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# Enfoques centrados en la familia para mejorar la socialización y la inclusión de los niños con autismo<sup>1</sup>

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**Resumen.** Este artículo examina las estrategias centradas en la familia destinadas a mejorar la socialización y la inclusión de los niños con trastornos del espectro autista (TEA). Hace hincapié en la crianza eficaz como factor crucial para fomentar interacciones positivas dentro de la familia y con la comunidad en general. Mediante un análisis en profundidad de estudios recientes, se destaca el papel fundamental de las familias en el desarrollo sociocultural de los niños con TEA. El objetivo principal era desarrollar un modelo y una estrategia globales para reforzar el potencial inclusivo de estas familias. En el estudio se emplearon diversas metodologías, como la revisión bibliográfica, el análisis comparativo, el análisis experimental de datos sobre la dinámica familiar y métodos estadísticos como la prueba chi-cuadrado de Pearson. Además, se utilizaron técnicas de modelización para crear herramientas metodológicas y de contenido para apoyar el desarrollo del potencial inclusivo. Los resultados incluyen la creación de un modelo unificado para evaluar y mejorar el potencial inclusivo de las familias con niños con TEA. Contiene una base de criterios estructurados e indicadores claros de la eficacia parental, organizados en grupos de competencias como las competencias informativas, comunicativas, valorativas, personales y educativas. El estudio identificó correlaciones significativas entre las autoevaluaciones y las evaluaciones de expertos en estas áreas. El artículo presenta un enfoque programático, estructurado en cinco bloques temáticos, que proporciona actividades específicas y orientación para el apoyo familiar.

**Palabras clave:** niños con trastornos del espectro autista, potencial integrador de la familia, perfil de competencias, crianza eficaz, socialización.

## Family-centered approaches to enhancing socialization and inclusion of children with autism

**Abstract.** This article examines family-centered strategies aimed at improving the socialization and inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). It emphasizes effective parenting as a crucial factor in fostering positive interactions within the family and with the community at large. Through an in-depth analysis of recent studies, the critical role of families in the sociocultural development of children with ASD is highlighted. The main objective was to develop a global model and strategy to strengthen the inclusive potential of these families. Various methodologies were used in the study, such as literature review, comparative analysis, experimental analysis of data on family dynamics, and statistical methods such as Pearson's chi-square test. In addition, modelling techniques were used to create methodological and content tools to support the development of inclusive potential. The results include the creation of a unified model to assess and enhance the inclusive potential of families with children with ASD. It contains a base of structured criteria and clear indicators of parental effectiveness, organized into groups of competencies such as informative, communicative, evaluative, personal and educational competencies. The study identified significant correlations between self-assessments and expert assessments in these areas. The article presents a programmatic approach, structured in five thematic blocks, that provides specific activities and guidance for family support.

**Key words:** children with autism spectrum disorders, integrative potential of the family, competency profile, effective parenting, socialization.

### INTRODUCTION

The family, as a crucial element of the social institution of society, serves as the subject of numerous interdisciplinary studies. Within the context of psychological and pedagogical research, the focus is on children with disabilities and their immediate surroundings, integrated into the modern educational and sociocultural space. Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) require a tailored approach due to their significant increase and the active development of inclusive practices in contemporary society, as well as the proactive involvement of their parents. This issue is relevant across all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups. The rise in diagnoses is partly attributed to advancements in screening diagnostics, clinical assessment methods, and diagnostic testing (World Health Organization, 2013).

Currently, there is a lack of large-scale, longitudinal studies in the context of psychological and pedagogical support for children with ASD in the sociocultural space. Clear boundaries for educational and social inclusion have not been established, complicating the choice of family strategies. Overall, the level of inclusive culture in society is noted to be low. Consequently, effective parenting, as a sociocultural phenomenon, requires the construction of an evaluation model and the development of resources and potential capabilities for both the child and the family. Existing experiences in supporting families with ASD often do not fully consider the environmental factor, where the established rehabilitative potential in the system of child-parent relationships and overall interpersonal interactions within families is paramount (Chemerilova et al., 2021). There is a need for scientific



substantiation of new strategies and the modeling of applied developments aimed at optimizing the support process for parents raising children with ASD through the study of the phenomenon and measurable aspect characteristics of the inclusive potential of families.

