

Research shows in-school occupational therapy creates positive education experiences for kids with autism

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Strong parent-school relationships are central to a child's learning, development, and well-being, yet when it comes to children with autism

(ASD), it seems positive relationships are few and far between say UniSA researchers.

In Australia, [an estimated 200,000 people are autistic](#), with [autism](#) the largest primary disability group served by the NDIS. Globally, about [one in 100 children](#) are autistic.

Lead researcher, UniSA's Dr. Kobie Boshoff, says support is urgently needed in schools to support the learning needs of children with autism. Occupational therapists are among the [support services](#) that are ideally placed to provide support to schools. The research is published in *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*.

"Effective parent-teacher relationships are vital for successful learning and well-being for children with ASD, but as this research shows, many parents are struggling to establish positive communications with schools," Dr. Boshoff says.

"Part of the problem is that schools do not have enough time or resources to appropriately support families with [autistic children](#), but another is a general limited understanding of what autism is in practice, and what children with ASD need to support their learning.

"The other issues relate to poor communication—many parents find it hard to connect with teachers, feel unheard, frustrated or stressed when talking with schools, or have been kept in the dark when it comes to their child's progress. Where [parents](#) report being heard, they are able to provide ideas and support the learning of their child in the classroom, allowing the teacher to get to know the child's needs better.

"When positive parent-school relationships are not established, schools cannot properly understand and support the unique learning needs of children with autism—and this leads to stress for all parties.

"Occupational therapists can help change this. By acting as a bridge between the parent and the school they can support parent advocacy, while facilitating school and staff understanding of the unique learning needs of each child with ASD.

"They work holistically within a child's environment, so whether it's working one-on-one with children, in groups or with teachers, they can design alternative ways to help children meet their learning goals.

"Positive parent-school relationships play a big part in creating successful outcomes for children with autism. Occupational Therapists can help deliver these and should be a consideration for the new Assistant Minister for Autism."

More information: Pamela Carrera et al, Understanding Parents' Experiences With Mainstream Schooling for Their Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Meta-Analysis, *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy* (2023). [DOI: 10.5014/ajot.2023.050025](https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2023.050025)

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