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Anxiety in children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders

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Abstract

Anxiety and poor stress management are common concerns in clinical samples of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Anxiety may worsen during adolescence, as young people face an increasingly complex social milieu and often become more aware of their differences and interpersonal difficulties. This review summarizes the state of research on the prevalence, phenomenology, and treatment of anxiety in youth with autism and related conditions such as Asperger's Disorder. Using search words *autism*, *asperger(s)*, or *pervasive developmental disorder* and *anxiety* or *anxious* to find reports published between 1990 and 2008, this review identified 40 papers. The results of the review suggest that anxiety, whether measured categorically or dimensionally, is indeed common in children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders and may be a source of additional morbidity. The assessment of anxiety disorders in ASD should be conducted using multiple informants and modalities, as children with ASD often do not

display age-typical symptoms of anxiety. To date, relatively few controlled intervention studies using well-characterized samples have been conducted despite preliminary evidence for efficacy of select pharmacological and psychosocial approaches. Recommendations for future applied research are presented and clinical implications are explored.



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Keywords

Autism; Asperger's Disorder; Anxiety

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