ASDs are traditionally viewed as developmental conditions of the nervous system, characterized by social communication difficulties, challenges in social interaction, and restricted, repetitive behaviors (Courchesne et al., 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies ASD as a progressive global public health issue. Promising studies delve into the differential diagnosis of autism and similar conditions and provide reasonable explanations for the significant increase in the number of children diagnosed with ASD in the past decade (Chereneva et al., 2022).

Researchers often emphasize the heightened socio-psychological vulnerability of children with ASD and their total dependence on family members, particularly parents and siblings (Fiske & Austin, 2022). The experiences of parents with autistic traits themselves have been studied, revealing challenges in raising children and obtaining professional services (Marriott et al., 2022). The socio-psychological maladaptation of parents often hinders the socialization of children with ASD. Consequently, researchers increasingly focus on the intervention of specialists in developing skills and competencies related to stress management, reducing psycho-emotional dysfunctions, and optimizing personal, family, and child functioning, which overall enhances parental effectiveness and resilience (Schwartzman et al., 2022).

Parents frequently encounter difficulties in independently solving problematic situations, and often lack the competencies, resources, and technologies necessary for actively participating in the development and upbringing of a child with ASD. This necessitates a systematic analysis of the family's potential capabilities and resources to develop and timely implement quality assistance for the child and their immediate environment, thereby improving the quality of life (Hosseinpour et al., 2022).

The modern family is seen as a vital subject of the educational and sociocultural space, holding primary socialization functions. For individuals with ASD, the family remains the main foundation for organizing and sustaining life activities, acting as a factor in managing existing challenges. In recent research, the problems of families with children with ASD are the focus of numerous scientific and applied studies. Issues of providing comprehensive assistance to parents raising children with ASD, from initial consultation and addressing the acceptance of the child's diagnosis to discussing developmental interaction, are presented in various studies (Baenskaya, 2022).

The external and internal locus of studying the characteristics of families raising children with ASD is explored in the works of S.A. Morozov and colleagues. Their research on parents' attitudes towards their children's development with autism reveals significant problems identified by parents during interactions with their children, such as communication difficulties, speech development issues, stereotypical behaviors and habits, low levels of independence, and challenges integrating into social situations. The authors emphasize that parents of children with ASD do not always recognize intellectual problems as significant, often relying on the common understanding that autism and intellectual disability are not linked. This indicates a different level of parental competence in understanding their child's characteristics, necessitating objective assessments in the system of competent consultation for parents and the child's immediate environment (Morozov et al., 2021).

In the social profile of families raising children with ASD, obtained from the study by S.A. Morozov and S.G. Chigrina (2022), it is noted that parents, in the majority of cases, have higher

education, yet over half are unemployed and lack self-realization. In terms of professional engagement, psychological-pedagogical professions are most frequently mentioned. One-third of families have a child with ASD as their only child. Research into intra-family relationships has highlighted difficulties related to behavioral problems and raising children with ASD, as well as a lack of qualified assistance. Indicators of positive and negative reactions to the acceptance of the child's characteristics in micro- and macro-environments are of interest (Morozov et al., 2023).

The conceptual space of the inclusive potential of the family is based on several fundamental positions. Under current conditions, real inclusion touches on two main research areas: the resources of the child with health limitations and the family as an actor in the child's social development and inclusive processes (Alekhina, 2017).

V.V. Tkacheva (2016) defines the family as a determinant, fundamentally incorporating several crucial elements: medical-rehabilitation, sociocultural, psychological-pedagogical, correctional-educational, moral-ethical, and material-economic. In this context, concepts such as potential—a combination of available means and opportunities—and resources, considered as potential possibilities to be actualized and utilized, converge. Human resources (mental and external) are linked to the understanding of potential, including the family as a subsystem of the social.

