

Predictors and outcomes associated with therapeutic alliance in cognitive behaviour therapy for children with autism

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Many children with autism have difficulty managing their emotions and behaviour. Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) can help reduce these problems for *some* children with autism, but not everyone who takes part in therapy improves. It is important to understand what leads to treatment change so more children can benefit from therapy. Improvements can be partially explained by the relationship between therapist and client, called the therapeutic alliance. This relationship is a key factor of treatment success for both children and adults who take part in CBT. For children with autism, things like the way they manage their emotions (known as emotion regulation), and the severity of their emotional and behavioural challenges may impact the therapeutic alliance. The purpose of this study was to look at whether these challenges impact therapeutic alliance, and if therapeutic alliance was associated with treatment change. Findings from this study showed that children who had more emotional and behavioural challenges, and greater difficulty regulating their emotions prior to starting to therapy, had poorer therapeutic alliance when in therapy. This study also found that stronger therapeutic alliance was related to improvements in emotion regulation following therapy. Results from this study will help increase the benefits of mental health treatment for children with autism by educating therapists on how to adjust their approach to support the emotional and behavioural difficulties that children with autism can experience, and how the therapeutic alliance is an important component of the care that is provided.