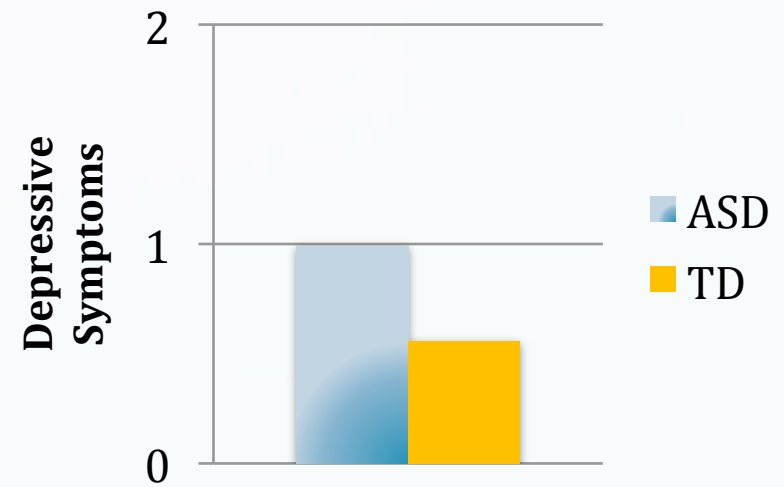
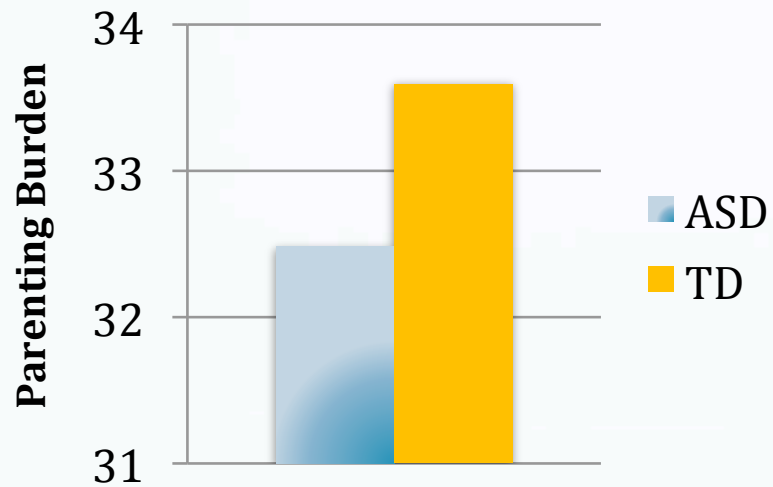
Ly, Abdullah, & Goldberg (under review)

