

# Mindfulness and Acceptance: Strategies for Parents

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**Autism**ONTARIO  
*see the potential* *voir le potentiel*

# Why is this important?



# Mindfulness is not....

- relaxation
- mind control
- thinking happy thoughts
- a religious thing



# Acceptance is not...

- Accepting that your child has autism
- Accepting that this is how things will be
- A decision not to explore treatments to help your child



# What is mindfulness?

mind·ful·ness

'mīn(d)f(ə)lnəs/

*Noun*

1. the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something.
2. a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique.



# What is mindfulness?

- Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment.
- Mindfulness also involves acceptance, paying attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them—without believing, for instance, that there’s a “right” or “wrong” way to think or feel in a given moment.
- When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into what we’re sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future.



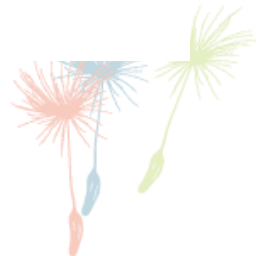
# What is acceptance?

ac·cept·ance

ək'septəns/

*Noun*

1. the action of consenting to receive or undertake something offered.
2. the action or process of being received as adequate or suitable, typically to be admitted into a group.



# What is acceptance?

1. an openness to experiencing thoughts and emotions as they are (Hayes)
2. an active process of orienting to private experience moment by moment. It is entering reality just as it is at any given moment by noticing and describing without judgment (Linehan)







# Mindfulness means putting the oxygen mask on yourself first: study

**'We have to take care of ourselves,' says Toronto mother of son, 25, with autism**

By Muriel Drasisma, CBC News | Posted: Apr 04, 2017 6:03 PM ET | Last Updated: Apr 05, 2017 12:00 PM ET



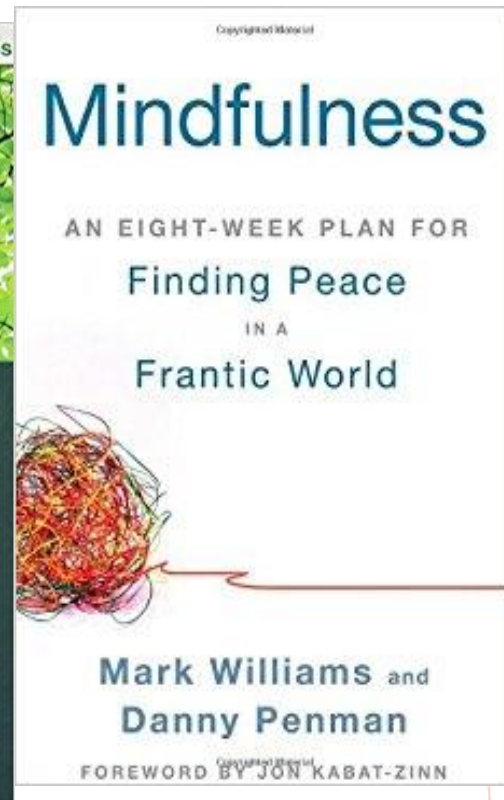
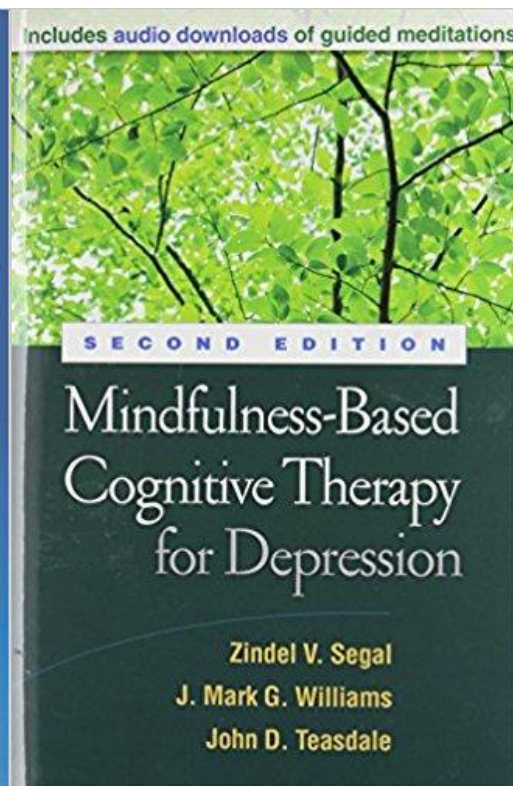
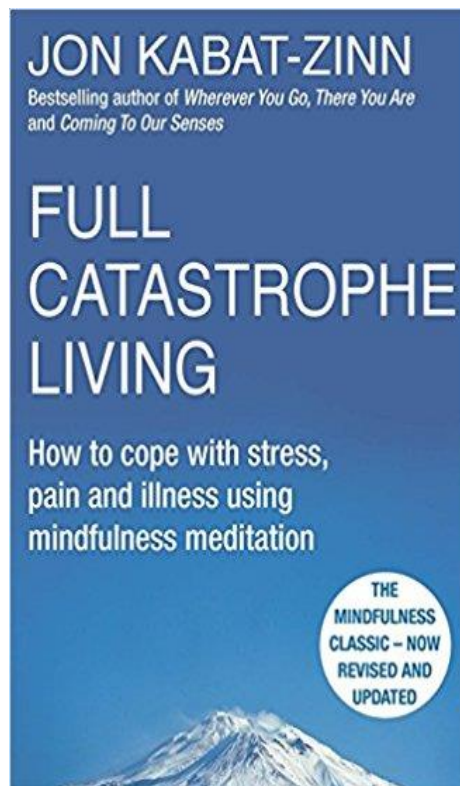
Lee Steel, mother of a 25-year-old son with autism, says mindfulness taught her to put the focus back on herself. (CBC)

