

## First port of call: facing the parents of autism spectrum disorder

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**Abstract** (Full text available online at [www.tandfonline.com/ojfp](http://www.tandfonline.com/ojfp))

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**Background:** Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a debilitating condition for the child as well as the parents and family. Research in ASD is on the increase with many studies coming out of developed countries. To add to the knowledge base in ASD from a South African perspective, the experiences and coping strategies of parents of children with ASD were explored.

**Methods:** A qualitative phenomenological research design was adopted. The sample consisted of 11 parents of children with ASD. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim using pseudonyms for participants' names. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data into themes.

**Findings:** There were a number of themes that emerged about parents' experiences and coping strategies while raising a child with ASD. The theme "A road map to coping with ASD" was used in this article to map out guidelines for practitioners when dealing with parents of children with ASD.

**Conclusions:** As practitioners are often the "first port of call" within the Western context when a parent is concerned about their child's development, they can play a valuable role in the lives of parents who present with vulnerability, by providing timely psychosocial support. This article provides practitioners with guidelines to care for these parents.

**Keywords:** autism spectrum disorder, parents, practitioners