

MARIANNE'S ASSISTIVE CHILD-SAFE KNIFE (M.A.C.K.) FOR IMPROVING MEALTIME QUALITY FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN LITTLE ONE'S HOME THERAPY CENTER

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ABSTRACT

Mealtime Quality is a unique social event for families to allow them to come together and to share experiences and engage in meaningful conversations. Successful mealtime quality means that the family is able to exchange their thoughts, emotions and experiences on a shared table peacefully. Often times, with the current fast-paced lives families are currently living in, these experiences are overlooked and neglected thus, causing inadequate and unsustainable experiences. For a family having a child with autism spectrum disorder, it can be stressful and a more challenging experience for them due to their child's limited variations to food, challenging behaviors such as hitting, pushing and throwing away of utensils and strategies that parents used engage their child to eat and to received adequate amount of nutrients such as resorting to the use of gadgets and giving them toys throughout the time. At present, research shows limited tools for Pediatric Occupational Therapist to use and incorporate during meal preparation and mealtime and limited knowledge for parents to determine that importance of mealtime quality can gravely have an effect on to them and their children with ASD. This study aimed to determine whether the use of Marianne's Assistive Child-safe Knife (M.A.C.K.) can help improve the meal time quality for parents having a child with ASD. Specifically, this study (1) determined the problems commonly encountered by parents during mealtime, (2) determined the strategies used by parents overcome behavioral challenges during mealtime, (3) developed M.A.C.K. to help improve mealtime quality and lastly, (4) parents evaluated and provided an outstanding and relatively high impact and performance when using M.A.C.K. when using during meal preparation.

Thirty (30) parents having a child with ASD who are currently attending Occupational Therapy Services at Little One's Home Therapy Center were recruited for this descriptive-developmental study. The study involved surveys for the determined problems commonly encountered, strategies used by parents to overcome these behavioral challenges and an evaluation of the developed tool entitled Marianne's Assistive Child-safe Knife in improving mealtime quality for parents having a child with ASD. Overall, the parents with a child having ASD often ($M=2.84$) experience behavioral problems and being disruptive such as pushing/throwing away of food and utensils. To summarize, parents always ($M=3.33$) allow their child to move around and use gadgets during meals as a strategy to get them to eat. Lastly, the tool Marianne's Assistive Child-safe Knife was developed to help improved mealtime quality and parents strongly agree ($M=3.78$) that the tool can be recommended to other parents and its features can convinced you to incorporate it during meal preparation. Parents used the provided researcher made evaluation questionnaire and strongly agrees ($M=3.58$) to the overall indicators of the tool that it can be

used for a long period of time, materials are sustainable, tool is physically pleasing and can be easily recognized as a child-safe knife. The Marianne's Assistive Child-safe Knife will serve as a connection between the child and the food. It is also an alternative way for Pediatric Occupational Therapist to become innovative and accepting to use as an introductory tool to incorporate during play, meal preparation and for parents to include during mealtime to help manage children with A.S.D. at Little One's Home Therapy Center.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Mealtime, Quality, Meal Preparation