Challenges for Parenting

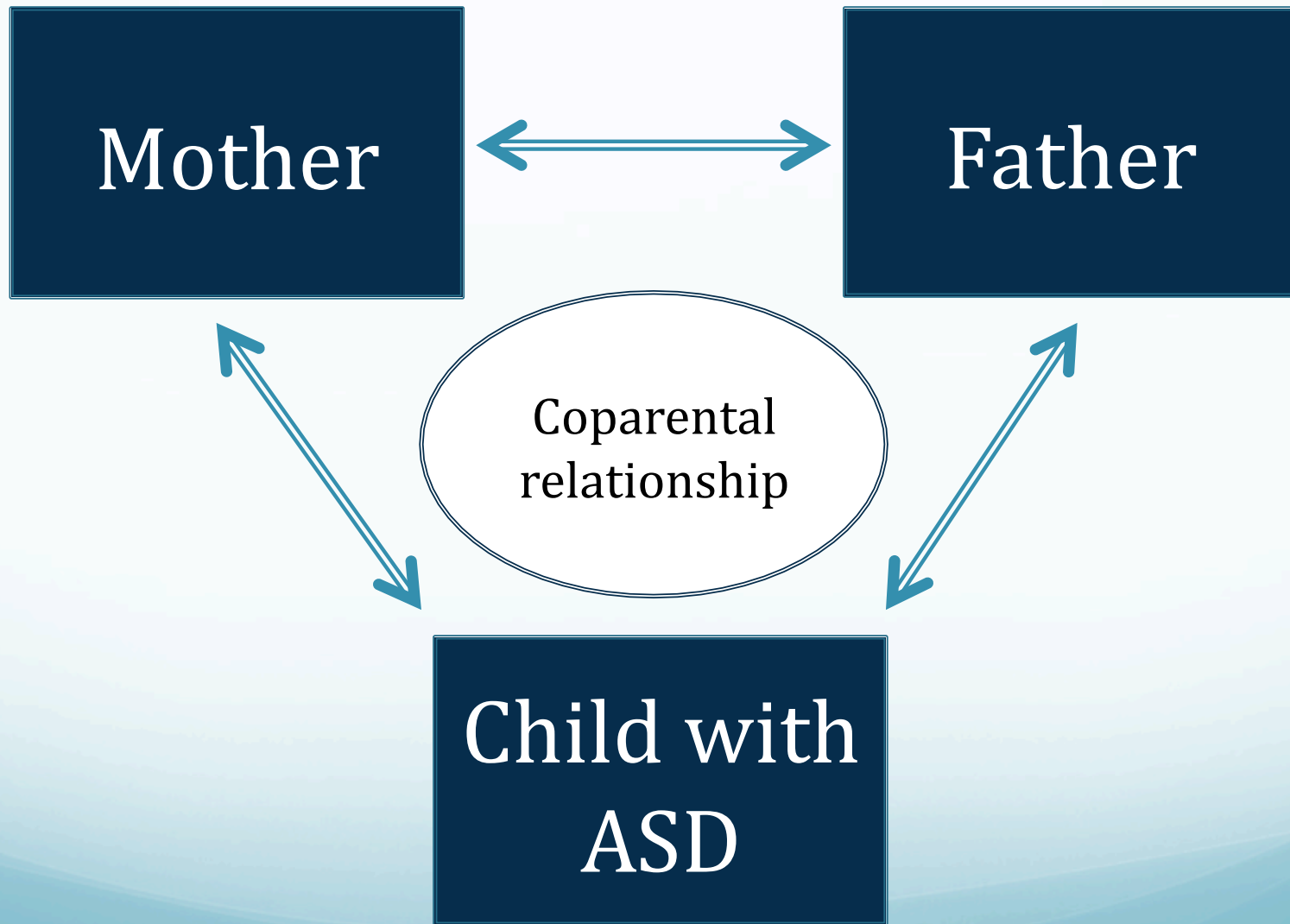


Ly, Abdullah, & Goldberg (under review)

Similarities for ASD-TD



Coparenting



What is Coparenting?



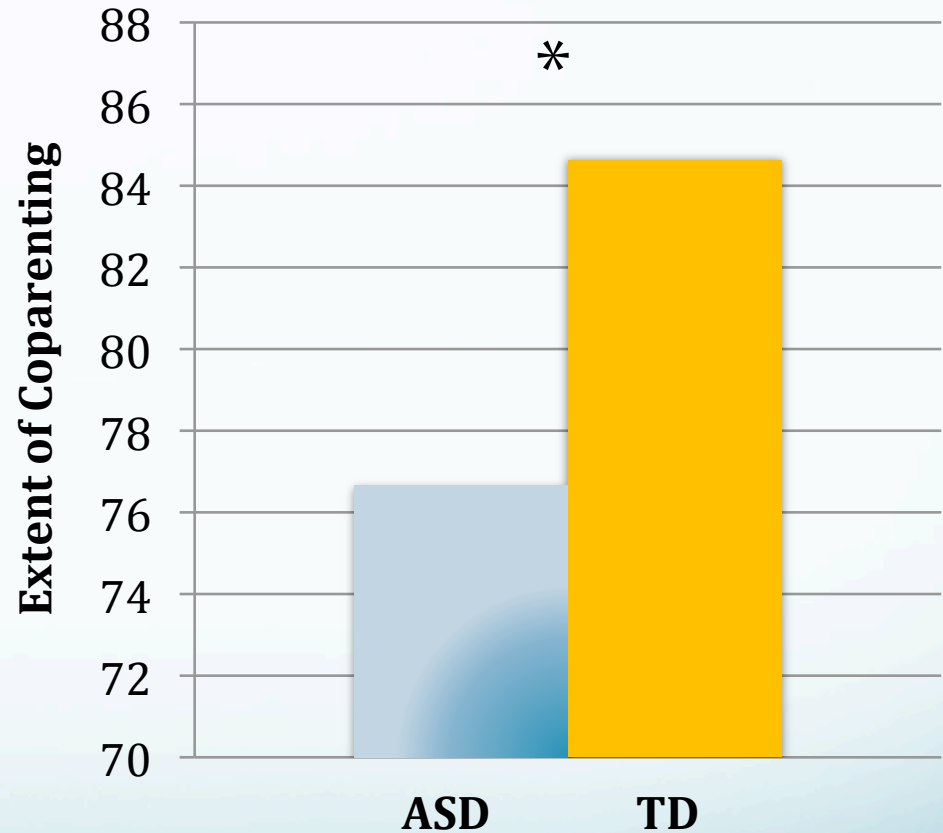
- It is how parents work as a team in raising their child.
 - Do you agree on the types of therapy your child should have?
 - Do you support each other with efforts to be involved with your child?
 - Do you both hold similar goals and expectations for your child?

