

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Intensive Child-Centered Play Therapy for Children on the Autism Spectrum: A Pilot Study¹.

Participants included: “(a) had a diagnosis of ASD either by a medical professional or school psychologist, (b) were between 3 and 12 years of age, (c) scored on the Social Responsiveness Scale–2nd Edition (SRS-2; Constantino, 2012) in the moderate to severe impairment of functioning for ASD, and (d) were not participating in counseling services.”

Reason for the study: “comprehensive psychotherapy-based approaches for treating core autism symptoms and comorbid behaviors are scarce. A need thus exists to explore the efficacy of CCPT in improving both core ASD symptoms and externalizing behaviors, such as attention and aggression problems. In this study, we examined the behavioral effects of CCPT for children with ASD. We primarily aimed to (a) test the efficacy of CCPT using validated rating scales to measure core autism symptoms, attention problems, aggression problems, and externalizing problems; (b) examine the feasibility of implementing CCPT in school settings for children with ASD; and (c) implement an intense CCPT intervention with sessions occurring four times per week over a period of 6 weeks.”

Treatment:

- 30 Minute CCPT sessions four times weekly over six weeks.
- In-person parent-consultation sessions weekly for a total of six sessions were also conducted.

Results:

- A randomized controlled study was performed with a waitlist control group.
- Children in the play group experienced the following results (all statistically significant):
 - Increased social responsiveness with an effect size of .47;
 - Decreased attention problems with an effect size of .40;
 - Decreased aggressive behavior with an effect size of .20;
 - Decreased externalizing problems with an effect size of .34.
- Parents also reported:
 - improved eye contact,
 - decreased tantrums,
 - increased appropriate play behaviors,
 - increased relational play with parents.

Conclusion:

- This study with results of a previous similar study, indicate that CCPT may be an effective intervention to help improve the social behaviors of children with ASD.
- This study found that just 12 hours of CCPT and six parent-consultation sessions improved social behaviors for children with ASD.

For more information about Play Therapy or Child Centered Play Therapy, see “A4PT.org”

¹ Schottelkorb, A. A., Swan, K. L., Ogawa, Y. (2020). Intensive Child-Centered Play Therapy for Children on the Autism Spectrum: A Pilot Study. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 98(1), 63-73.