

Embarking on the Autism Journey

The Occupational Therapy role in navigating the early phases of identification, diagnosis and service provision for ASD

ONLINE (over 3 x 3 hour sessions)
Expressions of Interest Sough
Semester 1, 2026

Life is a complex journey filled with all sorts of unique experiences, relationships, strengths and struggles. This is true for both individual's with neurotypical or neurodiverse development. However, we know that for many neurodiverse individuals and their families, the journey of observing their child's challenges or "differences", learning about autism and accessing/navigating service pathways for diagnostic assessment, diagnosis and related support services can be a challenging and stressful experience, that is highly influenced by personal, cultural, and environmental factors.

Occupational therapists have a unique role in supporting children and their families to gain an understanding of the individual's abilities and difficulties in participating in daily occupations, activities and routines, across environments. Information gathering using an occupational performance perspective can be highly effective in contributing to a diagnostic formulation, as well as supporting families to understand, accept and navigate the implications of a potential ASD diagnosis for their child.

This workshop will explore the Occupational Therapy role in the early phases of identification, diagnosis and service provision for ASD from the perspective of information gathering to support diagnostic assessment, as well as supporting families embarking on this journey.

Workshop Aims/objectives

This workshop will provide participants with:

- Where/how to starting the journey as a clinician
 - An overview of the ASD DSM-V diagnostic criteria and the National Guidelines for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism
 - An overview of the occupational therapy role in gathering diagnostic information/observations, including an understanding of developmental surveillance and screening, as well as autism specific screening.
 - An understanding of ASD from a participation and occupational performance perspective
- Opening the road map with families
 - Introducing the concept of ASD with families (ie having those difficult conversations)
 - Supporting a referral for a diagnosis
 - Unpacking a diagnosis/non-diagnosis with families – what it means for their child/family
- Navigating support services
 - Supporting families to create functional therapy goals, including autism specific goal setting tools
 - Supporting families to make informed decisions with regard to the best evidence-based intervention approaches for their child/family
 - Supporting the occupational roles of a parent as they embark on the journey of raising an autistic child

This workshop is suitable for occupational therapists.

Workshop Delivery

Participants will be expected to complete the workshop requirements via an integrated system of pre-reading material and online presentations. Workshop delivery will include:

- **Workshop Manuals** participants will be mailed a hard copy of the workshop manual which will include the presentation slides and links to relevant research and resources.
- **On line presentation** – using Zoom videoconferencing, participants will have the opportunity to link into three presentation sessions over 3 consecutive weeks (with 30 min break mid-session). Sessions will also include interactive components (ie group discussions, case studies and Q&A sessions) to assist with integrating participants newly acquired knowledge and skills.

Participants will need to have access to internet facilities and webcam to ensure that they are able to download and view workshop content, as well as actively participate in the on line group sessions. Participants will be emailed the link (including password) to the workshop presentation sessions approx. one week prior to the commencement of the first session.

Please note that due to confidentiality, copyright and privacy reasons, this workshop WILL NOT be recorded.

About the Presenter



Dr Charmaine Bernie PhD, BOccThy (Hons)

Charmaine is an Occupational Therapist, lecturer and researcher with 20 years' experience across community and hospital settings in Australia, and overseas. She has specialised in paediatric assessment and intervention.

Charmaine recently completed her PhD - *Understanding and Supporting Children and Families on the Pathway to Autism Assessment* with the University of Melbourne. She is a certified Occupational Performance Coaching and CO-OP trainer, and is currently a Senior Research Fellow with the Early Years Research Lab at Southern Cross University.

Expressions of Interest are now being sought for this workshop. Please email info@zimei.com.au to register your interest. Further workshop enquires can be directed to Zi Mei Events on info@zimei.com.au or (07) 3358 3689.

