

Efficacy of Group Social Skills Intervention for School-Aged Boys with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Introduction:

Difficulty with reciprocal social interaction is a common characteristic of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Because peer relationships are an integral part of the occupations of childhood, recent research has focused on both defining specific impairments and examining how intervention might increase these children's social skills and participation. Techniques focusing on social cognition, rather than discrete skills, may be particularly effective for children with high-functioning ASD.

Objectives:

1. Describe a social interaction group intervention based on Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for school-aged children with ASD
2. Determine the impact of the intervention on social skills
3. Discuss directions for occupational therapists providing intervention for children with ASD

Methods:

Fifteen 10 to 12 year old ($M=11.1$) boys with ASD and typical receptive language ($M=93.9$) and IQ ($M=109.5$) participated in the group intervention. Each group of 4 to 6 boys met weekly for fifteen 1.5 hour long sessions using a manualized curriculum based on principles of CBT. Outcome measures were collected pre and post intervention. Measures addressed social perception, peer interaction, social responsiveness, and general adaptive behaviour related to socialization.

Results:

Preliminary paired t-tests indicate that intervention resulted in a significant improvement in the boys' ability to notice nonverbal cues ($t= -2.83$; $p=.009$) and accurately infer emotions from those cues ($t= -4.30$; $p=.001$). Their scores also improved during a one-on-one interaction with a peer ($t= -15.24$; $p=.000$). Significant improvements were also found on the Vineland II socialization subscale Parent report ($n= 13$, $t= -2.24$, $p=.045$) and the parent-rated Social Responsiveness Scale ($t= 2.33$, $p=.036$).

Conclusion:

Results provide support for the efficacy of group-based CBT intervention aimed at improving the social interaction of children with ASD, both on child measures of social perception and peer interaction, and parent rated measures of social responsiveness and general socialization.

Contribution to practice/evidence base:

This research adds to the growing literature on providing CBT-based manualized social skills intervention and provides direction to occupational therapists working to enable greater social participation for children with ASD.