In Russian disability studies, it is shown that parents are the primary resources resolving issues of correctional education, upbringing, and socialization of children from early childhood. It is essential to involve not only parents but also other family members in the circle of psychological and pedagogical work (Razenkova et al., 2022). Parents must receive reliable information about their child and be able to competently utilize the family's resource potential. The resourcefulness of the family is determined by an active life stance, competence, and expertise regarding their child and interactions with support specialists and other parents of children with disabilities, as external support. It is crucial to pay attention to the assessment, development, and replenishment of internal resources of parents and other family members (Pavlova, 2022).

E.M. Starobina (2018), in turn, studying the resources and possibilities of families, combines them into rehabilitative potential as a generalized indicator of several characteristics, highlighting several key components: social, psychological-pedagogical, medical, and professional-labor. The rehabilitative potential of the family was incorporated into the family-oriented rehabilitation model for children with disabilities (Pavlov, 2020), and considered as a crucial characteristic of the family in the system of psychological-pedagogical and medico-social rehabilitation. This involves certain mental resources, which are structural components of personality (motivational, emotional, self-assessment, and communicative) (Afonkina & Omelchenko, 2019).

Through understanding rehabilitative potential, Yu.A. Afonkina (2016) approached the understanding of inclusive potential, using it in the context of social inclusion, implying a broader conceptual field. This represents an integrative result of the relationships and potential capabilities of individuals with disabilities as direct initiators and autonomous implementers of various social processes, synthesizing the possibilities and resources of social environments.

In the framework of the presented scientific research, an author's interpretation of the inclusive potential of families raising children with disabilities is formulated as an integrative formation of external and internal resources, determining the overall functionality of the family and parental effectiveness in the processes of including the child in various educational and sociocultural spaces (Kashtanova et al., 2023). Structured indicators, criteria, and assessment indicators of the family's

inclusive potential are required to enhance parental effectiveness in interacting with educational and other organizations for the socialization of children. The focus of this article is on families raising children with ASD.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study employed a comprehensive and structured approach to analyze the potential capabilities of modern families with children with disabilities, particularly those raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The methods included a detailed literature review, comparative analysis, experimental data analysis, and advanced statistical processing.

### **Participants**

The study involved a sample of 50 families raising children with ASD, recruited through special education centers and autism support groups. The sample provided a diverse representation across different socio-economic backgrounds.

### **Data collection**

Data were collected through multiple methods to ensure a thorough understanding of the families' inclusive potential:

- **Structured Interviews:** Conducted with parents to gather qualitative insights into their experiences and challenges.
- **Standardized Questionnaires:** Used to assess parental competencies and family functionality.
- **Observational Assessments:** Conducted by trained professionals to objectively evaluate family interactions and child behavior.

### **Statistical analysis**

For statistical processing, Pearson's chi-squared test was used to analyze contingency tables. This test was chosen to determine the significance of associations between different variables.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University named after K. Minina (Russia). Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and the confidentiality of their data. Informed consent was obtained in writing from all participants. Measures were taken to ensure the anonymity and privacy of the participants throughout the research process.

### **Technological aspects**

The study utilized modeling techniques to develop the content and methodological support for fostering the inclusive potential of families raising children with ASD. A unified model for analyzing and assessing the inclusive potential of families raising children with various disabilities, including ASD, was created. Comparative analysis of individual indicators was used to determine the degree of influence of various factors on the effectiveness of child support.

A criteria-based assessment framework was developed, highlighting specific groups of competencies and indicators of parental effectiveness, which were included in specially designed forms for different respondent groups. These forms enable qualitative and quantitative assessment based on the Likert scale. Studying the inclusive potential involves a comprehensive analysis of subjective assessments (author's questionnaire "Self-assessment of Parental Inclusiveness") and expert evaluations of the family's inclusive potential conducted by specialists supporting the child and family to objectify the obtained data. This results in two profiles (self-assessment and expert), whose processing includes mandatory correlation with information from personal records. Quantitative results allow building a competency profile of the family (Kashtanova & Kudryavtsev, 2024).

