

Guided self-help for depression in autistic adults: the ADEPT feasibility RCT

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Plain English summary

The ADEPT feasibility RCT

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Plain English summary

The National Institute for Health Research commissioned research to investigate whether or not NHS psychological treatment for depression could be adapted for autistic people. Psychological treatment for anxiety can be helpful for autistic people if it is adapted to meet their needs, but there has been less research into such treatment for depression. We developed a treatment called guided self-help, which comprised materials for nine individual sessions and a manual to help the therapist guides work alongside autistic people. Two autistic people helped us to improve the session materials we had developed. The guides attended 2 days of training on how to deliver guided self-help.

Seventy adults with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and depression agreed to take part in the study. They were randomly allocated to guided self-help or to treatment as usual. Treatment as usual means whatever treatment would usually be available.

We asked these adults to complete measures of depression, anxiety and other psychological symptoms, as well as their use of health and social care services, before treatment. We asked them to complete these measures again 10, 16 and 24 weeks later. We also invited them to take part in interviews about their experiences of the study.

People who had guided self-help attended the treatment to the end and said that they found it acceptable and helpful. They suggested ways to improve the treatment materials.

More people in the guided self-help group than in the treatment-as-usual group completed the 16- and 24-week follow-ups. Just over half of the people in the treatment-as-usual group did not attend the 16- and 24-week follow-ups. This would be a problem in a larger trial because we would not have enough information about the treatment-as-usual group to know if people in this group were doing better or worse than those in the guided self-help group.

The findings of this study suggest that a larger trial to find out if guided self-help is effective in treating depression in autism would be helpful.

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This report

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