



Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This project is part of an international study to identify the COVID-19 related anxiety and concerns of autistic children, children with special needs and their parents during the pandemic (April to July). We were also interested in the coping strategies used by children.



Study participants

74

Australian parents of children with special needs including autistic children (87%)

COVID-19 related anxiety and concerns

For parents



68% Child's ability to cope with changes in their routine



61% Loss of institutional support (e.g. school, workplace) for child



61% Child has fewer occasions for social contact and interaction

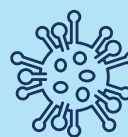
For children (parent reports)



38% Not being able to meet friends or peers



37% Loss of routine



29% COVID-19 itself

Anxiety levels of **74%** of parents and **46%** of children increased after the pandemic started.



There was a strong bi-directional relationship between children's and parent's COVID-19 related anxiety and concern. This means children's concerns predicted parent's concerns and vice versa.

Coping strategies used by children (parent reports)

Most effective



42% Established a daily routine



37% Spent time alone



34% Engaged in distracting activities

Least effective



66% Used aggression



66% Tried to change the way the child thinks about the situation



65% Suppressed negative emotions

Support needs

Parents identified the following support needs during the crisis:

- ✓ Social support for their child
- ✓ Access to support workers and services
- ✓ Affordable access to experienced psychologist
- ✓ Additional educational support
- ✓ Child friendly social stories about COVID-19
- ✓ Support managing sensory, behavioural and emotional issues
- ✓ Access to accurate and truthful information
- ✓ Financial support

Clinical implications

The findings of this study highlight the importance for mental health clinicians supporting families of autistic and special needs children to take into account the bi-directional relationship of anxiety.

This study will help build the evidence base on the needs of children with special needs including autistic children and their families during crises and help to improve support at times of great disruption.