

**NEWS REPORT** | October 14, 2020

# MAXout Outpatient Autism Treatment Improves Children's Social-Cognitive Skills

High-functioning children with autism spectrum disorder (HFASD) who completed an 18-week intensive outpatient psychosocial treatment program for autism called MAXout had greater improvements, compared to a control group, in their social-cognitive skills (nonliteral language skills), according to a new study from researchers at the Institute for Autism Research at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York. The children, aged 7 to 12, who completed MAXout also had greater improvements on parent ratings of targeted social-communication skills, autism symptoms, broader social skills, and problem behaviors. The improvements were maintained at a follow-up test up to six weeks after the program ended.

The MAXout intervention is delivered in two 90-minute sessions per week that include a mix of direct instruction, modeling, role-play, feedback, and repeated practice. The sessions provide small-group skill instruction and therapeutic activities targeting social/social-communication skills, face-emotion recognition, nonliteral language skills, and interest expansion. The program targeted several core areas of functioning for children with HFASD.

These findings were reported in "RCT of a Comprehensive Outpatient Treatment for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder" by Christopher Lopata, Marcus L. Thomeer, Jonathan D. Rodgers, James P. Donnelly, and Adam J. Booth. The researchers conducted a randomized controlled trial with 88 children ages 7 to 12 years old. They were randomly assigned to the treatment or control (waitlist) condition. Those assigned to the treatment received two 90-minute sessions per week for 18 weeks. Each session included two 45-minute treatment cycles comprised of an intensive skill instruction group followed by a therapeutic activity. A behavioral system was implemented to increase skills development and reduce autism symptoms. Six parent training sessions were also offered during the program for parents to help their child maintain and generalize taught skills to home and community settings. The participants were tested immediately following treatment, and again at a follow-up four to six weeks later. The measures included parent ratings of the children's social/social-communication skills, autism symptoms, broad social skills, and behavior symptoms, child tests of social-cognitive skills (emotion recognition and nonliteral language), and behavioral observations. This research was supported by United States Department of Defense Grant (W81XWH-15-1-0195).

The full text of "RCT of a Comprehensive Outpatient Treatment for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder" was published July 22, 2020, by *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*. A free abstract is available online at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15374416.2020.1790380?af=R&journalCode=hcaps20> (accessed October 12, 2020).

OPEN MINDS last reported on a version of the intervention in "Clinical Trial Finds Summer Max Autism Treatment Program Effective For Children With High-Functioning Autism," which published on February 25, 2013. The article is available at <https://www.openminds.com/market-intelligence/news/022513idd2/>.

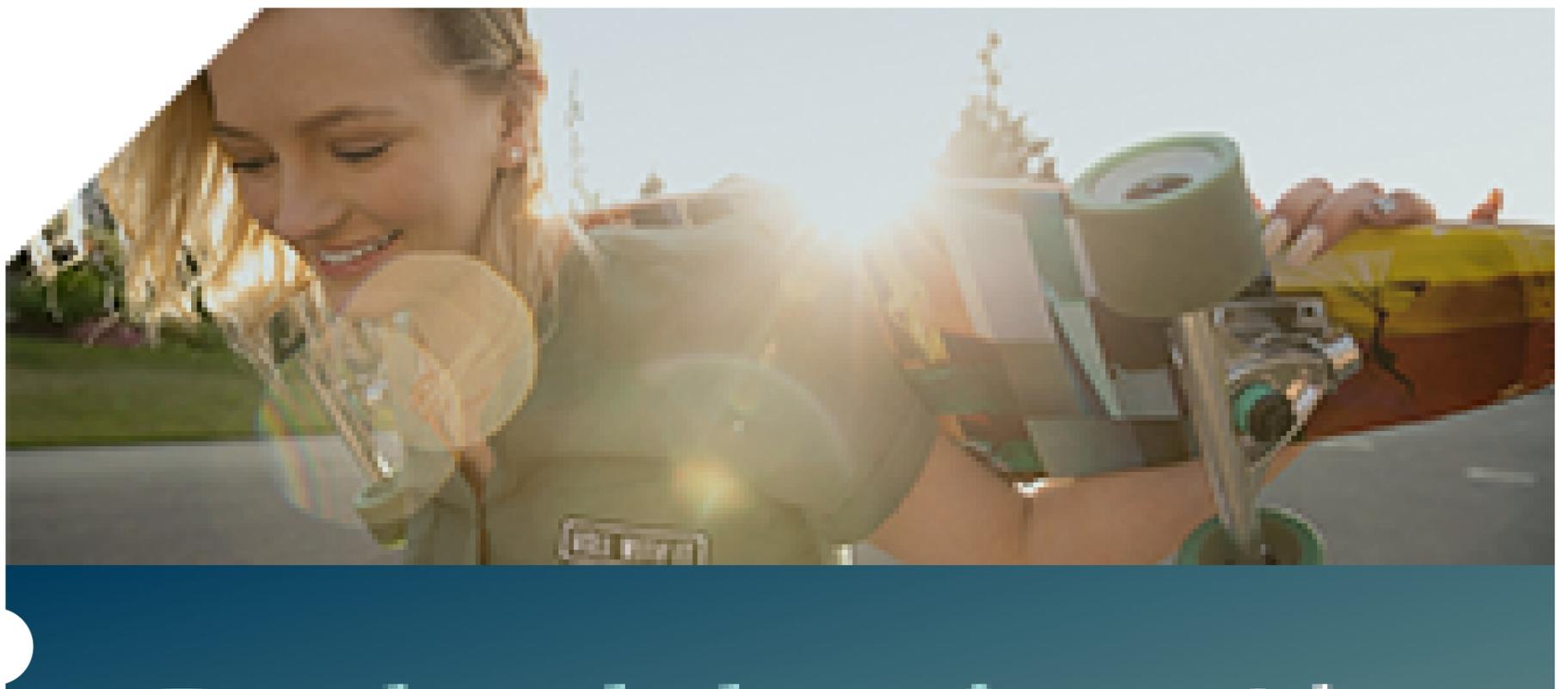
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