

# research snapshot

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## Supporting Parents of Children with Autism: Acceptance and Commitment Training

### What is this research about?

Parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) often experience high levels of stress. However, little attention has been given to their mental health needs. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) helps parents recognize the chronic nature of their caregiving challenges and the difficult feelings that come with them. ACT emphasizes:

- accepting unpleasant emotions;
- seeing thoughts and feelings for what they are;
- clarifying values and goals;
- and taking steps to move towards achieving those values and goals.

ACT has succeeded in helping individuals deal with a variety of mental health problems. These include anxiety and stress, pain, substance use, depression, and burnout. This is the first study that measured the effectiveness of ACT on the depression and distress of parents with children that have ASD.

### What did the researchers do?

The researchers carried out an ACT workshop for

### What you need to know:

Parents of children with ASD often experience high levels of stress. The study suggests that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy may help parents of children with ASD cope with their children's challenging behaviour and the difficult feelings that come with them. However, more research is needed in order to fully understand the effectiveness of this treatment.

20 parents of children with ASD, over the course of 2 days. The workshop consisted of 14 hours of instruction, group discussion and experiential exercises. Parents completed questionnaires that assessed their levels of depression and distress before and after the workshop.

### What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that parents' levels of distress and depression decreased significantly after the workshop. The parents also maintained these significant changes three months after the workshop.

### How can you use this research?

This research has implications for parents, clinicians and researchers. ACT may be an

effective treatment for parents of children with ASD displaying depressive symptoms, or experiencing high levels of distress. Treatments that are tailored to the mental health needs of parents with ASD is important. However, further research in this area is needed. Also, other factors that may improve the depression or distress of parents other than the workshop needs to be looked at further.

### About the Researchers

John T. Blackledge is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Morehead State University.

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### Citation

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### Keywords

Autism, Parental Stress, Acceptance, Defusion, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

This research summary was written by Maria Khan for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries, can be found on our [blog](#) and at [asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries](http://asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries)

### About the Chair

The Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research is dedicated to studying ways to improve the mental health and well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families in Canada.

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For more information, visit the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research website at [asdmentalhealth.ca](http://asdmentalhealth.ca)

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