Coparenting Challenges

- Compared to mothers of TD children, mothers of children with ASD report:



level of coparenting with their spouse



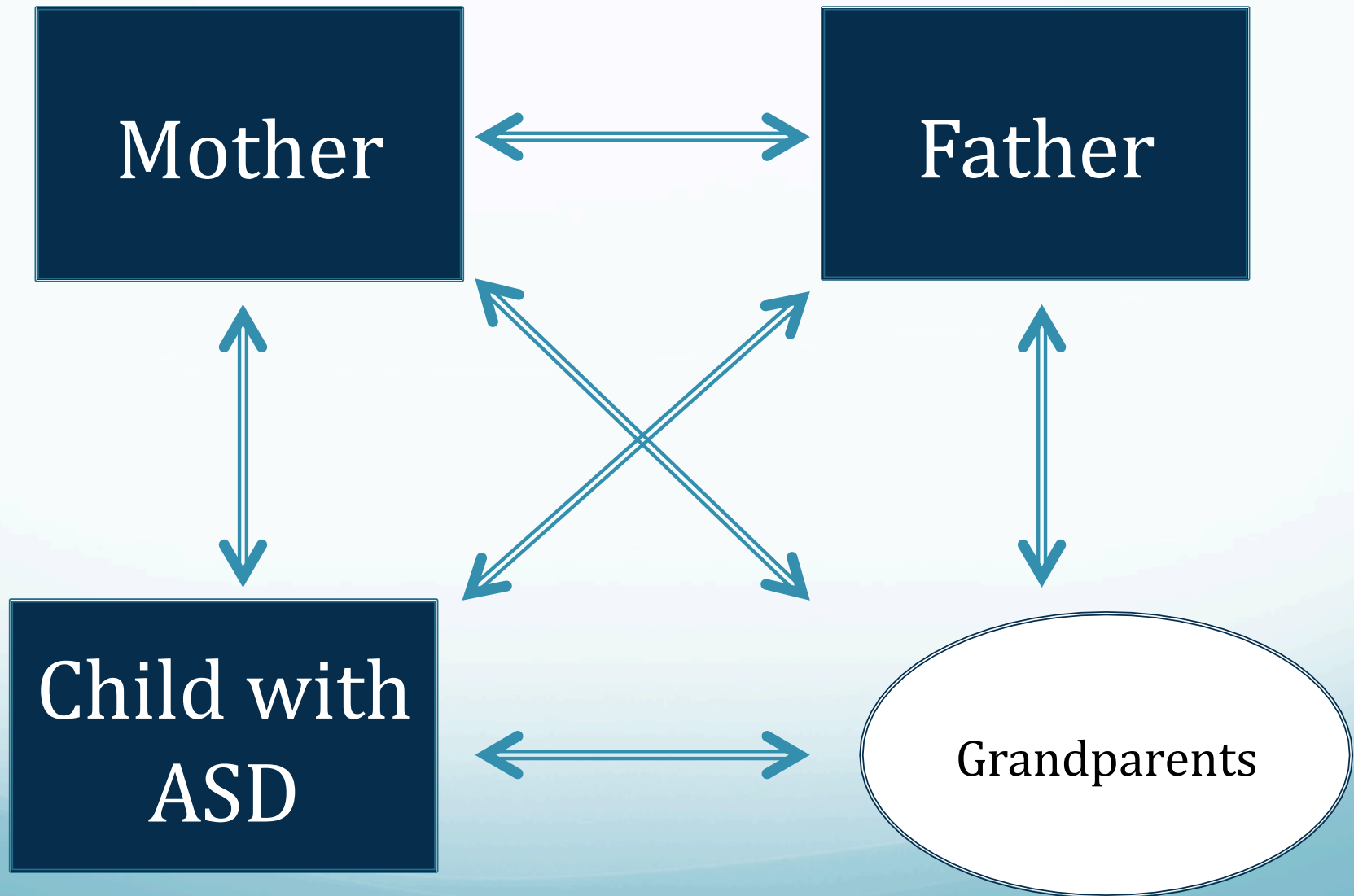
Ly, Abdullah, & Goldberg (under review)

