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## Background

- Impaired social communication is the hallmark feature of ASD<sup>1</sup>.
- However, there is ambiguity in the construct of social communication<sup>2</sup>.
- Measures of social communication in ASD focus on deficits or symptoms<sup>3</sup>.
- Current state of the field does not provide understanding of what children with ASD can do in daily life<sup>4</sup>.

## Objective

- 3 Year CIHR funded study to develop a **STRENGTH BASED** Autism Classification of Functioning: Social Communication (ACSF:SC) Tool.
- First objective is to describe **social communication** in everyday functioning for preschool children with ASD (ages 3-5)
- Based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF)

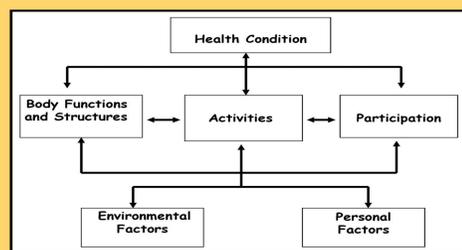


Figure. ICF Framework

## Results

3 rounds of focus groups (FG) with parents, educators, and clinicians meeting in own group

| Objective   | Results   | Quotes   |
|---|---|--|
| <b>FG Round 1</b><br>Describe everyday social communication of 3-5 year olds with ASD                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~400 pieces of text coded from 4 FGs, grouped into 14 categories</li> <li>Additional contextual factors; partner preference, environment adaptations.</li> </ul>   | <p><i>He will take your hand and drag you to wherever you, like he knows the cookies are in the cupboard up there, so he'll pull you into the kitchen and he'll point to the cookies up there...</i><br/><b>Parent (1P5)</b></p>   |
| <b>FG Round 2</b><br>Feedback on categories, their meaning and additional descriptions                    | <p>Identified <b>4 key characteristics</b> of social communication from 14 categories</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child's communicative intent</li> <li>Child's social skills and strategies</li> <li>Flexibility in an interaction</li> <li>Environment</li> </ol>  | <p><i>there is a strength in that child, who is actually reaching outside of himself to go and see if I can play that game, however inappropriate or appropriate that is, you know, that is still a communication.</i> <b>Educator (ED12)</b></p> <p><i>You really love something and you look at your Mom and share that you really love that...that kind of look to share enjoyment is a very social function.</i> <b>Clinician (CL7)</b></p>                    |
| <b>FG Round 3</b><br>To finalize social communication construct and identify range of usual performances. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New Operational definition of 'social communication'</li> <li>Redefined meaning of 'Flexibility' and reworded as 'Reciprocity'</li> <li>Merged categories (2) and (3)</li> <li>New categories within social communication construct</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child's communicative intent</li> <li>Childs social skills/strategies and reciprocity</li> </ol> | <p><i>Home, is very comfortable, so I think the comfort level is going to have a huge impact. You know, the place we go to more on a regular basis, he knows the place... have met the person before... they know the children, they feel comfortable there, Okay, I can do this.</i> <b>Parent (1P3)</b></p> <p><i>Gives you eye contact and then smiles when you smile, or sometimes you smile first and then they'll respond too.</i> <b>Educator (ED6)</b></p> |

Focus Group Participants met 3 times in 8 months



Parents n = 5



Educators n = 13



Clinicians n = 13 (5+8)

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## Discussion

- Preschool ASD construct of functioning & levels described: **communication intent and skills.**
- Environment is important but hard to define due to individualized nature of the disorder.
- Triangulation of concepts by 3 groups of experts to establish social communication construct.
- Limitations: Participants from Southern Ontario;  
Focus on children ages 3-5 - does not consider children diagnosed after age 6
- Next steps:** 5-level ACSF:SC undergoing reliability testing and then validity.

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