

## A Telehealth Delivered Intervention to Influence Adaptive Behavior among Children with Autism

Lauren M. Little, PhD, OTR/L, Rush University  
Anna Wallisch, PhD, OTR/L, University of Kansas  
Scott Tomchek, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, University of Louisville  
Winnie Dunn, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, University of Missouri

**Research Objective.** Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) experience adaptive behavior difficulties that persist throughout their lives. For young children with ASD, adaptive behavior difficulties contribute to parent stress and have been found to decrease effectiveness of interventions designed to target core features of the disorder. While parent-mediated interventions are efficacious in promoting long-term positive outcomes among children with ASD, there is a lack of approaches that directly teach parents to target discrete and specific adaptive behaviors. Tele-SCOPE (Telehealth Strategies for Collaborative Occupational Performance Engagement) is a parent training intervention that combines self-directed online educational modules with live video visits with an occupational therapist, and one intervention module focuses on toilet training. The purpose of this study was to investigate the acceptability and preliminary efficacy of the intervention on the toileting behavior among children with ASD ages 2-8 years as well as estimate the influence of the intervention on caregiver efficacy.

**Methods.** We recruited n=34 families of children with ASD ages 2-8 years old, and caregivers received 5 synchronous coaching sessions over 10 weeks along with asynchronous email exchanges every other week. Caregivers also had access to 9 podcasts and tip sheets about toilet training strategies. We used descriptive statistics to understand acceptability of the intervention and paired sample t-tests to examine changes in child behavior and parent efficacy.

**Results.** Results showed that n=25 caregivers completed all intervention procedures, n=5 caregivers did not complete all intervention sessions but completed follow up questionnaires, and n=4 caregivers dropped out of the study completely. Parents that completed the intervention reported high acceptability, mean=1.67 (1=Highly Agree to 6=Highly Disagree). Children showed significant improvements in toileting behavior ( $p<.05$ ), and parents showed a significant increase in parenting self-efficacy ( $p<.05$ ).

**Conclusion.** The current telehealth delivered intervention shows promise in improving the adaptive behavior among children with ASD. Given that young children with ASD are increasingly receiving telehealth delivered services during COVID-19, research is needed to understand the active ingredients of a coaching-based intervention for parents as well as investigations that focus on dosage (i.e., how many online sessions are necessary to achieve client goals) to inform large scale intervention programs.