The proposed model for assessing the inclusive potential of families raising children with disabilities has a structured criteria base and clear indicators of parental effectiveness. The selection of competency groups embedded in the mechanism for assessing inclusive potential is scientifically grounded and allows a systematic evaluation of the family's capabilities and resources from the perspective of educational and sociocultural processes. The following registry of competencies was established: informational, communicative, value-meaning, personal, and educational.

## RESULTS

The study results indicate high levels of statistical significance in the self-assessment of criteria indicators and expert evaluation in specific competency categories. Analyzing the channels of potential assistance from specialists and organizations, state educational organizations (57.5% of respondents) are considered the most accessible and active partners. Parents rated the effectiveness of interaction with public organizations relatively low.

Only 32.5% of respondents highly rated their overall informational competence, whereas almost 80% of parents indicated a low level of competence in regulatory and social protection areas. There is also a pronounced need for knowledge about the patterns, characteristics, and technologies of development and support for children with ASD.

Regarding communicative competencies, the focus is on the culture of social interaction and the interaction between parents and specialists supporting the child with ASD. About 40% of respondents rated their skills in conflict-free communication, prevention, or constructive resolution of conflict situations as low. However, there is a high percentage of coincidence between expert and subjective assessments of the level of interaction between parents and specialists, indicating homogeneity of views and positions and readiness for cooperation.

In the group of value-meaning competencies, two key points are emphasized: the attitude towards the "condition" and the so-called generational continuity. Some studies indicate a high level of general psychological stress among parents raising children with ASD, partly associated with overemphasis on symptoms, the tendency to overestimate the significance of individual symptoms and the child's overall condition. The child's condition is perceived as something beyond their control (Kisova & Koneva, 2022).

The initial reaction of parents to the diagnosis is also noteworthy. Parents often exhibit increased anxiety, expressed in seeking answers to the question, "Why did this happen to us and our child?" This frequently leads to searching for someone to blame within the family or among medical staff. Confusion and helplessness drive parents to seek non-traditional forms of assistance (Filippova & Letyagin, 2022).

The perception of the diagnosis is also tied to the process of identifying the child with the diagnosis, and the parent, primarily the mother, with the child. “My child, I, and autism are intertwined into one inseparable whole!” This position is shared by about 42% of respondents. Attention is also drawn to the concern of almost 30% of respondents about the lack of unconditional acceptance of the child by family members and close surroundings. Regarding generational continuity, the analysis of self-relations and expert evaluations indicates high intergenerational confrontation, conflict with their parents and the parents of their spouse, which is relevant for 40% of respondents. About 50% are concerned with the issue of genuinely including the child in the extended family’s socio-cultural space.

Analyzing the realm of personal inclusive competencies, several key positions are highlighted. First, there is a discrepancy between parents’ and specialists’ subjective assessments regarding the component of self-education. Nearly 60% overestimate their need and readiness to acquire new knowledge and skills in the areas of education, development, and upbringing of the child. More than 70% of parents highly rate their own level of general cultural development, but these ratings coincide with specialists’ opinions in only 15% of cases. It is also worth noting the insufficient level of personal maturity, manifested in inadequate criticality, proactive position, responsibility, and readiness for an open conversation about the family and child’s problems, low adaptability, and self-regulation (50% of respondents).

The most important applied aspect can be called the group of educational competencies, determining the ability of parents and close relatives to solve tasks of upbringing and spiritual-moral development; use the environment’s opportunities to achieve educational results; organize interaction within the family and beyond, support and develop the child’s activity, initiative, independence, and creative abilities. Deficiencies include a lack of skills, techniques, and means of constructive interaction with the child in different tasks and activities, noted by about 65% of respondents. The problem of ensuring special conditions, organizing space and a developmental environment in the context of home education, concerns 52% of parents. Also relevant is the issue of effective educational resources, with about 48% of parents not having formed a unified effective system for encouraging and stabilizing desired behavior.

