

## Introduction

- Caregivers of children with autism spectrum disorder experience higher levels of stress in comparison to caregivers of typically developing children and children with other developmental disabilities (Abbeduto et al., 2004; Innocenti & Huh, 1992).
- Caregivers of children with disabilities typically experience elevated stress in child specific areas compared to parent specific stressors, such as their child's behavior or qualities that make it difficult for caregivers to fulfill their roles or interact with their child (Abidin, 1995).
- The Collaborative Model for Promoting Competence and Success (Ruble & Dalrymple, 2002) is a parent-teacher consultation framework that aims to improve the Individualized Education Programs (IEP) of the child and child educational outcomes (Ruble, Dalrymple, & McGrew, 2010).
  - Includes the child's teacher, caregivers, and COMPASS consultants who together contribute to the child's educational plan
  - COMPASS participants have shown improvements in IEP goal attainment outcomes with a large effect size ( $d = 1.51$ ) (Ruble, Dalrymple, & McGrew, 2010).
- Helping caregivers feel empowered in their abilities to problem solve, cope, and adjust may play an important role in lowering their stress.
- While lowering reported caregiver stress is not the main objective of COMPASS, this consultation model may have indirect effects on levels of stress reported by the caregivers.

## Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether COMPASS had an indirect impact on caregiver stress.

- Specific research question:

1. Were there statistically significant differences in caregiver stress at the end of the school year between the caregivers in the control group who did not participate in COMPASS and the caregivers in the experimental group who did participate in COMPASS?

## Methods

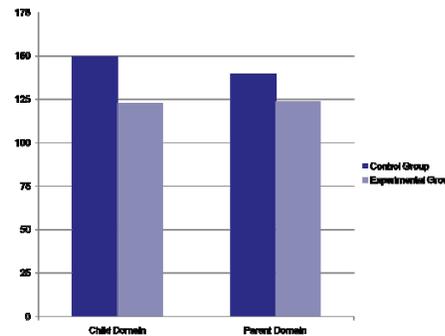
- Thirty-three caregivers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ages 3-8) participated in a randomized controlled study of COMPASS.
- Experimental Group (n=16): participated in a COMPASS parent-teacher consultation at the beginning of the school year; the teacher received four additional follow-up coaching sessions throughout the remaining school year. The coaching sessions were optional for caregivers.

## Methods Cont.

- Control group (n=17): participants did not receive an intervention from the COMPASS consultants.
- Caregivers of children with autism completed the *Parenting Stress Index (PSI)* at the beginning of the school year (prior to the COMPASS consultation) and again at the end of the school year.
  - The *PSI* is a normed questionnaire that assesses caregiver stress in three major domains: child characteristics, parent characteristics and situational/demographic life stress.
  - The Child Domain score accounts for 6 child-specific stressor areas: Distractibility/Hyperactivity, Adaptability, Reinforces Parent, Demandingness, Mood, and Acceptability.
  - The Parent Domain scores accounts for 7 parent-specific stressor areas: Competence, Isolation, Attachment, Health, Role Restriction, Depression, and Spouse.

## Results

Figure 1. Means of the Child Domain and Parent Domain scores from the *PSI* between the control and experimental groups at the end of the school year



- A one-way between-groups univariate analysis of covariance was conducted to determine whether there were differences between the experimental and control groups in caregiver stress at the end of the school year while controlling for the scores at the beginning of the school year as reported on the *PSI*.

## Results Cont.

- Child Domain:
  - The ANCOVA indicated there were statistically significant group differences at the end of the school year while controlling for the scores at the beginning of the school year for the Child Domain.
    - Child Domain:  $F(1, 30) = 6.65, p = .015$
    - Control Group Child Domain Score: 149.82
    - Experimental Group Child Domain Score: 122.88
- Parent Domain:
  - The ANCOVA indicated there were statistically significant group differences at the end of the school year while controlling for the scores at the beginning of the school year for the Parent Domain.
    - Parent Domain:  $F(1, 30) = 5.94, p = .021$
    - Control Group Parent Domain Score: 137.75
    - Experimental Group Parent Domain Score: 125.52

## Discussion

- These exploratory results indicated that caregivers who participated in COMPASS reported less stress at the end of the school year on the Child Domain and on the Parent Domain stress scores on the *Parenting Stress Index*.
- While COMPASS does not target caregiver stress directly, it does target child outcomes, which may impact caregiver wellbeing and stress.
- COMPASS may therefore help support and empower caregivers with their abilities to problem solve or cope with their child-specific stressors, impacting their parent-specific and overall stress.
- Future directions:
  - Current data are being collected. Replications of these findings are necessary for further conclusions.
  - Future analyses will investigate whether parent involvement in the coaching sessions mediated the reported stress levels, since parent participation was mandatory for the consultation, but not for the subsequent coaching sessions.

## References

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