

# research snapshot

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## Group CBT for Adults With AS and Anxiety or Depression

### What is this research about?

Individuals with Asperger Syndrome (AS) often experience mental health problems such as depression or anxiety. Very little research has examined the psychological treatment of depression or anxiety in adults with AS. Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) may be useful for treating depression and anxiety, and more research is needed to determine if CBT helps adults with a mental health disorder and an AS diagnosis. In this case series, researchers examined the benefits of a group CBT program for individuals with AS who were experiencing depression and/or anxiety.

### What did the researchers do?

Researchers found participants through AS websites and community agencies for people with an autism spectrum disorder or AS. Three individuals with AS participated in the intervention: Frank, a single man in his mid-50's; Shelli, a single woman in her late 30's; and Jake, a single man in his mid-50's. All three participants had a diagnosis of AS by a health professional and met criteria for depression and/or anxiety. The intervention consisted of 12 weekly 1-hour sessions using a CBT group program called Mind Over Mood. Each participant completed an anxiety and a depression questionnaire at the screening session, at each of the 12 interventions

### What you need to know:

Individuals with AS often experience mental health issues such as anxiety or depression. CBT can be successfully adapted for individuals with AS and a diagnosis of anxiety or depression. This study had a small sample size (3 subjects), so more research needs to be done on this topic to see if the same results can be repeated.

sessions, and at a follow-up session.

### What did the researchers find?

At the screening session, Frank met criteria for depression. Frank's depression symptoms did not show a steady decrease during the intervention; however, his anxiety symptoms did decrease during treatment. Shelli met criteria for a mood disorder and an anxiety disorder. Shelli's depression and anxiety symptoms decreased during the intervention. Jake met criteria for depression and an anxiety disorder. Jake's depression scores showed a sharp decrease until session 10. Session 10 was the anniversary of his mother's death and he experienced feelings of depression. Jake experienced some recovery after Session 10 but there were only two sessions left of the intervention. Jake's anxiety symptoms did not decrease during the intervention but the researchers noted that he showed fewer signs

of anxiety in his behaviour. This was a first step in determining if group CBT could be used with adults with AS.

### How can you use this research?

CBT can be successfully adapted for individuals with AS and a diagnosis of anxiety or depression. Some aspects of CBT are especially helpful for individuals with AS such as the repetition and skill building focus. A group CBT for individuals with AS provides support and an opportunity to meet others who share their challenges.

### About the Researcher

Dr. Jonathan Weiss is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at York University. He was awarded a Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research.

### Citation

Weiss, J. A., & Lunsky, Y. (2010). Group cognitive behaviour therapy for adults with Asperger Syndrome and anxiety or mood disorder: A case series. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 17(5), 438-446.

### Keywords

Cognitive behaviour therapy, Group therapy, Asperger Syndrome, Depression, Anxiety disorders

This research summary was written by Carly Albaum 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.

The Chair is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in partnership with Autism Speaks Canada, the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance, Health Canada, NeuroDevNet and the Sinneave Family Foundation. Additional funds from the Spectrum of Hope Autism Foundation and support from York University.

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