A new reality in modern science and practice is the demand for developing the content component of the culture and ethics of inclusion as a complex multifactorial and multi-subject process. The shift in predicate in these phrases “inclusive culture” and “culture of inclusion” corresponds to the shift in emphasis and the replacement of the dominant “inclusiveness” with the dominant “culture.” A person constantly implements cultural scenarios, i.e., some formalized algorithms of life activity determined by social and environmental conditions, public experience, values, norms, and rules of behavior. A special place among cultural scenarios is occupied by scenarios of certain activities, as they generally predetermine the nature, goals, norms of behavior, and interaction of people in any sphere of life. One such cultural scenario in modern society is the culture of inclusion.

According to respondents participating in the survey, the psychological component of the culture of inclusion, primarily the desire, ability, and aspiration of a person to understand others, consider and respect their interests, habits, moods, sincerely respond to their feelings and experiences, understanding and accepting the characteristics and uniqueness of another person and oneself – 65.5% of respondents.



A fairly high self-assessment of their own level of inclusion culture is given by about 82% of the surveyed parents, which significantly exceeds the similar assessments of specialists, teachers working in the system of accompanying children with ASD and their families. It is particularly noteworthy the dominance of a passive-consumer, “object” position demonstrated by 65% of the surveyed parents of children with ASD. They position themselves as some “recipients” of this very culture, demonstrated by practical steps from others. About 85% of all surveyed parents highlight the behavior and attitude of others as the main reason for the educational and social inclusion of children with ASD. An inadequately high assessment by parents and family members of their own level of inclusion culture and a pronounced external locus of control with reduced subjective criticality can become a serious barrier to the socio-personal development of both the child with ASD and the family as a whole. This position correlates with a qualitative analysis of the provided results of assessing the personal, communicative, and educational competence of parents raising children with ASD.

Based on the structure of the competency profile of the experimental group and the overall picture of the evaluation indicators, the main directions of corrective and developmental and advisory-educational activities with parents raising children with ASD as the target group of the study were determined. The program of activities is divided into blocks according to the groups of competencies. The most important thematic vector is the axiological aspect, integrating value-meaning competencies, besides informational, communicative, personal, and educational competencies are included.

Block 1 “Value-Meaning” is aimed at making parents of children with ASD aware of the potential opportunities and negative consequences of the condition. The following positions are considered important:

- Formation of parents’ readiness to openly discuss the problems of their child and family, correlating with parents’ acceptance of the child’s condition.
- Emphasizing the importance of maintaining and transmitting family values, and fostering the family’s role in spiritual communication.
- Actualization of intergenerational relationships within the family as a basis for preventing negative consequences of the condition.

Basic content and implementation tools:

- Primary group training (formation of a conscious attitude towards the condition, increasing the level of acceptance, and perception of the situation of a “special child”/ “feeling and experiencing ‘otherness’”).
- Group training “Are we the right parents?!” (working through the criteria of family well-being and educational potential of well-being).
- Practicum “Life balance wheel” (identifying value-meaning priorities and distributing resources of each family member).
- Seminar “Fathers and children – connection or conflict of generations” (actualization of parent-child relationships in the context of an extended family system of several generations, identifying the degree of unity and functionality of the family).

Block 2 “Informational” aims to activate parents’ efforts to create and organize special conditions aimed at developing the potential opportunities of a child with ASD. The main guidelines are:

- Increasing parents' awareness of parent communities, medical, psychological-pedagogical, and social support.
- Determining the parent's own influence on the regression of developmental challenges.

Basic content and implementation tools:

- Lecture "What is important to know about autism" (educating parents about the patterns of development of children with ASD, their special educational needs, and the need to create special conditions).
- Round table "Routes of assistance" (analyzing real and potential resources and sources of "assistance" for parents raising children with ASD).
- Seminar "Comprehensive support and assistance for families raising children with ASD" (informing parents about the support and assistance available from various societal institutions).