Possible Solutions to Marital and Coparenting Challenges

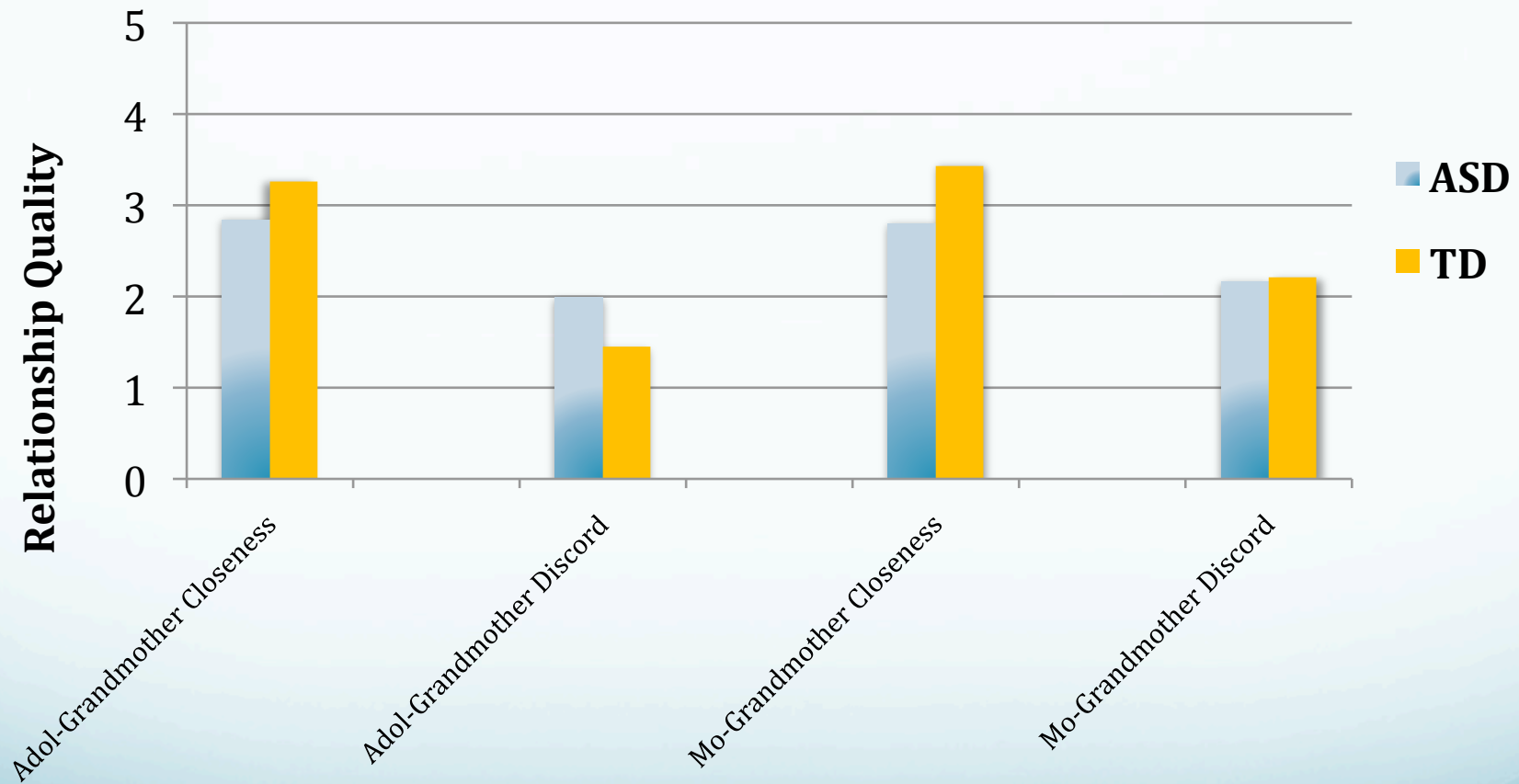
- **Improve communication**
 - Focusing on problem-solving strategies
 - Compromise
 - Soften “start up”, de-escalate
- **Support and respect** each other’s views and contribution to the child’s development
 - Focus on the positive aspects
- Recognize that coparenting is an **ongoing process** that may need “revising” with time and developmental changes of child

