



## Extended Research Article

# A group intervention for parents and carers to recognise and understand restricted and repetitive behaviour in autistic children: a multisite RCT

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## Plain language summary

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## Plain language summary

Autistic children often do the same behaviours repeatedly, have specific interests or like things to stay the same each time something happens. Often this does not cause difficulties and these behaviours and interests can be helpful and fun. However, sometimes they may cause harm to the child, put them at risk and/or restrict opportunities for learning or impact on their family life. Working with parents/carers of autistic children, we developed a parent/carer programme (Understanding Repetitive Behaviours) to help parents/carers to recognise and understand these behaviours and learn approaches to reduce their child's use of behaviours that have a functional impact. This study aimed to find out whether our parent programme was helpful and good value for money.

The 227 families who agreed to participate in the study were allocated by chance into two separate groups, either the Understanding Repetitive Behaviours group or another parent/carer group (Learning About Autism). Parents/carers provided us with lots of information about their child and themselves at the beginning of the study, and then again after 10, 24 and 52 weeks. This study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we had to make changes to both the delivery of parent programmes and how the research took place to comply with government guidelines. Unfortunately, 72 families did not complete the follow-up at 24 weeks. This meant that we were unable to find out whether or not the Understanding Repetitive Behaviours intervention was effective. We therefore cannot recommend either parent group intervention to help parents know how best to respond to their autistic child's impactful repetitive behaviours. Despite this, we were able to show that both Understanding Repetitive Behaviours and Learning About Autism can be delivered by trained NHS professionals and that both groups are safe for families. Also, some families who attended Understanding Repetitive Behaviours reported improvement in their child's functionally impactful repetitive behaviours at 24 weeks and parents/carers in both groups reported more confidence, greater well-being and less stress up to 1 year afterwards, indicating that both parent groups were beneficial and supportive for parents of autistic children.

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## This article

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