

INTRODUCTION: GETTING STARTED ON YOUR JOURNEY

This manual reflects ACT's commitment to bring together British Columbian parents and professionals to address the complexities of Autism Spectrum Disorder in our communities. Here you will find vital information for parents and the community professionals who support them, whether the issue is diagnosis, treatment, funding, education or transition to adulthood.

ASD is an invisible disability that profoundly affects a child's social and communication skills, but it impacts each child differently. No one resource will match or map every child's changing needs as they reach adulthood. This manual is intended as an anchor for B.C. parents, a reference that can be revisited as they navigate the sometimes turbulent waters of parenting a child with ASD.

It is important that families have access to this information because in British Columbia parents play a significant role in running their child's intervention program. This responsibility is a challenge for many families, but it is one that they can meet with the support of informed communities. It is our intention that this manual also be a resource for community agencies and professionals to enable them to strengthen their supports for families. With this support, families can successfully meet the challenge of autism and experience the joy that our children can bring.

The message of this manual is positive, because never before has there been so much good news when it comes to autism treatment. For those just starting this journey, we encourage you to use this manual as a starting point for educating yourself about ASD. For those who are more experienced, we hope you will find useful resources and new perspectives. Children are impacted very differently by ASD, but no matter how a child has been affected, the value of having engaged parents, prepared to educate themselves about ASD, is an immeasurable advantage for a child. International research into autism treatment is full of examples of the positive impact of parent education and their active involvement in their child's treatment. We hope that this manual will help community professionals to support parents as they develop the special skills necessary to parent a child with ASD.

Key to the publication of this manual is the group of committed professionals who have contributed to it and those who provide direction to ACT through their role on ACT's Advisory Council and Board of Directors. As

ACT's Mission

The mission of ACT – Autism Community Training Society is to provide excellent information and training in accordance with international best practices. Our goal is to enable parents, professionals and para-professionals to support children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder to live productive, satisfying lives within their families and communities.

Know your Options!

“Over time, you will receive a lot of recommendations, and hear many points of view, about your child’s treatment and handling. Whether it’s about tolerating certain behaviors, special diets, or their education, you’re bound to hear contradictory information. Or you might be presented an option as the only right one, or the only one, period. The best way to handle this is to do lots of reading, both in books and on the Internet. You can also learn a lot by attending workshops and joining your local autism association where you can borrow videos and talk to other parents. The more you know, the more you will be able to find views and methods that work for you. All the professionals will tell you that you know your child best, but unless you learn about all the options, someone else will be choosing for your child. Get informed, and then do what feels right to you.”

Leslie Clark, Victoria, B.C.

you will see, many of our contributors are from our Advisory Council. These professionals have tremendous practical knowledge of ASD; they understand the pressures on our families because they work with them and have participated with many families in their journeys. This enables them to pair their professional knowledge with both compassion and insight to the needs of families with children with ASD.

Equally important to ACT’s work are the many parents throughout our province who have supported ACT since its inception in 2003. Parents committed to helping other parents as they walk this exhausting, frustrating but frequently uplifting journey remain ACT’s core strength. Throughout this manual, you will find the insights of families as they ponder their remarkable children and what they have learned about our communities.

This manual is an important component of the extensive information that ACT provides to families and those who support them. It will be a living document, with revisions to each section available free of charge on ACT’s website. It is envisioned that community organizations and parents will print the relevant sections of the manual for easy reference. We encourage those who are reading printed sections of the manual to check our website for more recent updates. For parents without the resources to print relevant sections, ACT will mail them out. It is our hope that in the future we will have the resources to be able to make printed versions of the manual available to institutions across British Columbia and to have it translated into the major languages spoken by B.C.’s immigrant communities.

ACT recognizes the significant financial support of B.C.’s Ministry for Children and Family Development for this project, in addition to the commitment of our contributors and ACT’s other generous donors. Without them it would have been impossible to undertake this initiative. However, responsibility for the content of this manual remains solely that of ACT—Autism Community Training Society. As an independent not-for-profit society, we remain committed to the children and parents we support.

ACT’s friendly and experienced staff is available to help by telephone, email and in person at our Burnaby office. At ACT we have other resources that we can offer to callers that go beyond what is available in this manual. We have staff members who speak Punjabi and Mandarin, in addition to English, and we have basic information on ASD available in additional languages. We also have many educational opportunities available in live events and on our website on video. We offer generous bursaries to enable everyone to benefit from these opportunities. Our contact information is ACT – Autism Community Training, 150 – 2250 Boundary Road, Burnaby, B.C., Canada, V5M 3Z3. Phone 604-205-5467 in Metro Vancouver, toll-free at 1-866-939-5188, or email info@actcommunity.ca.

To provide us with new information and/or corrections to include in manual updates, e-mail info@actcommunity.ca.