Gottman (1999); McHale, et al. (2010)

Family Systems

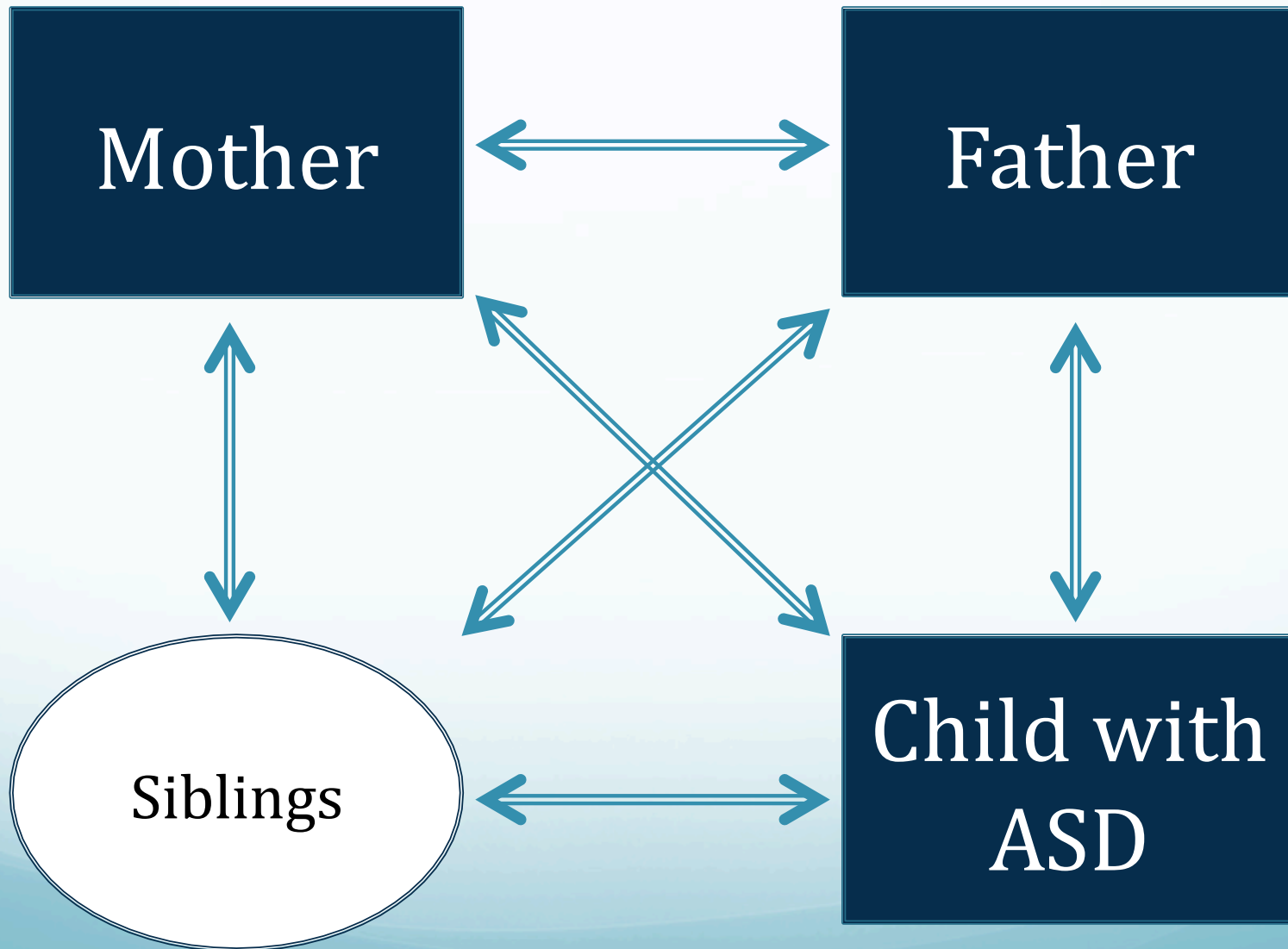


Grandparents of Adolescents



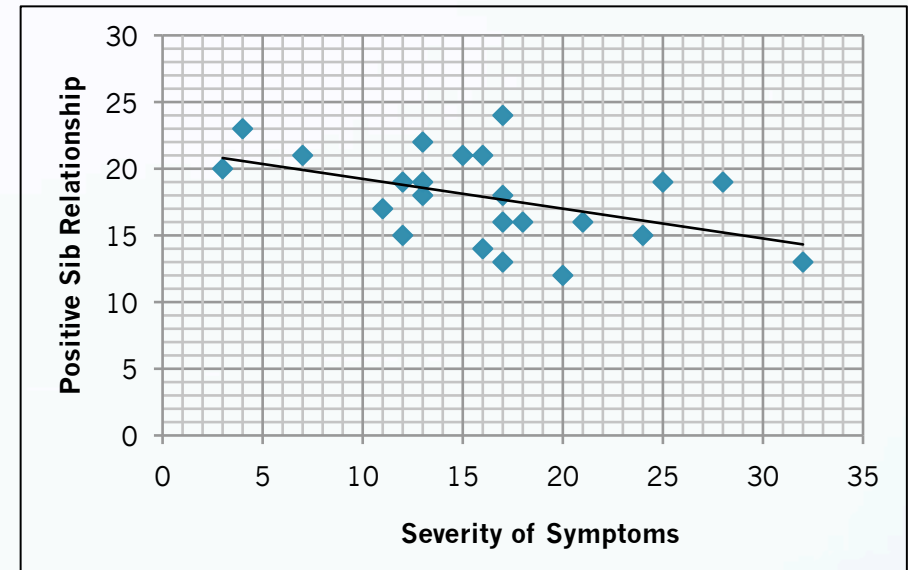
Becerra, Tran, Abdullah, & Goldberg (2011)

Family Systems



Sibling Relationship Quality

- ▶ Children reported as **more severe** had **less positive** SRQ ($p < .05$)
- ▶ Children reported as **more severe** spent **less time** interacting with siblings on weekdays ($p < .05$)
 - ▶ But no difference on weekend days



Theory of Mind (ToM)

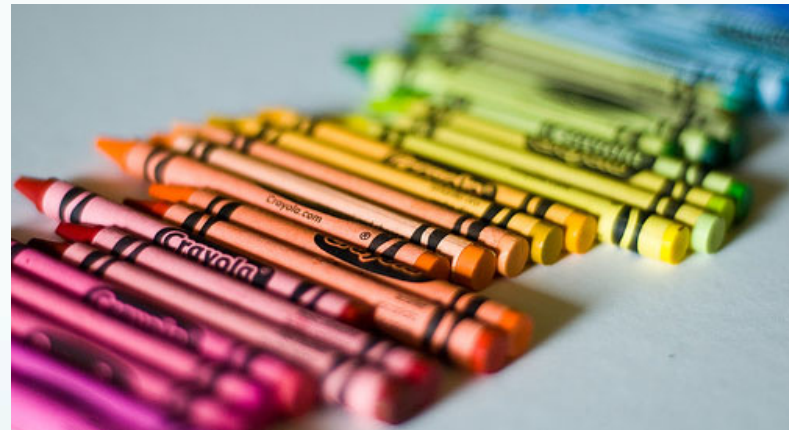
- The ability to infer the mental states of the self and others
- Typically develops during the preschool period
- However:
 - Delayed or inconsistent in children with ASD; some children with ASD *pass* ToM tasks



Wellman (2002)