Before Lee Steel took mindfulness training, she sometimes felt like a cup filled to the brim.

If one more thing happened — one extra drop — the Toronto mother of an adult son with autism said she felt she would spill over.



# Mindfulness based stress reduction & Mindfulness based cognitive therapy



## **Mindful Staff Can Reduce the Use of Physical Restraints When Providing Care to Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities**

[Nirbhay N. Singh](#), [Giulio E. Lancioni](#), [Alan S. W. Winton](#), [Ashvind N. Singh](#),  
[Angela D. Adkins](#), [Judy Singh](#)

First published: 12 January 2009 [Full publication history](#)

## **Caregiver Training in Mindfulness-Based Positive Behavior Supports (MBPBS): Effects on Caregivers and Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

[Nirbhay N. Singh](#),<sup>1,\*</sup> [Giulio E. Lancioni](#),<sup>2</sup> [Bryan T. Karazsia](#),<sup>3</sup> and [Rachel E. Myers](#)<sup>4</sup>





# Essential ingredients


- Experiential learning with homework
- Skills based
- Formal mindfulness practices
  - Sitting meditation, yoga, body scan, walking
- Informal practices
  - Daily activity, mindful breath



# Comparative Effects of Mindfulness and Support and Information Group Interventions for Parents of Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Other Developmental Disabilities

Authors

[Authors and affiliations](#)

Yona Lunsky , Richard P. Hastings, Jonathan A. Weiss, Anna M. Palucka, Sue Hutton, Karen White

Original Paper

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## Abstract

This study evaluated two community based interventions for parents of adults with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities. Parents in the mindfulness group reported significant reductions in psychological distress, while parents in the support and information group did not. Reduced levels of distress in the mindfulness group were maintained at 20 weeks follow-up. Mindfulness scores and mindful parenting scores and related constructs (e.g., self-compassion) did not differ between the two groups. Results suggest the psychological components of the mindfulness based group intervention were effective over and above the non-specific effects of group processes and informal support.