Block 3 "Communicative" has the goal of forming a culture of social interaction and ecological relationships within the family raising a child with ASD. The following positions are defined:

- Formation of parents' abilities to build productive interactions with teachers and specialists.
- Emphasizing the importance of building positive relationships with other parents (of neurotypical children, children with ASD, and other developmental groups).
- Orienting parents in a variety of communicative means.

Basic content and implementation tools:

- Training seminar "Culture of inclusion" (forming parents' ideas about the culture of inclusion and the importance of generational continuity in this matter).
- Training "Do we communicate ecologically?!" (forming parents' skills in conflict-free communication and social interaction culture).
- Practicum "Family mapping" (building a schematic representation of the family based on identifying its needs, determining connections with other families, social organizations, institutions).
- Webinar "Productive cooperation" (identifying the need and readiness of parents to cooperate with specialists, increasing the productivity and intensity of interaction).
- Training "Masters of communication" (equipping parents with information on traditional and alternative means of communication, forming skills to recognize the child's non-verbal signals).

Block 4 "Personal" focuses on parents' analysis of their own personality traits and determining personal maturity. The basic constructor includes:

- Finding a stable source of psychological support and emotional relief for parents.
- Forming optimistic attitudes and positive thinking in parents.
- Accumulating parental resources.

Basic content and implementation tools:

- Practicum “Self-knowledge – the key to development” (creating conditions for parents to analyze their personality traits and the risks of realizing their own incompetence).
- Lecture “The highest qualified parent” (identifying indicators of successful parenting, updating criteria for their competence in parenting issues).
- Training “Problem solving and self-care” (identifying current difficulties experienced by parents raising children with ASD, working through the algorithm for solving arising problems, and forming useful ways of self-care).
- Webinar “Territory of personal growth” (determining parents’ trajectory of self-development, addressing issues of de-identification, idealization, and the syndrome of personal importance).

Block 5 “Educational” relates to identifying and using rational educational strategies by parents raising children with ASD. The main directions include:

- Developing parents’ educational potential.
- Forming mentorship in family relationships.
- Analyzing the involvement of the immediate environment in the educational process and helping to activate their efforts.
- Unveiling the potential of the family’s adaptive educational resources.

Basic content and implementation tools:

- Webinar “Basics of special family pedagogy” (informing parents about the features of family upbringing of children with ASD, updating the main educational strategies and methods of education).
- Lecture “Compensatory upbringing and adaptive parenting – territory of potential opportunities” (demonstrating to parents special methods of interaction with a child with ASD, forming skills in designing a subject-developing environment).
- Round table “Parent tutoring – pros and cons” (discussing the feasibility of parent tutoring, helping parents solve problematic situations).
- Practicum “Fair of positive practices” (identifying and actualizing the resources of the family and the close environment of parents raising children with ASD).

## CONCLUSION

The positions proposed in the article form a unified system for assessing and developing the inclusive potential of the family, which expands the possibilities for creating and implementing necessary special conditions and meeting the special needs of children with ASD in the process of their active inclusion in sociocultural and educational spaces. The family and immediate environment constitute a powerful potential resource, providing access to various means and forms of comprehensive support for the child with ASD. One of the main mechanisms ensuring psychological and pedagogical support for the child is the system of parental competencies.

The analysis of the positions presented in the article, reflecting the content and specifics of the competency profiles of parents raising children with ASD, aligns with modern conceptual positions that consider parental competence as a basic condition for their education, upbringing, and socialization (Tkacheva, 2023). The formation of targeted settings in parents for understanding the main substantive aspects of their own culture of inclusion, the inclusive potential of the family and immediate environment, as well as the rehabilitative-adaptive potential of their own child. The technological solutions aimed at developing inclusive potential, presented in the form of thematic blocks reflecting separate groups of competencies, can be used in the system of comprehensive family support for those raising children with ASD.

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