

research snapshot

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Reducing Stress Using Mindfulness for Parents of Adults with ASD Compared to Information Sessions

What is this research about?

Mindfulness techniques involve intentionally paying attention to inner state, “being present in the moment”, and not denying negative emotions that may be present. These may be helpful to alleviate the continual stress of caregivers during their child’s adult years while caregivers themselves are aging. Mindfulness can foster a focus on self-care, being less solution oriented, and stronger caregiver-child relationships. This would protect from caregivers from exhaustion and distress in light of complex issues in the adult years, and help them managing the changing relationship dynamics as the child ages. This study compared outcomes for caregivers of adult children who received a mindfulness intervention versus those who were in a support and education group.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers invited caregivers who were eligible and on a waitlist for community and social services. In the end, there were 26 caregivers in mindfulness group and 24 in information/support group that completed the study. Caregivers were an average age of 56.6, ranging from 37-81.

Each group had 7 sessions that were 2 hours long. The mindfulness group had mindfulness activities (e.g. 3 min breathing exercises, 20 min meditation), reflection time, exercises to take home.

What you need to know:

Caregivers, while on a waitlist to receive services for their child, who had a mindfulness intervention had reductions in distress more than those who attended information sessions about services and supports.

The information/support group had presentations on topics selected by the group. Presentation topics included person-directed planning, and accessing supports and resources around respite, clinical, housing, and crisis intervention. Researchers used questionnaires at the start, after intervention finished (8 weeks later) and 3 months later to measure outcomes in both groups.

What did the researcher find?

The researchers found that caregivers in the mindfulness group had less distress after the intervention that continued 3 months later. This was not observed in the parent information/support group. Both groups reported similar satisfaction with the sessions they had attended. At the 3 month follow up, 81% of those in the mindfulness group reported that they continued to use what they learned at least 3-4 times a week.

It is important to note that many who were interested to participate initially could not due to scheduling conflicts, language barriers, issues with transportation, child/caregiver health, or child care.

How can you use this research?

This study shows that the psychological component of mindfulness is more effective than information and support services to decrease stress for parents seeking and waiting for services for their adult child. Mindfulness is helpful in a context of ongoing frustration that are out of one's control. This modified intervention (shorter sessions that busy caregivers could attend) was still effective. Future interventions need to address the barriers that caregivers face in order to participate.

About the Researchers

Lunsky (PhD, C. Psych) is a Clinician-Scientist in Adult Neurodevelopmental Services at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Professor at the University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

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Autism, Mindfulness, Caregiver, Parenting, Stress, Distress, Intervention

This research summary was written by Dr. Jonathan Lai 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

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

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