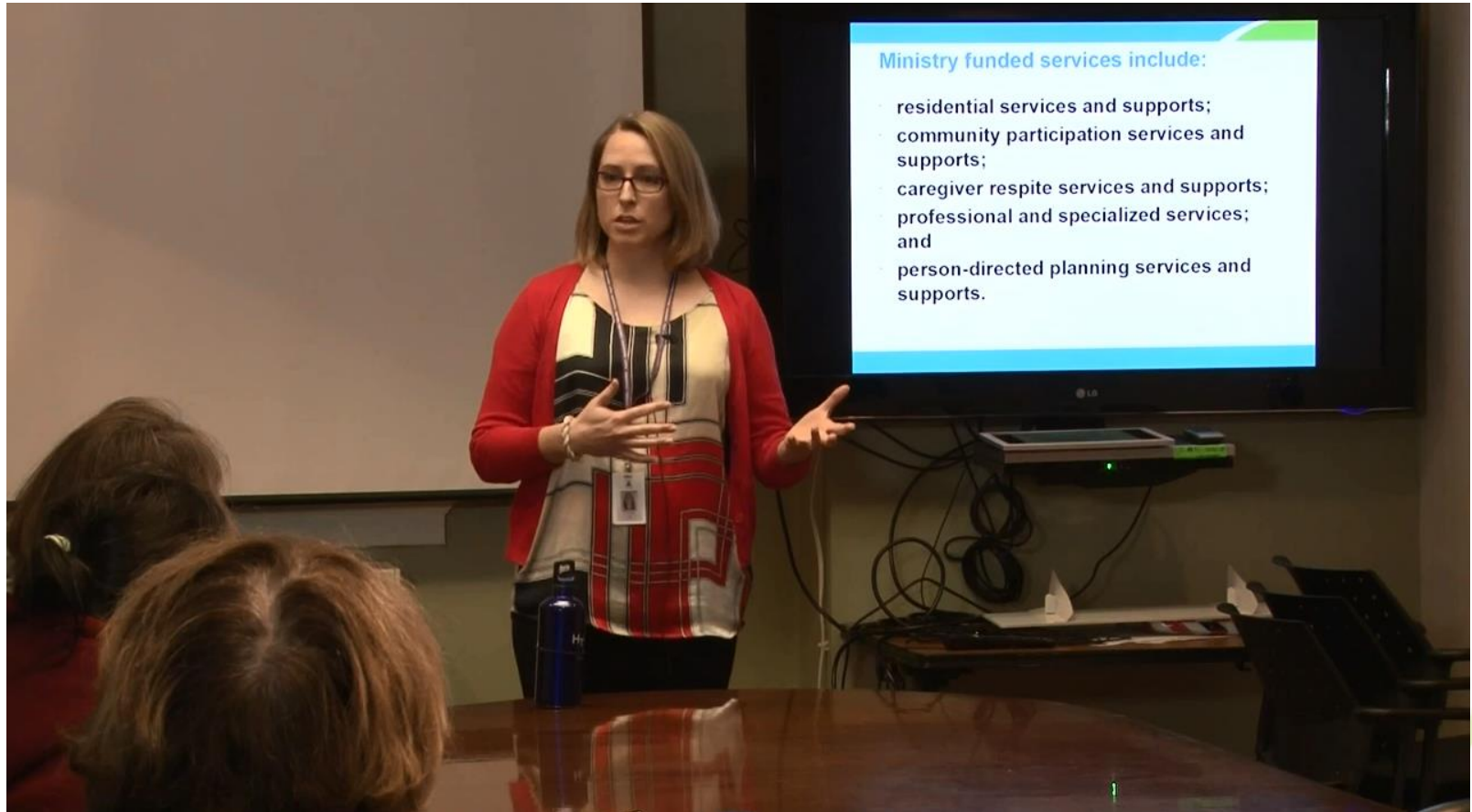


# What we did

- Parents of adults waiting for DSO services
- Parents randomly assigned to 1 of 2 groups
- 2 hour meetings for 6 weeks
- Childcare available
- 4 groups btwn fall 2013 and winter 2015



# Support and Information



## Ministry funded services include:

- residential services and supports;
- community participation services and supports;
- caregiver respite services and supports;
- professional and specialized services; and
- person-directed planning services and supports.

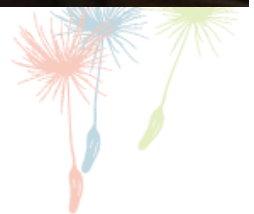


# Support and Information

- Getting to know Adult Developmental Disability Services
- Person Directed Planning
- Taking care of us: Caregiver issues and Respite services
- Specialized clinical services
- Connectability overview (website with resources); fee for service, advocacy and parent support groups
- Residential alternatives
- Crisis supports
- Family support workers and role of Adult Protective Service Workers Roles



