

Emotion processing in preschoolers with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Abstract

Children spend most of their days interacting with their social environment. Emotions form a large part of these interactions and vice versa social emotions become meaningful when interacting with others. Understanding the emotion processes that underlie successful social functioning is important, especially in children that experience difficulties in social-emotional functioning such as children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). These studies used a unique approach towards understanding the complex mechanisms that are involved in emotion processing, incorporating how emotions are perceived, experienced, regulated, and expressed.

Sensitive and direct measures of emotion processing such as eyetracking and physiology revealed for the first time on a neurobiological level that children with ASD have difficulties emotionally resonating with others, use less efficient strategies to regulate their emotions, and provided evidence for a possible discordance between the expression and experience of emotions. The preschool years also presented with a possible window of opportunity; children with ASD do feel emotions when it comes to their own experiences and the development of social attention towards others might be prone to improvements during the preschool years. These findings are important to parents and professional and enhance the understanding of emotion processing during these very early years of life.