# Research Questions

What are the experiences of mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders?  
How do the experiences of mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders inform the Theory of Inner Strength in Women?

# Findings

## Thematic Model: Experiences of Olmsted County, MN Mothers of Children with ASD

The pattern which emerged through analysis of the interviews collected included three distinct phases:

- **In the Beginning** (pre-diagnostic and diagnostic periods)
  - Everyday ASD (phase during which the mother lives with her child or provides for her child’s day-to-day needs)
  - This distance contributes to the mother’s ability to generate inner strength in a way allows her to look at the phase of Everyday ASD in a retrospective manner.

## Implications for Nursing Practice and Suggestions for Research

The findings of this study can be used to further inform practice in a variety of practice settings including:

- Psychiatric mental health clinics
- Schools and public health nursing
- Pediatrics

Recommendations for further research include further testing for adaptation of the Inner Strength Questionnaire.

# Discussion

Mothers of children with ASD live challenging lives as they engage in the day-to-day activities of parenting. Tailoring nursing interventions for these mothers has potential to improve psychological well-being of mothers and to improve ability to care for the family. Distance from the day-to-day activities of parenting, based on the findings of this study, is necessary for mothers to grow in their inner strength and achieve a healthy new normal.

## Conceptual Model: Genesis of Inner Strength in Olmsted County, MN Mothers of Children with ASD

- **New Normal**
  - Inner Strength in Women
  - Adaptation to Everyday ASD
  - Growth in Inner Strength
  - Adaptation to Everyday ASD
  - Final Location

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Mothers of children with ASD are vital members of the care team for their children and families overall. Mother’s experiences include:

- Diagnosed child’s challenging behaviors
- Mother’s psychological distress
- Caregiver burden
- Difficulty obtaining correct diagnosis
- Coping and adaptation

The Theory of Inner Strength moves beyond resilience to describe the processes which occur as women move through challenging life events.

- Dimensions:
  - Engagement
  - Connectedness
  - Anguish and searching
  - Movement
  - Outcome: living a new normal.