

# **The therapeutic alliance in cognitive-behavioral therapy for school-aged children with autism and clinical anxiety**

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The quality of the relationship between a therapist and a client is sometimes referred to as the therapeutic alliance. Little is known about the alliance between therapists and children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who are receiving treatment. This study examined the therapeutic alliance in children with autism and anxiety who received cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in a clinical trial. A standard measure of therapeutic alliance was administered to 64 young people with autism and anxiety, ages 7 – 14 years, and also to their parents and therapists. The same measure was also administered to 36 young people, ages 5 -12 years, with clinical anxiety from the general clinical population. Both the child-therapist and parent-therapist alliances were more positive in the general population than among young people with autism. Both therapist and parent reports of a more positive alliance predicted lower anxiety in young people with autism; however, child reports did not. A strong therapeutic alliance appears to be associated with better outcomes of treatment in children with autism receiving CBT, and a thoughtful and developmentally sensitive approach is advisable to promote a positive alliance with young people with autism.