Family Process
Autism Spectrum Disorders

Mark Benson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor & Director of Graduate Studies
Department of Human Development
Area of research: Family Processes in Parent-Adolescent Relations

Family processes
- Theoretical perspective
  - Ecological systems
  - Attachment schema across the lifespan
  - Affective and cognitive mediation
- Parenting dimensions
  - Cohesion, support, closeness, warmth, acceptance
  - Hostility, inconsistency, harshness
  - Structure, organization
- Adolescent Development
  - Identity processes
  - Peer relations
  - Intimacy & Sexuality
Findings to date: Influences on Adolescent Development

- Broad influence of cohesion, support, warmth
- Hostility and aggression
- Relative unimportance of family structure
- Lack of importance of social location indicators
- Importance of adolescent intra-personal mediators
  - Anxiety
  - Self-regulation
- Functional attribution patterns
Ways research can contribute

- Family as enduring and pervasive influence in moderating the influence of ASD on outcomes
- Situating ASD within normative developmental processes
- Dimensions of parenting and key dimensions of development, particularly adolescent development
Current working relationships and resources

- Workforce Development – Commonwealth of Virginia
  Career coaches program 100+
  Students served: 11,000+
- Family Life Project - Family Observational Data
- National Educational Longitudinal Survey
- Adolescent Health Dataset
Collaborations and resources needed

- Project needing parenting or family focus
- ASD and typical developing sample
- Project needing conceptualization and measurement expertise in family, parenting, or adolescent development
- Personnel funding for equivalent percent time