# Mindfulness

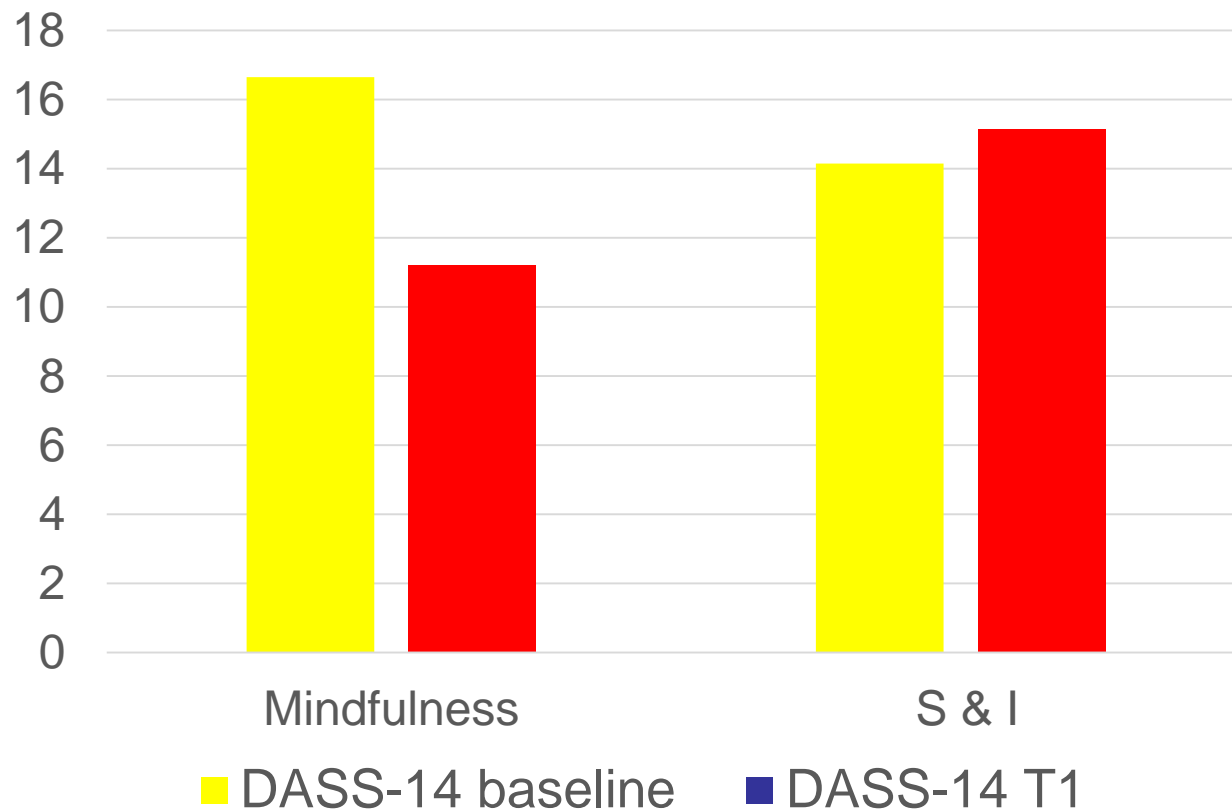


# Mindfulness

- Session 1     Getting off Automatic Pilot
- Session 2     Observing and Non-Judgmental Acceptance
- Session 3     Thoughts are not Facts
- Session 4     Taking Care of Myself
- Session 5     Turning Towards Difficulties
- Session 6     Continuing with Mindfulness



