

NEWS

# Community Newsletter: Predictive parenting, cognition and anxiety, autistic strengths

BY CHELSEY B. COOMBS

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Hello, and welcome to this week's Community Newsletter! I'm your host, **Chelsey B. Coombs**, *Spectrum's* engagement editor.

Our first tweet this week comes from **Tony Charman**, chair of clinical child psychology at King's College London in the United Kingdom, who tweeted about a new study that was "5 years cooking," published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*: "**A novel group parenting intervention for emotional and behavioral difficulties in young autistic children: Autism Spectrum Treatment and Resilience (ASTAR): A randomized controlled trial.**"

Apols for puffing our own work (I kind-of try not to...). 5 years cooking. Out now (OA): Predictive Parenting intervention to support behavioural and emotional outcomes in young **#autistic** children: <https://t.co/idNMhwXgtY>

— Tony Charman (@TonyASDorAFC) **May 7, 2021**

The pilot study aimed to determine whether 'predictive parenting,' which "provides strategies to manage both externalising behavioural problems and anxiety," performed better than a control intervention to lessen challenging traits in autistic children. Two groups of autistic children participated in 12 two-hour weekly sessions.

Parents in the predictive parenting group learned how to predict their autistic child's behavior more effectively, how to make their child's life more predictable and how to help their child cope with unpredictability. The intervention also promoted parental self-care and stress reduction.

Parents in the control group learned the “**Seven C's of ASD**,” which includes causes and comorbidities, caring for yourself and your family, and other information.

There was no difference between the interventions when it came to the rate of challenging child behaviors, such as aggression. However, “rates of child compliance, facilitative parenting and parent-defined target symptom change favoured Predictive Parenting,” the researchers wrote.

**Lorcan Kenny**, head of research at the U.K. autism research charity Autistica, tweeted that more pilot trials should “inform service design and ensure support is evidence based.”

Important new paper: predictive parenting is feasible and acceptable but effect size likely small and may not be cost effective

We need more pilot trials like this one and definitive trials to inform service design and ensure support is evidence based <https://t.co/WEk7cMB3ms>

— Lorcan Kenny (@LorcanKenny) **May 7, 2021**

**Michael Absoud**, senior clinical lecturer at King's College London, wrote that it was a “very nice intervention.”

Congrats Tony and team - v nice intervention

— Michael Absoud ???? (@MAbsoud) **May 7, 2021**

**Elizabeth Sheppard**, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Nottingham in the U.K., also praised the study, saying, “A key strategy is helping parents make life more predictable for their child and to help their child cope with unpredictable situations when they do arise.”

Love this. New parent-mediated intervention designed to help young autistic kids with anxiety and co-occurring difficulties. A key strategy is helping parents make life more predictable for their child and to help their child cope with unpredictable situations when they do arise <https://t.co/aondQTpw3l>

— Dr Lizzie Shephard (@lizzieshephard) **May 7, 2021**

Another study that generated a lot of buzz on Twitter this week was “**Autistic cognition: Charting routes to anxiety**” from the journal *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*.

Autistic Cognition: Charting Routes to Anxiety

by Eloise Stark, James Stacey, Will Mandy, Morten L. Kringelbach, & Francesca Happé [@HappeLab](#) [@OxPsychiatry](#) <https://t.co/9ulci7tyha> [pic.twitter.com/rbs2hXHpFd](https://pic.twitter.com/rbs2hXHpFd)

— Trends in Cognitive Sciences (@TrendsCognSci) **May 5, 2021**

The researchers presented previous studies’ evidence linking anxiety to common autism traits, such as differences in predictive processing, intolerance of uncertainty, and black-and-white thinking.

“We hope to start a dialogue surrounding how we can best address specific autistic cognitive differences that may lead to distress by developing appropriate models, measurements, and psychotherapeutic interventions,” they wrote.

**Lily FitzGibbon**, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Reading in the U.K. tweeted about her excitement at seeing work that examines the “links between predictive processing, affective responses to uncertainty, and anxiety.”

The **London ASD Clinical Excellence Network for Speech and Language Therapists** tweeted the study, saying it was a “fascinating new paper.”

**Steph Allan**, a research assistant at the University of Glasgow in the U.K., highlighted a passage from the paper about “exploring what gives autistic people joy” that particularly struck her.

"Harnessing neurodiversity and exploring what gives autistic people joy is vital if we are to improve well-being among the autistic population" [pic.twitter.com/Jv1sYVfwwO](https://pic.twitter.com/Jv1sYVfwwO)

— Steph Allan (@eolasinntinn) **May 4, 2021**

**Ann Memmott**, associate and “expert by experience” at the **National Development Team for Inclusion**, tweeted that the paper “takes some significant steps away from the negative narratives of the past, and starts to explore the positives around a need for certainty.”

I like a lot about the paper. It takes some significant steps away from the negative narratives of the past, and starts to explore the positives around a need for certainty. Anyone who gets into a car will appreciate seatbelts that work, brakes that function/

— Ann Memmott PGC???? (@AnnMemmott) **May 4, 2021**

This week, I also wanted to highlight *Spectrum's* new **special report on autistic people's strengths and beneficial special interests**. Although research has often focused on the challenges of autism, this report highlights the advantages that can come with the condition and the research into those strengths. The report includes archival content and two new Deep Dives, “**Finding strengths in autism**” and “**The benefits of special interests in autism**.”

That's it for this week's Community Newsletter from *Spectrum*! If you have any suggestions for interesting social posts you saw in the autism research sphere, feel free to send an email to me at [chelsey@spectrumnews.org](mailto:chelsey@spectrumnews.org). See you next week!