

Problem-solving education reduces parental stress after child autism diagnosis

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A cognitive-behavioral intervention known as problem-solving education (PSE) may help reduce parental stress and depressive symptoms immediately after their child is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), according to a study by Emily Feinberg, CPNP, Sc.D., of Boston University School of Public Health, and colleagues.

Mothers of children with ASD consistently report high levels of parental stress, depressive symptoms, and social isolation, according to the study background. This psychological distress suggests a need for interventions that specifically address parental mental health after a child's diagnosis.

Researchers conducted a clinical trial in an autism clinic and six community-based early intervention programs with 122 mothers of young children (under 6 years) who recently received a diagnosis of ASD. Fifty-nine mothers received six sessions of PSE (structured problem-solving) and 63 mothers received usual care (behavioral methods). Parental stress and maternal depressive symptoms were then measured after three months of treatment.

According to study results, a lower proportion of PSE mothers, compared to usual care mothers, had [parental stress](#) (3.8 percent vs. 29.3 percent, respectively). PSE mothers were also less likely to report [depressive symptoms](#) than the other group, but the difference was not statistically significant.

"Future analyses will examine the effect of intervention over a longer

follow-up period and allow us to assess whether the intervention worked differently among subgroups of mothers, which is knowledge that could help us better target those most likely to benefit from the intervention," the authors conclude.

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