

A Parent's Perspective: Looking through the lens of the SCERTS Model

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My fraternal twin sons were diagnosed with autism when they were 3 years and 2 months old. I feel that our boys have made wonderful progress over the years, but there came a time when I began to notice a large gap in the functional use of all the skills they were learning, and in their ability to transfer what they learned into everyday life. Even though this gap was becoming very apparent to me, I didn't know what to do about it.

In 2007, after attending a presentation at an autism conference with one of the founders of the SCERTS model, Dr. Barry Prizant, I realised how to fill the gap! I knew where I wanted and needed our son's educational and therapy programs to go. Wearing both of my 'hats'— the first being a university trained educator and the second being a parent— I knew I had found the treatment framework and methodology I had been searching for and trying to put into words for all of our current therapists: it was the SCERTS model. I immediately rushed to the conference bookstore and bought the comprehensive manuals. I then began helping my son's teams at school shift focus, and I started working with a service provider using the SCERTS model, Children's Autism Services of Edmonton.

What I love about the SCERTS model:

- It is extremely family-centred and focuses on the child's development.
- It provides a framework of detailed goals to work from, but it is very flexible.
- It focuses on enhancing our children's core underlying developmental abilities.
- It includes pretend play and addresses the domains of "Joint Attention and Symbol Use, Mutual Regulation and Self-Regulation, Interpersonal Supports and Learning Supports"¹
- It has excellent tools to help the team determine where the child is presently functioning and provides an organized progression for goals.

- It focuses on the development of functional skills that are individualized for children; skills that enhance our daily lives as a family and allow our children to increase their independence and self-esteem.
- It doesn't exclude other approaches and teaching strategies as long as they are in line with the SCERTS goals for our children.
- It doesn't focus solely on training skills in a linear, rigid manner. The model facilitates the generalization of skills.

Over the past three years, through our work with the qualified professionals both in the education system and via our FSCD-funded Specialised Services home program with Children's Autism Services of Edmonton, we have kept our SCERTS lens at the forefront of everything related to our sons' education and therapies. What a difference it has made to us and them! We have seen a significant increase in their ability to socially communicate and engage, regulate their arousal and communicate their emotions. Transactional supports have become an everyday part of every aspect of our lives. We have had many successful community outings, attended many community programs and events, and had two wonderful, very successful family vacations, both including airplane rides! We even used everything we have learned from SCERTS to help us get our sons through serious major medical procedures, successfully helping them understand what was going on. I have found the Learning Supports to be key in achieving success in whatever we are doing. There are a few things we don't leave home without: social stories, visual supports or schedules of some sort!

"The SCERTS® model is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to enhancing communication and social-emotional abilities of individuals with ASD and related disabilities. The model addresses three domains: Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactional Supports."²

*** For more information, check out www.scerts.com or www.childrensautism.ca*

1,2 Prizant, B. M., Wetherby, A. M., Rubin, E., Laurent, A., & Rydell, P. (2006). *The SCERTS Model: A Comprehensive Educational Approach for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Baltimore: Brookes.