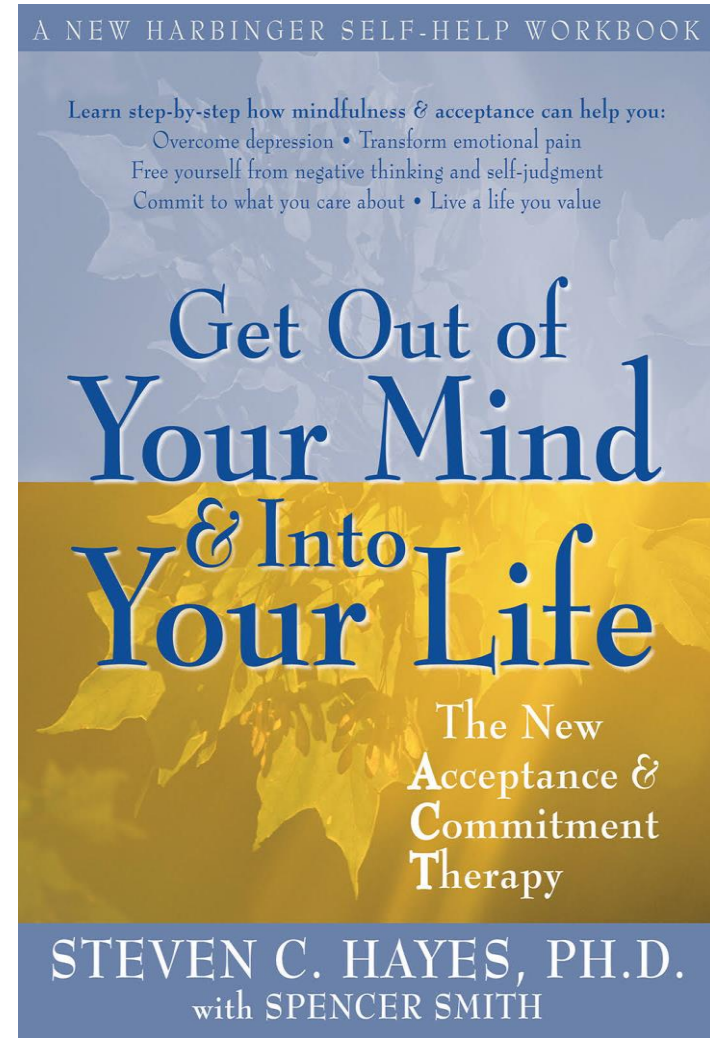
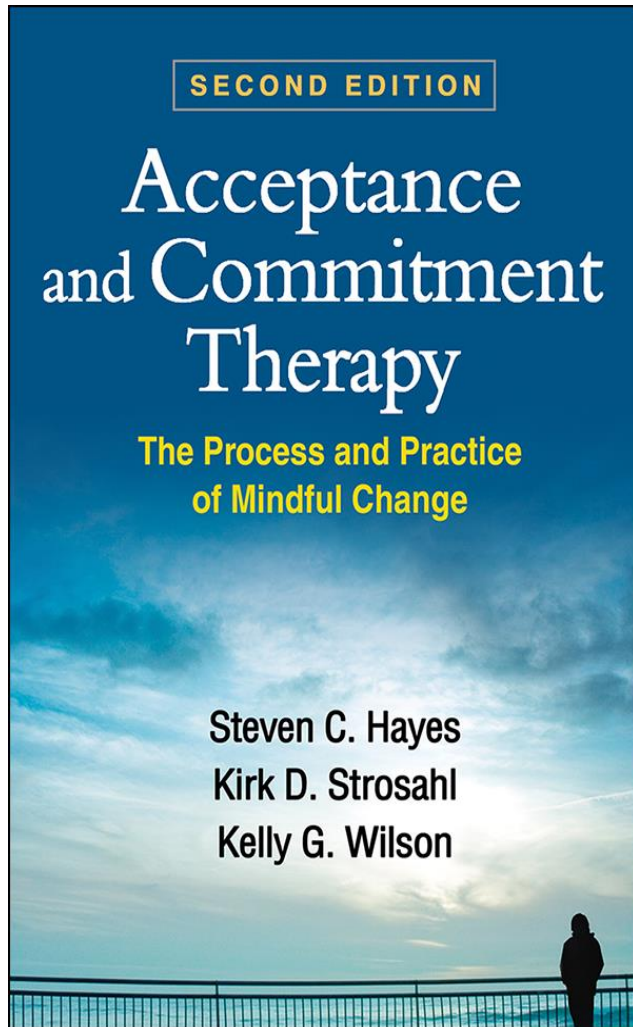
# What we found



ANCOVA T1,  
controlling  
baseline  
 $p=.001$  ( $d=.81$ ); effect  
maintains to T2



# Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)



# ACT for Parents

- 20 parents of children with ASD
- 2 day ACT workshops
- Decreased depressive symptoms
- Increased psychological acceptance
- Further improvement 3 months later

