



Communicating Research in Clear Language

REDUCING DISTRESS IN MOTHERS OF CHILDREN WITH ASD AND OTHER NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

What is the research about?

It is well known that mothers of children with ASD and other neurodevelopmental disorders (NDs) are highly stressed, are likely to become ill, and have mental health problems. However, treatment and policy are directed only towards their children. They do not address the health of the mothers, on whom the children depend for the care they need to help them develop as well as they can.

What did the researchers do?

The authors recruited 243 mothers of children with neurodevelopmental disorders. They were randomly assigned to receive one of two evidence-based group therapies. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is an intervention that emphasizes breathing techniques, the use of meditation, and relaxation. Positive Adult Development (PAD) is a program that teaches ways to control feelings of guilt, worry, and pessimism by identifying and using personal strengths, and developing optimism. At the beginning of the trial most of the mothers had very high stress levels, and about half were clinically depressed, and/or had anxiety problems. The interventions involved using peer mentors to lead 1½ hr weekly sessions of each of the programs for 6 weeks. The mothers were assessed before, during, and about 6 months after treatment.

What did the researchers find?

Both MBSR and PAD led to reductions in stress, and less dysfunctional parent-child interactions, depression, and anxiety, but MBSR led to better sleep and life satisfaction, and greater reductions in depression and anxiety. Mothers of children with ASD had less improvement in measures of anxiety, but didn't differ in other areas. The benefits of these programs strengthened and persisted over time.

Take home message

Both of the treatment programs helped reduce stress, anxiety and depression in mothers of children with ASD and other NDs, and led to persistent improvements in maternal wellbeing. This study also showed that these programs could be successfully delivered by trained peer mentors.

Read about the curriculum for the Parent Stress Intervention Program
at <http://vueinnovations.com/psip>

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