

WP2 ASDEU Training module proposal: Training modules on early detection, diagnosis and intervention

Background

The age of autism diagnosis in Europe is very disparate, which results in considerable differences depending on the country and region where ASD is assessed. In some areas of Europe, families have to go through a long, intricate and stressful process to get a diagnosis. Early detection and intervention have proven to be key factors to guarantee a better quality of life for individuals under the spectrum. Thus, there is a need for professionals and caregivers to be well-informed and trained in the needs and requirements of people with ASD.

Objectives

The training programme will be aimed at policy makers, therapists, and healthcare providers who care for children under the autism spectrum. These training modules will also be intended for professionals and paraprofessionals (a person trained to assist professionals, but do not themselves have a professional licence) working in early detection and intervention in Europe, as it will provide them with the necessary knowledge and tools to help them make conscientious, evidence-based decisions about efficient ways of implementing screening and intervention programmes. Furthermore, these programmes will provide professionals and caregivers alike with ASD-specific cost-effective detection and intervention strategies.

The training will provide frameworks and application, from theory to practice, giving participants the opportunity to explore their practice and how they need to tailor their support to meet the needs of children and adults with autism. Once there's good knowledge of the disorder and the different practices available, the programme will cover specialised topics, providing tools that can be applied in the working environment with people with ASD and their families, based on practice and empirical research (based upon observation and experience). However, the intention of these training modules is not just to cover the theoretical aspects of autism, but also to work on participants' awareness and empathy, and to encourage them to consider how to adapt their daily practice in order to meet the requirements of people with ASD. Therefore, these workshops will provide all of the attendees with printed and/or electronic material, such as handbooks, handouts, and video-audio support, which will be available in all the official languages of the 12 Member States.

Structure and recipients of training

The training modules will be divided into three sections depending on the profile and the relationship the attendees have with individuals with ASD. The proposed recipients are:

- Families
- Healthcare professionals
- Education professionals

The subject areas to be considered are the following: Early detection - detection of ASD warning symptoms and the correct use of different screening tools.

- Diagnosis - proper use of the different diagnostic assessments, coping strategies and available resources/ services.

- Early intervention – the most common programmes will be designed for children with ASD between 0 to 6 years of age. They will highlight effective strategies and techniques in the development and learning of social and communication behaviours, as well as in the reduction of stereotyped behaviours and restricted interests.

It is proposed to use On-line training as it offers flexible learning and accessibility i.e. regardless of their location, on any day, at any time and when is most convenient to the learner. The training can be undertaken anywhere in Europe, ensuring that participants will receive the same training and information regardless of their location.

Proposed formats of the training dependent on the participant's needs:

- **Information pills:** Small fragments of training that let the user learn specific content in which the levels of difficulty and specialisation will depend on the participant's skills, knowledge and experience.
- **Present or semi-present courses (on-site):** This could be aimed at families and individuals with ASD as well as caregivers and paraprofessionals.
- **Massive online open courses:** an online platform which will provide ASD background information and training topics, which may include but won't be limited to, new detection and intervention technologies, skills and services. This training has the potential to be aimed at the ASD population at large, professionals, paraprofessionals, caregivers and family members. These courses will try to integrate information available from universities and other countries, thus creating a network of knowledge that ensures integral and egalitarian education throughout Europe. This method would be cost and time-effective, and will be able to encompass a large audience.
- **Video conferencing:**
- **Performance models:** practical content of specific information i.e. theory into practice with an emphasis on short learning periods.
- **Workshops:** short presentations of theoretical ASD concepts. This type of approach could be aimed at the general population. It would offer a useful and practical method of disseminating ASD knowledge in a more relaxed and comfortable fashion.

Courses with theoretical content would be assessed by a short test after each module. Courses with practical content would be assessed by videoing participants, reviewing the content and then providing feedback.

Each of these profiles develops a specific type of service or care in the detection, diagnosis and intervention of people with ASD.

Certification

Two types of certification would be available for undertaking in this modular training: (1) an official certification (for training modules in specific programmes, skills and techniques) and (2) a participation certificate (for training modules that provide general ASD knowledge). The participant would choose the one most suitable to their needs.