## Using Acceptance and Commitment Training in the Support of Parents of Children Diagnosed with Autism

John T. Blackledge  
Steven C. Hayes

**ABSTRACT.** Parents of autistic children face enormous challenges, but very little attention has been paid to their psychological needs. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) has previously been tested with parents as part of a comprehensive package, but not yet alone. The present study used a within-subject, repeated measures design to test the effects of a 2-day (14 hour) group ACT workshop on 20 normal parents/ guardians of children diagnosed with autism. Parents were assessed three weeks before the workshop, one week before, one week after, and three months after. No significant change occurred while waiting for treatment, but pre to post improvements were found on the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), and the Global Severity Index (GSI) of the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI). Significant pre to follow-up improvements were observed on the BDI-II, BSI, and the General Health Questionnaire-12. Processes measures of experiential avoidance and cognitive fusion also changed and there was some evidence that these changes mediated outcomes seen. Results suggest that ACT may have promise in helping parents better adjust to the difficulties in raising children diagnosed with autism. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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Available online at <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/CFBT>  
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doi:10.1300/J019v28n01\_01

# ACT and parents

- Opportunity for parents to learn skills together
- Combination of focus on mindfulness and working toward values
- Powerful when cannot immediately fix or change the situation



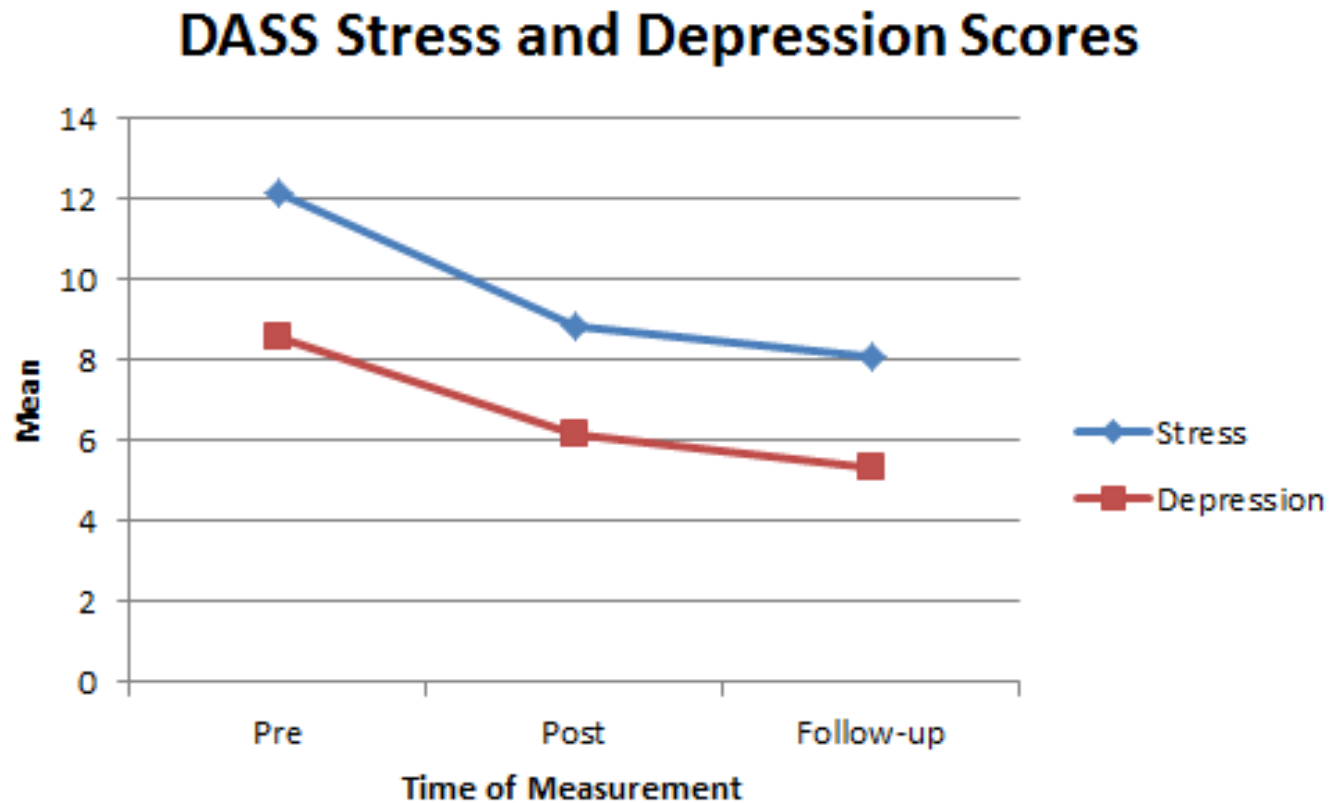
# What we did

- MOM TO MOM – mothers only
- Parent led
- Brief (1 evening, full day, refresher evening)
- Heterogenous group of moms
- 3 groups btwn summer 2015 & spring 2016



