Additional file 3

*Parents’ experiences prior to their child’s diagnostic ASD assessment*

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| Themes | Subthemes |
| Noticing worrisome behaviours in child | Behaviours challenging – not normal   * In comparison to other children * Parents Sib+: also in comparison to older sibling with ASD diagnosis   Questions on child-rearing practices (less in parents Sib+) |
|  | Concerns about parents’ responsibility toward behaviours   * By parents * By others |
| ‘Bidirectional’ involvement of professionals | Parents ask for professionals’ opinion |
|  | Professionals mention their concerns to parents |
| ASD mentioned and diagnostic ASD assessment arranged | Need of early diagnosis – but other people criticizing  Wish for ‘the best’ for child  Tension  Uncertainty about   * What ASD is * Match between ASD and child (gradually less doubts in parents Sib+) * Child’s behaviour part of personality vs. due to ASD   Awaiting conclusive answers from professionals |
| Ambiguous feelings about (consequences of) diagnosis | Anticipated negative implications (already experienced by parents Sib+)   * ASD ‘for life’ (but less ‘fixed’ than ID) * Stigmatising and stereotyping |
|  | Anticipated positive implications (already experienced by parents Sib+)   * Treatment-related: educational approach – entitlement to treatment services * Psycho-relational: understanding – recognition – reduced expectations – exculpation |
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