

# Tackling Teenage Training: A training programme for adolescents with ASD in psychosexual development during puberty

## Information about the Tackling Teenage Research and Training

**Title of the study:** Tackling Teenage Training: A study on the effectiveness of a training programme on psychosexual development and intimacy for adolescents 12 to 18 years old with High Functioning Autism (HFA) or Asperger's Syndrome (AS).

**Background of the study:** Adolescence, a time of social, emotional and physical changes can be difficult for adolescents with HFA or AS. Also during puberty, there is an increasing need for social-emotional skills, which is often limitedly developed in adolescents with HFA or AS, while their physical development proceeds similar to other adolescents. This creates a gap between the physical and socio-emotional development and this gap can lead to several problems regarding the psychosexual development of adolescents with HFA or AS. From clinical practice it is known that adolescents with HFA or AS can encounter difficulties regarding psychosexual development. The limited literature that is available tells us that these adolescents have similar needs and wants to typically developing adolescents. However, they often lack the necessary skills, knowledge and insight to fulfill these needs and longings. Parents, as well as the adolescents themselves may worry a lot about the future. Given these issues, it is important to provide young people with good information, guidance and support. Currently no evidence-based training tailored to the needs of adolescents with HFA or AS is commonly available. Therefore, an individual training programme was developed in the Netherlands targeting the psychosexual development of adolescents with HFA or AS: "Tackling Teenage Training".

**Development of the training:** The Tackling Teenage Training has been developed in the Netherlands and is now offered to adolescents with HFA or AS within Yulius, an institution for mental health care in Rotterdam. Over 100 adolescents have already followed the training. Between 2010 and 2011 the training was further developed and professionalised, in cooperation with adolescents with HFA or AS and their parents. In the Netherlands the manual for the Tackling Teenage Training (IkPuber-training in Dutch) was published as a book in 2011. The training has expanded to other countries in Europe (Spain, Denmark and Greece) and we are very excited to have the opportunity to deliver this programme here in Ireland.

**Objective of the study:** The objective of our study is to explore the effectiveness of the training with young adolescents with HFA or AS in Ireland. The main goal of the training is to improve knowledge, skills and insight of adolescents with HFA or AS regarding their development and their relationships with others. Secondary goals are improving self-confidence and decreasing worries that both parents and adolescents may have in this area.

### **Research procedure:**

**Phase 1** – Involves determining suitability for participation in the training. It will provide information on the individual's knowledge of the topic already. During this phase we aim to measure items such as self-esteem, self-confidence, and IQ. Some of the measures used to gather this information will include; Social Responsiveness Scale; Social Communication Questionnaire; The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI); Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents; Child Behaviour Checklist and a knowledge test related to education on sexual development (e.g., Biology and Social Personal and Health

Education). This phase is important because it will determine if the adolescent requires such training and whether they have the pre-requisite skills to participate in the corresponding lessons.

**Phase 2** - Involves 1:1 or small group workshops aimed at teaching key topics (delivered as 18 weekly one hour lesson plans) to adolescents in an effective way. All sessions will be delivered by professionals who are in university or have completed university at post graduate (Psychology) level. In addition, professionals will have received direct training on delivery of the programme by our Dutch partners. Lessons are interactive allowing the adolescent to ask questions, read material and engage with the instructor on the topic covered. Homework is given between lessons that the adolescent completes with one of their parents- this takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

**Phase 3** –Following the training, measures similar to those prior to training will be taken to see if the training given was effective for the adolescents involved. In addition to this, a 6-month follow will be taken to see if the benefits are still in place.

### **Confidentiality:**

We assure you that all information measured will remain confidential and will not be shared with any other persons outside of this research. All information reported for this study will also remain anonymous protecting the identity of participants. Confidentiality will be limited, however, on the basis of any sensitive information that an adolescent may reveal during the training period. Revelations of any such sensitive information that may raise a concern for the safety and well-being of a young person in the study will limit the boundary of confidentiality. Because of the nature of the intervention, participants cannot be ensured that anything they disclose will remain confidential. If the participant revealed sensitive information with regard to any indication of abuse, neglect (as defined in the Trinity College Dublin Child Protection Policy) or sexuality issues that concerned the researcher, such information could not be ignored. The researcher will follow the guidelines on how to respond to suspected child abuse as per the Trinity College Dublin Child Protection Policy.

### **Right to Withdraw:**

Participants and their parents have a right to withdraw from participation in this study at any time if they wish to do so. Withdrawal will have no impact on any service provision that the adolescent is currently in receipt of or result in any other implications for the parent and their son/daughter. If your child is experiencing stress or if they feel slightly embarrassed about discussing some topics although the materials discussed are age appropriate and delivered in a respectful and clearly understandable way. The researchers have been especially selected and trained to manage the programme in a respectful, honest and adolescent friendly format. **Please contact us to discuss your participation with the programme.**

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