

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Effect of Parent Training vs Parent Education on Behavioral Problems in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder

Bearss, K., Johnson, C., Smith, T., Lecavalier, L., Swiezy, N., Aman, M., ... Scahill, L. (2015). Effect of parent training vs parent education on behavioral problems in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.. *JAMA*, 313(15), 1524-1533. doi:10.1001/jama.2015.3150

**SUMMARY:** Children with autism spectrum disorder often show disruptive and noncompliance behaviors and many parents may need support as they deal with these behaviors. A 24-week parent training program which provided specific strategies to manage disruptive behaviors was compared to a 24-week parent education program that only provided information about autism. Results revealed that the parent training program was more effective than parent education program in reducing problem behaviors.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- At week 24, the Aberrant Behavior Checklist-Irritability subscale declined 47% for the parent training group, and 32% for the parent education group.
- Similarly, the Home Situations Questionnaire declined 55% and 34% for the parent training and parent education groups, respectively.
- About two thirds (69%) of participants in the parent training group gave positive responses about the program, compared to 40% in the parent education group.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Educate military parents about symptoms of autism spectrum disorder to help them identify symptoms as early as possible
- Provide extra assistance to military children with autism spectrum disorder

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for military parents whose children were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder
- Design parent training and parent education curricula regarding autism spectrum disorder, and make them accessible to military families

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support parent training and parent education programs that can help military parents cope with children's problem behaviors
- Recommend trainings for professionals who work with military family regarding the early identification of autism spectrum disorder

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited from six sites (e.g., Emory University, University of Pittsburgh).
- Participants were randomly assigned to the parent training group (N = 89) or the parent education group (N = 91); the parent training program provided specific strategies to reduce problem behaviors, whereas the parent education program only provided information about autism but no intervention.
- Each participant was assessed at baseline, every four weeks throughout the program, and after treatment at weeks 36 and 48; the primary outcomes included two questionnaires that assessed children's disruptive behaviors.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 180 children (86% White, 88% male) with autism spectrum disorder and moderate to severe disruptive behaviors.
- The average age of the children was 4.7 years (age range = 3-7 years, SD = 1.1).
- Children in the parent training and parents education groups were similar in demographics at baseline except for maternal education level.

## LIMITATIONS

- The parents were not blinded to treatment assignment, therefore their perspectives may result in a bias in favor of parent training.
- All the treatment outcomes relied on ratings from one source (parents), so the results may be hard to generalize to the classroom.
- It is unclear what child and family characteristics may predict success with the parent training and parent education programs.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Measure children's disruptive and noncompliant behaviors from both parents and teachers to get a thorough understanding
- Identify parent and child characteristics that may predict success with the programs
- Examine the effects of the programs on other aspects of autistic problems, such as social interaction and emotion regulation

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>