

# research snapshot

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## Anxiety Treatment Made Specifically for Children With Autism Works Better Than Other Treatment Programs

### What is this research about?

Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) frequently experience additional mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. Anxiety can have a significant impact on the well-being of both the child and their family. Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is the most evidence-based treatment for anxiety with typically developing children. CBT focuses on the ways we think and the behaviours we engage in when we are worried.

### What did the researchers do?

The researchers compared two groups of children using two different CBT anxiety treatment programs. Forming 2 groups of children (47 total) with ASD and anxiety, the researchers provided them with treatment for anxiety. One of the groups received treatment that was common in the wider community. The other group received the author's program, "Facing Your Fears". It was designed specifically to treat anxiety in children with ASD. Clinicians rated the anxiety of children before and after their treatment without knowing which one they had received. Parents were also interviewed about their child's anxiety before and after treatment.

### What you need to know:

Anxiety treatment programs that are specifically designed for children with ASD may be more effective in treating anxiety, rather than programs that are not tailored to their needs.

### What did the researchers find?

Researchers found that children who received the specialized program had greater treatment response. Thus, they experienced less anxiety after treatment than the children who received the common treatment.

### How can you use this research?

This research provides us with evidence that tailoring treatments to children with ASD can be effective. It helps us understand how treatments can be modified in the community to suit the needs of this population. This research may be relevant to clinicians, parents, and support workers.

### About the Researchers

Judy Reaven is a clinical psychologist and the Director of the Autism and Developmental

Disabilities Clinic of JFK Partners at the University of Colorado, Denver.

Audrey Blakeley-Smith, Ph.D. is an assistant professor in the departments of psychiatry and pediatrics at the University of Colorado, Denver. She is a licensed clinical psychologist specializing in developmental disabilities.

Kathy Culhane-Shelburne is a clinical neuropsychologist specializing in the assessment of individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders, focusing particularly on autism spectrum disorders.

Susan Hepburn is a clinical psychologist and an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Director of Research at JFK Partners.

### Citation

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### Keywords

Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Anxiety

This research summary was written by Michelle Viecili 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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