



## Benefits of Mindful Parenting in Children with Autism

### What is this research about?

Interactions between parents and children are important for the development of positive social behaviours in children with autism. Parents are often used as therapists for their own child, but parent training has typically focused on skills to help parents better manage their child's problem behaviours. The current study looked at whether parents could reduce problem behaviours in their child with autism by changing their own behaviours during interactions with them. The researchers were interested in finding out the impact of mindfulness training in mothers of children with autism. How would it affect a child's behaviour and a mother's satisfaction in parenting?

### What did the researchers do?

Three mothers of children with autism (ages 4-6 years) were taught the practice of mindfulness through a 12-week training course. Mindfulness involves having a calm and clear mind that is focused on the present moment without judgmental thoughts. A mindfulness practice phase followed immediately after the training and lasted for 52 weeks. The parents were asked to continue mindfulness exercises and use mindfulness skills during interactions with their child. The mothers were asked to rate changes in their child's behaviour, such as their: aggression, noncompliance, and self-injury. Mothers also rated their own satisfaction with their parenting skills and interactions with their children.

### What you need to know:

Parent-child interactions are important for the development of children's behaviours, particularly for parents of children with autism. Mindful parent training can reduce the aggressive, non-compliant, and self-injurious behaviours for children with autism. This may lead to better outcomes for satisfaction with parenting and parent-child interaction. Mindful parent training may be useful in reducing maladaptive behaviours for children. Thus, it is important to continue studying mindfulness in parents of children with autism.

### What did the researchers find?

The mothers reported that their child's aggression, noncompliance, and self-injury behaviours decreased from baseline after the mindfulness training. Further, the mothers reported that their children's maladaptive behaviours decreased following their mindful parenting practice. The mothers' satisfaction with their parenting and mother-child interaction increased from baseline to training, and again during the mindfulness practice. In addition, the mothers reported that they engaged in more mindful parenting during the mindful practice phase, compared to baseline and the training phase.

### How can you use this research?

This study showed that rates of maladaptive

behaviours in children with autism decreased during mindfulness parent training and practice. Mothers also reported increased satisfaction with parenting and interaction, and increased mindful parenting. Aggression, noncompliance, and self-injury in children with autism can cause stress for parents. It is important to find ways to help these families deal with problem behaviours. Mindfulness training for parents of children with autism is important, as improvements can be seen for both parents and children, and their interactions. Mindfulness training is a relatively new area of research. Thus, more research on mindful parenting could be a beneficial addition to existing parent training programs.

### About the Researcher

Nirbhay N. Singh was a professor of Psychiatry, Pediatrics, and Clinical Psychology at the Medical College of Virginia until his retirement in 2002. He is a Senior Scientist at ONE Research Institute, which is a non-profit company that focuses on services, training, research and consultation for people who are disabled. His main research interests include intellectual disabilities, mental health, and Alzheimer's disease.

### Citation

Singh, N. N., Lancioni, G. E., Winton, A. S. W., Fisher, B. C., Wahler, R. G., McAleavey, K., Singh, J., and Sabaawi, M. (2006). Mindful parenting decreases aggression, noncompliance, and self-injury in children with autism. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 14(3), 169-177.

### Keywords

*Mindful Parenting, Children, Behaviours*

This research summary was written by Stephanie Fung for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries,

can be found 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.

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

### Partners

