Just Right Challenge: Rethinking Parent Home Programs

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Objectives

- Identify at least three factors affecting a parent's capacity to implement a home program
- Apply a capacity-first intake framework to assess parent readiness before building a sensory lifestyle or home program
- Adapt home program recommendations using at least two strategies tailored to parents in burnout or with limited resources
- Demonstrate use of targeted parent-assessment questions to gather contextual information that informs individualized home programming



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Remember Who We're Serving

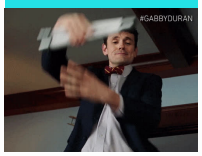
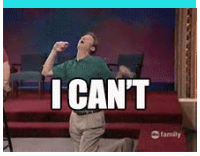
The just right challenge applies to all of our clients.

We support the whole family, not just the child.



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Why Home Programs Fail

First	Then	So
		
OTs come up with a list of strategies	Parents receive information that is clinically sound but practically overwhelming	Parents give up in frustration, and start to believe that "OT doesn't work" (OT gets frustrated too)

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Be Aware: Clinican Blind Spots

OTs who aren't parents, or are far removed from the realities of caregiving.

Seasoned OTs who move too fast, assuming parents know more than they do.

Unaware of family's cultural, financial, geographical, social dynamics.



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Learn From My Mistakes

- Giving generic suggestions with no context or examples
  - Not taking the time to ask questions
  - Not taking child's interests into consideration
- Giving parents a program vs. building one with them
- Listening to the text book vs. the family in front of me



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Barriers to Parental Adherence

- **Lack of Time**
  Adding extra activities that didn't fit well into an already busy routine made it easy to forget or avoid.
- **Lack of Confidence**
  Caregivers didn't know how to do a certain activity or exercise, how long to do it, or what to look for in terms of outcome.
- **Caregiver stress**
  Emotional exhaustion, burnout both decrease likelihood of home program being followed.



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Home Program Non-negotiables

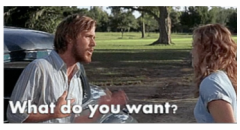
- Fits within the home's *current* environment and resources
- Fits within daily routines
- Child actually enjoys it
- Involves siblings or extended family if applicable
- Parent education on importance of the program, relating to skill development
  - takes their learning style into consideration
- Concrete structure for delivery

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What Real Parents Want

- **An incremental plan:** "Here's the most basic starting point that's most important. Then gradually add on based on bandwidth."
- **What to prioritize:** "If I can prioritize something for each kid, I'll get it done. If I have a ten step plan for every kid, nothing gets done."
- **Patience with instructions:** "We were given a massive list of possibly useful strategies with very little guidance about how to prioritize or implement them systematically. It ended up being overwhelming; when I asked for our OT for help, she suggested that this was a failing on my part.
- **Dedicated time for education:** "Literally just handed it to me on their way to get another client. And they said I could email them with questions, but the paper is so overwhelming that I didn't know where to begin"



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Understanding Parent Capacity

What Is Parent Capacity?

A caregiver's available bandwidth — physical, emotional, cognitive, financial, and logistical — to consistently implement a home program. **It can shift daily.**



Factors That Affect Capacity

household community,
physical space,
schedule demands,
caregiver availability,
neurotype
current stress/burnout level,
familiarity with childhood development

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Strategies for Parents In Burnout

- Prioritize. One thing at a time. "If you can only do one thing this week, try this:"
- Parasympathetic nervous system activation (for caregvier)
  - Double inhale, exhale
  - Support posture
  - Ice/ cold pack
- Environmental shifts (passive)



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Strategies to Increase Parental Capacity

- Simplify activities
- If they sent you pictures of their space at home, show them exactly how/where/when to do the activities
- Provide visual demos; hands on practice
- Therapeutic use of self
- Make it clear & easy to follow
  - What an activity is targeting
  - What signs to look out for that tell them it's helpful (or unhelpful)
  - How long/how many reps to do (even if you make up a number just to keep it concrete)
  - Create visuals, post its, record voice memos as you're explaining



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Meet Sonya, 6 yo

Presenting Concerns:

- Limited clothing in wardrobe. Difficult to find enough clothing for the school week.
- Morning meltdowns on school day mornings (but teacher says fine at school).
- Bath is "impossible", hygiene is becoming an issue. Hair is matted.
- Difficult to settle down for bed. If she has a bath, the time after dinner and getting her to bed is the hardest.

Special Interests/ Sensory Preferences:

- Stuffed animals
- Coloring
- Princesses
- Loves to jump, spin, be upside down



Family Capacity/ Resources V.1



Family Capacity/ Resources V. 2



Takeaways

- **Parent Capacity is Critical**

  A parent's ability to implement home programs is directly tied to their household composition, schedule demands, stress levels, and familiarity with therapeutic concepts. Assessing capacity first leads to better outcomes.

- **Capacity-First Intake Improves Outcomes**

  Parents in burn out might not benefit from a traditional home program, start with the simplest strategy.

- **Keep info and suggestions digestible and easy to follow**

  Make the program as easy to follow as possible; parents should not be leaving your sessions more confused or overwhelmed than when they started.





Let's Connect

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The Sensory Code Podcast





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