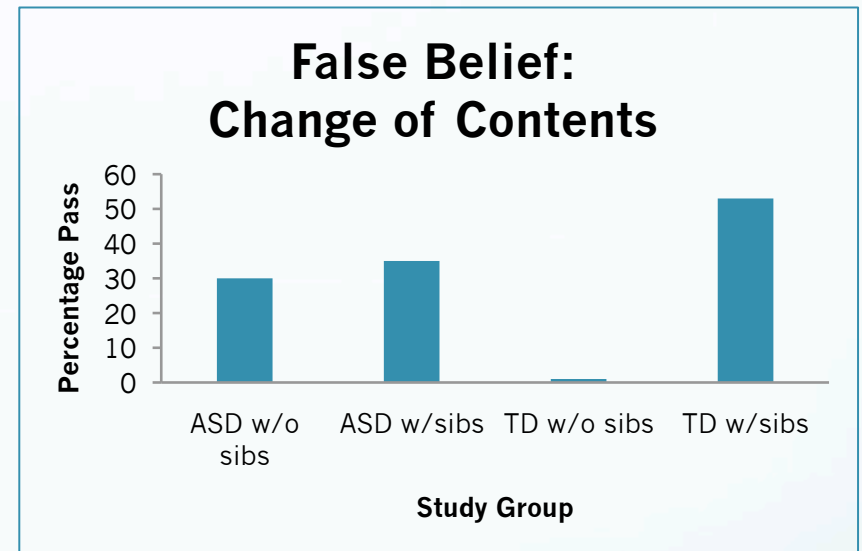
The Litmus Test for ToM: False Belief

- Change of Contents (“Smarties”) Task



Siblings and ToM

- Preliminary Results:
 - Replication of findings in TD children: do better if have child-age sibling
 - No difference in ToM between children with ASD who do and do not have sibs



