OTARC Introducing Research Video - Dr Kristelle Hudry

We're interested because when a child has an autism diagnoses, obviously it affects that child and their development, but equally has a big impact on all of the other people who are involved, so the family, the parents in particular, but also siblings, grandparents, any other extended family members who might be around as well, so we think it's really important to study the child and their diagnoses in the context of that family not just in isolation.

I think it's difficult for us to say globally how a family will react when a child has a diagnoses because I think families really vary a lot from one to the other. Some parents will find it really difficult to come to terms with that diagnoses and then to know what to do, whereas other families will cope really nicely from the beginning and just going forward. And I think part of what we want to understand is the variability in how families cope with autism, as well as on average how things are and what we can do to help.

In order for research to help families cope with autism, we just need to listen to families, we need to do studies where we talk to families and ask them about their experiences. Because families really vary in how they cope with a child with a diagnoses, we need to understand the different variabilities, so from the extreme of parents who coped really nicely and who find that it's actually just a little glitch but that everything goes okay, through to families who really find it very stressful from the beginning. And so by really listening to families, doing studies where perhaps we interview families, we have focus groups of families, perhaps studies where we even follow them prospectively before their child has a diagnoses and follow them through that diagnoses and find out how things go, we can really start to understand all of the different things that are involved and I think it's quite complicated and at this stage we just need to get more understanding.

I think when a child has a diagnoses initially, parents often get thrown in to become one of the therapists. Sometimes this is because they feel they want to, sometimes because they feel they need to. And sometimes parents don't feel that they particularly want to, they would rather just have their child being taken to some where therapy is delivered and then just having a parenting role. But often it is the case that parents become or take on a therapeutic role with their child. And so there's a whole branch of intervention research which is parent-mediated intervention, we call it so intervention where parents are the therapists and they deliver the intervention to the child. And that sort of sits along side the other intervention research which is the direct intervention, where a therapist delivers to the child and I think by comparing interventions that are in these two modalities, so parent-mediated and therapist-delivered, we can start to see how parents can support their child, and what sorts of things can be gained from parent-mediated intervention so from parents having an active role in developing their child's skills.