

School Connectedness: Why is it important and how can we promote it for adolescents with ASD?

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Adolescents with ASD are at increased risk of experiencing depression and other mental health problems but there is limited research on prevention and early intervention. Research with community samples suggests that school connectedness (the extent to which students feel valued, included and respected in the school) is a vital protective factor for adolescent mental health and well-being. However, the characteristics of ASD (including social and communication difficulties and difficulties with changes and transitions) impair access to this vital protective factor. This presentation describes school connectedness, research on the importance of school connectedness and its implication for adolescents with ASD. Innovative research is currently being conducted through the Autism Cooperative Research Centre. The research is aimed at developing and evaluating a multilayered intervention with adolescents, parents and schools to promote school connectedness for adolescents with ASD. We need to grasp the opportunity of the development of knowledge in this area to determine how best to promote school connectedness for improved mental health and wellbeing of adolescents with ASD.