Some other aspect of sibling relationship?

Younger siblings may be at risk

- Domains:

- Responds to Social Interaction

- Initiates Joint Attention
- Responds to Joint Attention
- Requesting Behaviors

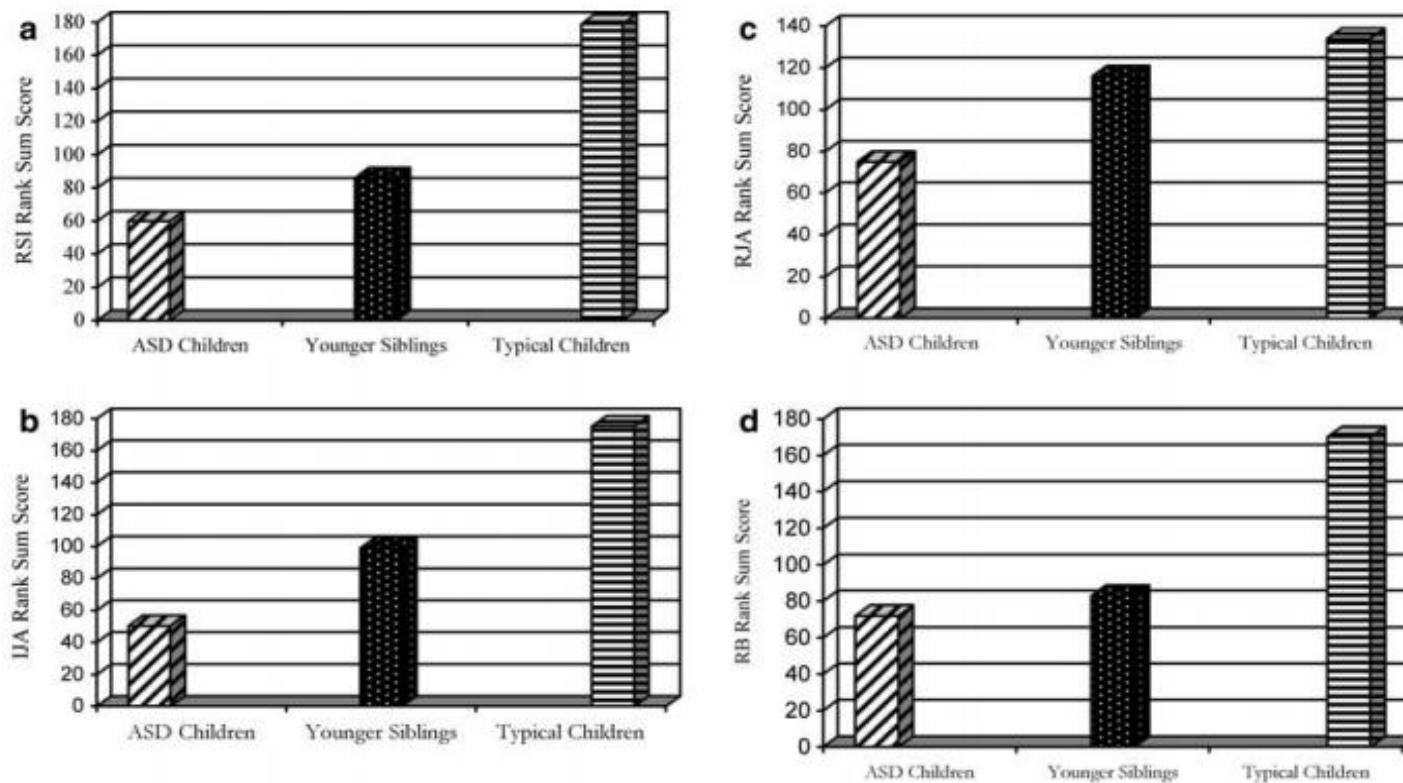
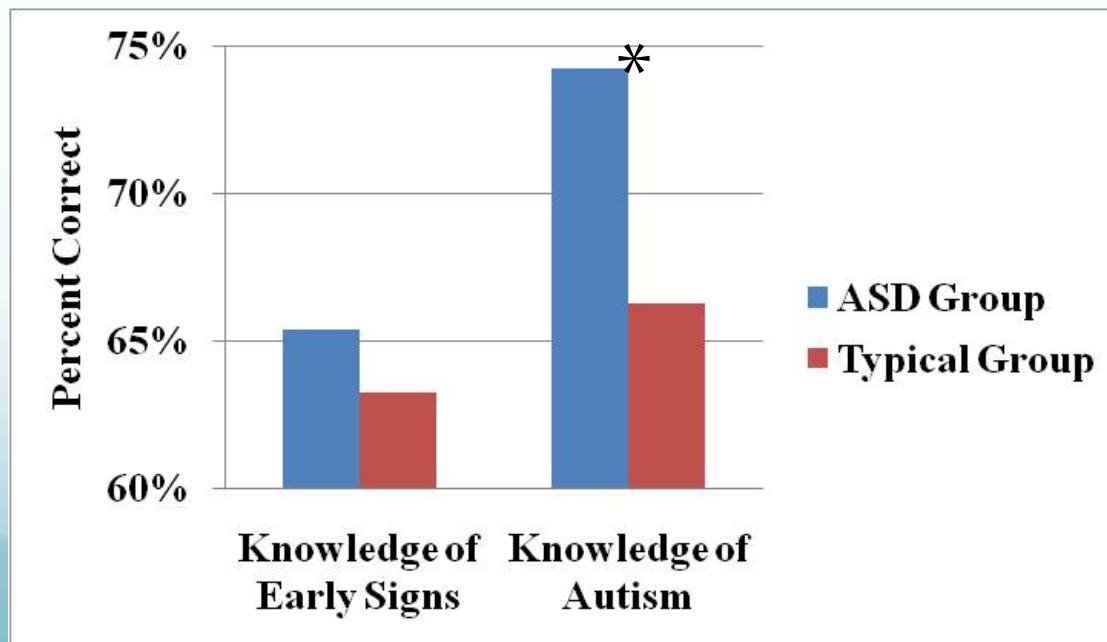


