

# Multi-Family Group for Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A Pilot Experience



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## Introduction

### Background

Families with children with ASD often have to face multiple challenges both physically and emotionally. Studies have shown high rates of divorce and lower overall family well-being in these families, highlighting the burden of having a child with an ASD [1,2]. On the other hand, from a strengths perspective, these families also possess coping abilities that help them sail through difficulties that are brought by the birth of a child with ASD.

This pilot study attempts to investigate the synergistic effects of bringing these families together to share with and learn from each other through self-help, peer-help and professional help, based on a multi-family group (MFG) approach [3].

### Objectives

To study the effects of the MFG on the family participants: Family adaptability & cohesion, parental stress and emotion wellness.

## Method

### Participants

Four families (6 parents and 4 adolescents with a confirmed diagnosis of ASD) were recruited through an open announcement of iREACH, a community-based social competence training centre serving adolescents and adults with ASD.

### Measurements

The following measures were completed pre- and post-group by participants.

**Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale IV [FACES-IV;4]**  
**Chinese Depression Anxiety Stress Scale 21 [Chinese DASS-21;5]**  
**Parental Stress Scale, Chinese version [6]**

An activity evaluation questionnaire was also completed post-group by participants.

### Session structure

Each session was conducted in accordance with a training manual (Multi-Family Group for Adolescents with ASD) developed by the iREACH research team. In this present group, the entire training was conducted in 4 weekly half-day sessions (15 contact hours).

## Results

The total attendance rate was 75%. From the activity evaluation questionnaire, 100% parents and adolescents agree that the group “can promote parent-child interaction”, “can improve parent-child relationship”, “can help me better understand my family’s interactive mode”, “can help me better understand the impact of my child’s growth on the family” and “can promote communication with other families”. For statistical analysis (N = 6), a decrease in Stress (mean 5.17 to 4.83) on DASS, a reduction in Parental Stress (mean 53.5 to 48), an increase in Family Cohesion (mean 50 to 53) and Flexibility (mean 50.17 to 53.67) on FACE-IV were observed, however, all these changes did not reach statistical significance ( $p > 0.05$ ) based on paired sample t-test.

## Discussion

The results of the evaluation questionnaire showed that the group successfully explore and develop the potential of the families and promote parents and children’s support to each other. Statistically, there were positive trend of changes without reaching significant level. Overall speaking, the results give an initial support to MFG for adolescents with ASD.

### Limitation

This was a pilot study with a small sample size. Thus further studies with an adequate sample are needed to confirm the effectiveness of MFG for families with an adolescent with ASD.

## References

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