

THE PARENT IS THE CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER: Parent-Participation Therapy Groups

Of all the people who have the potential to positively impact the development of a child, parents possess the greatest opportunities to promote their child's progress. The parents are the constant in their child's life, and know their child best. But when a child has special needs, parents are often hesitant to see themselves as capable in this role.



Parents Laurie Eallonardo and Erica Randall work with daughters Jenna and Alyssa at Kids in Motion Pediatric Therapy.

Therapies that promote development have been a key element of our support for children with special needs and their families, and families place enormous hope and trust in the hands of the qualified therapist. But over time we have also seen the limitations of conventional individual therapy.

Parents were not always encouraged or given the tools which they could use themselves to promote their child's development.

"With individual therapy, parents may get information about a technique to try at home without having an opportunity to practice it. By showing a parent how to do something, and to practice it in group and at home, it empowers the parent and provides simple tools to promote language." – Fran Harman, MS CCC SLP, Harbor Regional Center

When Parents Participate, Children Do Better

Meanwhile, in the field as a whole, the focus of care has increasingly shifted from child-centered to family-centered. Much evidence has supported the benefits of parent participation and peer support. Through interactions with other children and adults, both parents and children can learn from one another.

Parents may initially worry how effective they can be when working with their child with special needs, but we have seen parents overcome their initial con-

"In recent years there has been a significant shift in focus for therapy...and a shift in thinking about our role as therapists, from child-centered to family-centered. The best therapy focuses intervention on optimizing parent-child interaction through parent training, and well-trained parents are the child's best therapist. A truly family-centered approach encourages 100% parent participation and allows parents to realize quickly that it is not just about what new word their child learned in speech therapy that day or how much help their child needed to negotiate an obstacle course in physical therapy or occupational therapy, but more importantly what the parent learned during that therapy session that could become part of everyday activities."

– Marcie Rhee, DPT, Director,
Kids In Motion Pediatric Therapy

cerns. They realize that, with a little guidance, they as parents have so much more opportunity to be key facilitators of their children's development in their everyday lives. What's more, they find the group approach can be more fun and less stressful for their child, more beneficial for them as parents, and helps the child reach their goals faster.

Parent Laurie Eallonardo, thinks back on her daughter Jenna's earlier struggles.

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