

Behavioural interventions to treat anxiety in adults with autism and moderate to severe intellectual disabilities: the BEAMS-ID feasibility study

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

This study was about autistic adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities who have anxiety. There are good interventions for anxiety, but these need to change to meet the needs of autistic adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities. An example of such an intervention is called exposure therapy.

This study had two parts. In the first part, we worked with autistic adults, carers and family members, and professionals to adapt an existing anxiety intervention. We also completed a national survey to find out what interventions people are getting now. In the second part, the intervention was tested with 28 autistic adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities. We asked participants, carers and clinicians about their experiences of being part of the study and receiving the intervention.

We successfully changed an existing intervention together with autistic adults, carers and family members, and professionals. The intervention included relaxation training and exposure therapy. From our national survey, we found out that autistic people with moderate to severe learning disabilities who have problems with anxiety are most often offered psychological interventions (e.g. relaxation) or medication (e.g. sertraline) for anxiety. Exposure therapy was not offered very frequently. We tried out our intervention and autistic people with moderate to severe learning disabilities told us that they liked coming to the intervention and liked that their carer attended. Carers liked taking part in the research and were positive about the intervention. Therapists told us that the intervention was suitable and were positive about the training they received in delivering the intervention. Both carers and therapists suggested some changes to the intervention to help improve it in the future. We recommended that a larger study should now be completed.

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This article

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