

Learning daily skills prepares kids with autism for adult life

May 15 2015, by Alan Mozes, Healthday Reporter



Those who can clean house and make meals more likely to be employed, study says.

(HealthDay)—Adults with autism have a better chance of finding and keeping a job if they can effectively perform basic daily tasks, such as bathing, brushing their teeth, cleaning and preparing meals, new research reveals.

Investigators found that having strong self-care skills appears to be a more important predictor of employment success than an individual's intellect or symptom severity.

"What we know about adult outcomes for people with [autism](#) is not very positive in terms of independent living and employment," said study lead author Laura Klinger, an associate professor in the department of

psychiatry and executive director of the TEACCH Autism Program at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

"But what is hopeful about this data," she added, "is that we found that among adults with autism who were diagnosed as children, the biggest predictor of gaining employment as an adult is having good independent daily self-care skills. Because while we can't change intellectual functioning—and it's very difficult to change symptom severity—these skills are something very practical that we can work on to try and improve the prospects of adults with autism."

Klinger and her colleagues are scheduled to discuss their findings this week at the International Meeting for Autism Research in Salt Lake City. Research presented at meetings is generally considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

To explore the roots of job success among people with autism, the study team looked at responses from surveys from 81 adults between the ages of 21 and 64. Their average age was 34 years.

All had been diagnosed with autism between 1970 and 1999. They were between 21 months old and 17 years old at the time of diagnosis. The average age at diagnosis was 6.5 years old, according to the researchers. Most were deemed to be on the moderate to severe end of the autism spectrum.

Nearly 45 percent of participants lived at home with their family. Interviews were conducted with their caregivers to gather information on each individual's employment status, quality of life, social isolation, mental health issues (such as anxiety, depression and mood), symptom severity, and language skills. The ability to perform basic self-care skills was also assessed.

Surveys revealed that only 43 percent were employed. More than one-third (36 percent) were socially isolated, meaning they had no contact with friends over the prior year, the researchers found.

After taking into account symptom severity and communication ability, the research team found that having good self-care skills was the most important independent predictor of adult job success.

Specifically, those with better self-care abilities were more likely to keep a job. They were also likelier to work more hours, and to rely on employment support services less often. What's more, self-care skills were found to be critical across both adulthood and childhood, with better adult job prospects for those who displayed better self-care abilities when they were children.

The researchers also noted that having a job contributes to a good quality of life.

Klinger said these findings highlight the importance of teaching those with autism the practical skills of day-to-day living.

"But I want to make clear that our research is not an indictment on parents having done something incorrectly," she added. "It's just that the focus is often on teaching social communication skills and speech therapy, rather than on practical, if mundane, skills.

"So our findings suggest the importance of working with families on just these kinds of home-based skills," Klinger said. "And maybe that means going outside a normal clinic setting to offer home-based intervention services where we can really help parents help their children."

Anne Roux, a research scientist with the Life Course Outcomes Research Program at the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute in Philadelphia,

said the study findings "closely parallel our own research, which consistently finds that even among adults with autism who have more significant impairments, some do hold jobs and continue their education and training."

But while "these individuals are capable of making valuable contributions to society," Roux argued that "we need to develop opportunities for people to step into as they age."

"Learning," she said, "is a lifelong activity. And too many of these adults don't have services and opportunities to help develop their adaptive [skills](#) after they leave high school."

More information: There's more on autism and adulthood at the [The Autism Society](#).

Copyright © 2015 [HealthDay](#). All rights reserved.

Citation: Learning daily skills prepares kids with autism for adult life (2015, May 15) retrieved 13 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-05-daily-skills-kids-autism-adult.html>

| |
|--|
| <p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p> |
|--|