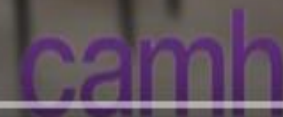
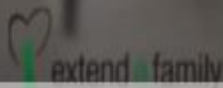


# What we found

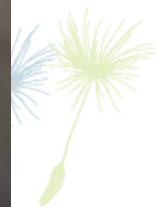
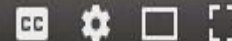




# Caring for the Caregiver Through ACT



0:03 / 3:26





*“This has given me a very beautiful outlet to try other things to cope with*



feature WORKING TOGETHER

## Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT):

IMPROVING THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF MOTHERS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH ASD

by Lee Steel



Photos.com

**OVER THE PAST YEAR**, I have had the privilege of co-facilitating a research project evaluating ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) for mothers of children and youth diagnosed with ASD. The research project entitled “Mom to Mom: Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Mothers of Children and Youth with ASD,” was a joint initiative of CAMH, Surrey Place Centre and Toronto Western Hospital, funded by a Women’s Xchange 15K Challenge grant, through Women’s College Hospital.

In January, 2014 I attended an ACT workshop called “Caring for the Caregiver.” The flyer proposed that, among other outcomes, I would have the opportunity to reflect on and reconnect with my own core values, and come up with ways to be with my children and live in a way consistent with my values. This appealed to me. I realized that I didn’t take the time to reflect on my values in parenting, I was often too busy reacting. I was feeling the deep tiredness of trying to be what I thought a “good” parent should be, but my belief had involved a lot of doing, not leaving much time for reflecting.

I don’t think I’m alone. Parents of children diagnosed with ASD often receive and give ourselves positive feedback for all our advocacy work, our ever-striving to meet the needs of our children, not leaving much time to just *be* – to celebrate, to cherish, to enjoy our children, just as they are. Fears of the future, demands of the day, seem like constant robbers of the moment. I knew it was time to turn some attention back to myself – to “care for the caregiver” – so I could come from a healthier place, a place that honoured both my children and myself.

I enjoyed the workshop and longed to learn more about ACT, so I was delighted when Dr. Yona Lunsky asked if I would be interested in joining Dr. Kenneth Fung and Kelly Bryce, a mom whom I partnered with at the initial workshop, to co-facilitate an ACT workshop series specifically for mothers of children and youth with ASD. This was such an exciting opportunity for me to learn first-hand

*I was feeling the deep tiredness of trying to be what I thought a “good” parent should be...*



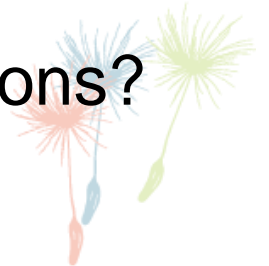
# What does it all mean?

- Importance of parent focused interventions
- Suggestion that clinical improvement may be linked to mindfulness and acceptance processes
- Families can learn from families
- May be beneficial to bringing groups of isolated individuals with similar roles together
- Have to co-design interventions so they are feasible for families



# What is next?

- Are mom groups better than parent groups?
- Do groups need to be specific to autism families?
- How important is it to have groups led by other parents?
- How successful are online versions of these groups?
- How do we teach this to entire families?
- Could we enhance existing interventions by weaving in mindfulness and acceptance at the start?
- Which parents do better with which interventions?



# But I don't have time....

It is at these moments where we don't have time to attend to ourselves when we need to take a moment to do just that!



# Where to go to learn more....

- [http://www.parentbooks.ca/Mindfulness\\_Parents%20Resources.html](http://www.parentbooks.ca/Mindfulness_Parents%20Resources.html)
- <http://www.mindfulfamilies.ca/>
- <http://franticworld.com/>
- <http://blog.stageslearning.com/blog/six-simple-mindfulness-practices-for-kids-with-autism>
- <http://theautismblog.seattlechildrens.org/category/mindful-mondays/>
- <http://asdmentalhealth.blog.yorku.ca/>

