

# research snapshot

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## The Coping Cat Program Can Help Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders and Anxiety

### What is this research about?

Many children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) experience higher rates of anxiety than children without ASD. This anxiety can have wide reaching effects for children and can last into adulthood, but little is known about effective treatments for children with ASD and anxiety. Cognitive behaviour therapy is based on the idea that individuals can be assisted to develop strategies and/or a way to change their thinking patterns or behaviour. This article specifically discusses the Coping Cat program, a manualized CBT program for children and which has been used with typically developing children for many years, as a potentially helpful treatment for reducing symptoms of anxiety in children with ASD.

### What did the researchers do?

Many children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) experience higher rates of anxiety than children without ASD. This anxiety can have wide reaching effects for children and can last into adulthood, but little is known about effective treatments for children with ASD and anxiety. Cognitive behaviour therapy is based on the idea that individuals can be assisted to develop strategies and/or a way to change their thinking patterns or behaviour. This article specifically

### What you need to know:

A manualized individual cognitive behaviour therapy program may be an efficient and practical way to help children with ASD manage feelings of anxiety.

discusses the Coping Cat program, a manualized CBT program for children and which has been used with typically developing children for many years, as a potentially helpful treatment for reducing symptoms of anxiety in children with ASD.

### What did the researchers find?

After treatment, over half of the children in the treatment group no longer qualified for an anxiety disorder diagnosis. None of the children on the waitlist had this level of improvement. After 2 months, many of the children who participated in the program continued to be free from their previous anxiety disorder diagnosis.

### How can you use this research?

This study suggests that children with ASD and anxiety can benefit from cognitive behaviour therapy to treat anxiety. This study provides

evidence for the usefulness of the Coping Cat program. Future research is needed to expand on these findings, but this adds evidence that CBT may be a possible first line treatment for children with ASD and anxiety.

### About the Researchers

Rebecca H. McNally Keehn, Alan J. Lincoln, Milton Z. Brown and Denise A. Chavira are all researchers in ASD and Developmental Disabilities.

Rebecca H. McNally Keehn is a San Diego Clinical Psychology PhD student.

Dr. Alan J. Lincoln is a Professor of Clinical Psychology for Alliant International University and Director of the Center for Autism Research, Evaluation and Service.

### Citation

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### Keywords

Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Anxiety, Coping Cat Program

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