



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are conducting research on fostering literacy skills and theory of mind (perspective-taking) in children and adolescents with high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger's syndrome (AS). The proposed intervention is expected to provide children with a strong foundation in attending to the background knowledge of their readers. Being aware of whom one is writing for and what one's reader may or may not know is a critical aspect in the development of writing and editing skills. In a recent pilot study with AS children, those who received the intervention were significantly more descriptive and accurate in their written instructions, compared to children who did not receive the intervention. Improvements were also found to be maintained well after the intervention and generalized to very different school-based tasks.

For the purpose of this research, we will be recruiting children, aged 7- to 12-years-old, who have received a formal diagnosis of HFA or AS. This research has received ethical approval from the University of Toronto and we would like to invite your child to participate.

What will your child be asked to do?

Children will be asked to participate individually in two full sessions (approximately 40 to 45 minutes each) and a short follow-up session (approximately 30 minutes) that will occur about 6 weeks following the initial two sessions. All sessions will be conducted in a small, quiet space in a testing room at the University of Toronto or in the child's home.

For the intervention, children will be asked to build a series of odd-shaped monster figures called "Gruffees" on a computer. Each child will then dictate instructions about how to build a Gruffee so that a second researcher in another room will be able to build the same Gruffee without seeing it. Following training, all children will receive a series of tasks that will assess how well they have learned to consider a reader's perspective when dictating instructions. Additional measures will assess children's language, visual-motor and theory of mind abilities.

Are there any risks associated with participating?

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. The children in the pilot study found the computer-based tasks very engaging, but if your child appears to be tired during the first two sessions the investigator will consider ending the session early and adding another "makeup" session the following day or week. Children's responses will always be identified by a randomly assigned number rather than by name. All children's data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and only people directly involved in this research will have access to this information.

If you are interested in having your child participate or have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact Michael Grossman or Professor Joan Peskin. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, you can contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

We sincerely appreciate your cooperation. Your assistance is invaluable to the ongoing study of children's learning and development!

Yours sincerely,

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