

# Supporting Children with Autism and Their Families

## A Culturally Responsive Family-Driven Interprofessional Process



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### KEYWORDS

- Autism spectrum disorders • Children • Interprofessional practice • Collaboration
- Coaching • Family driven • Culturally responsive • Strengths based

### KEY POINTS

- Coaching in Context (CinC) is a family-driven, culturally responsive, interprofessional process that enhances functioning in everyday activities of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families.
- Coaching can significantly increase participation in the everyday life activities of those with ASD.
- Context therapy focuses on improving a person's everyday life by changing the task demands rather than attempting to remediate the impairment of the individual.
- Goal Attainment Scaling allows the monitoring of progress toward family-driven goals and promotes family-coach collaboration in achieving these goals.
- CinC includes 3 components: connecting about the previous action plan, brainstorming potential strategies to support progress toward goals, and planning strategies to be tried.

### INTRODUCTION

Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may experience challenges across most International Classifications of Functioning (ICF) activities and participation domains: learning and applying knowledge, general tasks and demands (eg, following routines, handling stress, responding to demands), communication, self-care (eg, getting dressed), domestic life (eg, chores), interpersonal interactions and relationships,

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major life areas (eg, school), and community life (eg, recreation and leisure).<sup>1</sup> Some of these challenges (eg, communication and interpersonal relationship) are core impairments of the condition and are part of the diagnostic criteria for ASD.<sup>2</sup> Other difficulties (eg, learning and self-care) are not part of diagnostic criteria, but are the daily life challenges resulting from the symptoms of ASD. These challenges negatively affect not only the quality of life of the child with ASD, but also that of their family.<sup>3,4</sup>

Numerous interventions have been designed, empirically evaluated, and clinically implemented to remediate the underlying impairments experienced by children with ASD with various degrees of success.<sup>5</sup> Often, however, the most important barriers to participation are not impairments, but rather the context in which an activity takes place, such as people's attitudes, the physical environment, institutional policies, and human support.<sup>6</sup> In fact, remediating the skills of children with ASD without consideration of contextual issues typically leads to poor skill generalization.<sup>7</sup> Intervention is needed that accommodates a person's impairments and modifies the environment and task demands to yield faster, greater, and more meaningful changes than intervention focused on skill remediation alone.<sup>7-9</sup> Intervention focused on enhancing the participation of children with ASD has the potential to increase their quality of life and that of their family.

By their nature, enhancing engagement in ICF activities and participation domains requires an interprofessional perspective, because these hinge on a child with ASD using a variety of skills that are traditionally addressed by different health professionals. For example, playing team sports requires communication, self-regulation, and social-cognitive and motor skills. Consequently, the involvement of several professions is critical to effectively address the participation needs of children with ASD and their families. Effective interprofessional practice requires collaboration from individuals of different professional backgrounds with families and their children to address their needs.<sup>10,11</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF THE COACHING IN CONTEXT PROCESS

The Coaching in Context (CinC) process described in this article is a family-driven, culturally responsive, interprofessional process developed to enhance the functioning of children with ASD and their families in everyday activities. Family-driven practice involves families having the primary decision making role in all aspects of care including setting goals and designing, implementing, and evaluating their child's intervention plan.<sup>12</sup> Culturally responsive practice includes understanding a person's beliefs for the medical condition they experience, recognizing their cultural identity, developing a trusting relationship, and using strengths-based approaches.<sup>13</sup>

The CinC process combines 2 empirically supported interventions: coaching (a type of parent-mediated intervention) and context therapy to enhance the participation goals of those with ASD and their family. The CinC process begins with identification of family-selected participation goals and continues with family-selected and implemented strategies to realize progress toward these goals. The selected strategies prioritize modifying the task and environmental demands of an activity, rather than skill remediation. One of the interprofessional team member serves as coach to the family while collaborating with colleagues from other professions as the need arises based on a family's interest and readiness.

### ***Coaching: Parent-Mediated Intervention***

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Parent-mediated intervention is a general term used to describe a variety of intervention approaches that are delivered by a parent to their child. Strong empirical evidence exists about the efficacy of parent-mediated intervention to support the development

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