

Reading List

Working in collaboration with high school teachers to better understand how to support the social emotional needs of autistic adolescents.

The Westmead Feelings Program is the first emotion focused evidence-based program designed for autistic children (both with and without an intellectual disability). The program aims to develop the emotional competence skills of the child, as well as the confidence and skills of parents and teachers who will be the main emotion coaches beyond the therapy room. The current Westmead Feelings Program has been demonstrated to be successful in both a clinical and a school-based setting for children, however high school settings can often present a range of different barriers which require additional consideration. Furthermore, while mental health concerns continue to rise in adolescents on the autism spectrum with co-occurring ID, there are no evidence-based interventions designed for this population.

In 2017 Anita Gardner was employed to work on an adolescent adaptation of the Westmead Feelings Program, one that is designed to meet the social-emotional needs of autistic adolescents with a mild ID. Conducting a literature review, it became evident that there was a dearth of research that aimed to understand the social emotional learning needs of autistic adolescents from the perspective of high school teachers. As context is crucial in a program's success, the team conducted its own research to explore the high school teacher perspective.

This year, the results of that study were published in the Australasian Journal of Special and Inclusive Education (Gardner, Wong & Ratcliffe, 2020). In the focus group, lead by Jodie Caruana and Kim Eisler and held at Kids Research, 8 experienced teachers from mainstream and special needs settings shared with us their experience and thoughts on some of the social emotional needs and barriers faced by autistic adolescents in their school setting. A thematic analysis identified 3 themes: (a) Social emotional learning needs of students on the autism spectrum, (b) teaching social emotional learning in high school settings, and (c) gaps in social emotional learning. The study also revealed suggestions for how a program such as the Westmead Feelings Program could be developed so that it best meets the needs of the teachers who might be implementing it. Outcomes from this study provided important insights into our understanding of the development of emotional competence in adolescents on the autism spectrum in special education and have practical implications for intervention models.

Gardner, A., Wong, M., & Ratcliffe, B. (2020) Social-Emotional Learning for Adolescents on the Autism Spectrum: High School Teachers' Perspectives. Australasian Journal of Special and Inclusive Education, p1-16. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/jsi.2020.13>

Zandt, F. and Barrett, S. (2020). Creative ways to help children manage anxiety: ideas and activities for working therapeutically with worried children and their families. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. www.childpsychologyworkshops.com.au

Websites

Practices that support parenting by parents with intellectual disability by the Australian Institute of Family Studies <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/2020/09/30/practices-support-parenting-parents-intellectual-disability>

Respite Care, Short Term Accommodation and the NDIS <https://planpartners.com.au/ndis-respite-care-sta>

Supporting yourself- Carers <https://headtohealth.gov.au/supporting-yourself/support-for/carers>