Fig. 1. Group differences in rank scores on ESCS subscales.

Goldberg et al.,
2005

Early Identification Challenges

- Barriers to early identification
 - Parental knowledge/recognition?
 - Raising a child with autism increases mothers' knowledge of autism in general, but not knowledge of the very early signs (Thorsen, dissertation in progress)



Early Identification: Possible Solutions

- Boost parent knowledge/recognition
 - Free, online screening questionnaires
 - Training to recognize early signs
- Expedite referral/evaluation/services
 - Don't settle for “wait and see” approach
 - Seek monitoring by a pediatrician/health care professional
- Take videos, make notes, keep records

Reasons for Optimism!

- Great strides are now being made in parents' and health professionals' recognition of early signs
- Greater understanding of causes
- Better treatments
- More awareness and support from community and schools for children and their parents
- Challenges are there, but we are making progress in meeting them!

Find Support in Local Community

- KiDA
- Regional Center
- For OC Kids
- Grandparent Autism Network
- Pretend City
- Autism Speaks
- Online parent networks & support groups

Participate in Research

- Ongoing studies in my lab examine:
 - Coparenting, play interactions, and child behavior
 - Parent-adolescent and parent-parent relationships
 - Online parent- training program to identify early signs

Thanks to my
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Kara L. Thorsen

Agnes R. Ly

Nicole L. Matthews



<http://www.ucifamilylab.com/>