

## Sample Experimental Study

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The Effects of an Intervention Targeting Negative Behavior in Preschool Children With Autism ← *title of article*

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### Abstract

An intervention targeting negative behavior in preschool children with autism was tested in four preschools for children with developmental disabilities in a large city in the midwestern United States. Schools were randomly assigned to receive either the intervention or a control condition. Results revealed that children in the intervention schools demonstrated a significant decrease in both intensity and frequency of negative behaviors following the intervention; negative behaviors in children in the control condition did not change from baseline to posttest. The study demonstrates the effectiveness of an intervention designed to reduce negative behavior in preschool children with autism.

### Introduction

Interventions designed to correct negative behavior in children with autism are typically designed to be delivered on an individual basis (e.g., applied behavioral analysis). While many attest to the efficacy of interventions targeting individuals, it seems more time- and cost-efficient to design interventions that could be conducted with groups of children with autism. A review of the literature found several studies designed to target groups (Jenkins & Howell, 2019; Miller, 2015). The results of these studies were mixed. While Jenkins and Howell (2019) found some benefits, the Miller (2015) study failed to show a significant difference between children who received the intervention and children in the control group.

*previous research cited*

The purpose of the present study was to test the efficacy of an intervention designed to reduce the negative behavior of children with autism in a preschool setting. [*It was predicted that, compared with the control group, children who received the intervention would demonstrate a significant decrease in negative behavior following intervention.*]

Specific hypothesis

## Method

### Subjects

The subjects were 38 children with autism between the ages of 3 and 5 years old. There were 32 boys and 6 girls—31 Caucasian, 4 African American, 1 Asian, and 2 Hispanic.

### Procedure

Four schools were randomly assigned to receive either the intervention or no intervention; two schools were assigned to the experimental group and two schools were assigned to the control group. The experimental group included 22 children, and the control group included 16 children. The intervention consisted of group exercises in correcting negative behavior, conducted every day for three weeks. The control group received no exercises (“business-as-usual”).

Research assistants were trained to make observational assessments of negative behavior. Baseline observational measures of negative behavior were recorded prior to the intervention for the experimental group and on the same day for the control group. These same measures were recorded for the experimental group at a one-week post-intervention followup assessment and on the same day for the control group. Research assistants were blind to the children’s group assignments.

## Results

Statistically significant findings

Paired-sample t-tests revealed a significant difference between groups in both frequency ( $t = 2.935, p < .05$ ) and intensity ( $t = 1.556, p < .05$ ) of negative behavior on the posttest. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the two groups.

**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations in Frequency and Intensity of Negative Behavior at Time 2**

Scale	Pretest	Posttest
Frequency of Negative Behavior		
Experimental Group	39 (14)	27 (9.7)*
Control Group	35 (16)	36 (15)
Intensity of Negative Behavior		
Experimental Group	41 (12)	30 (11)*
Control Group	42 (7.8)	40 (8.6)
* $p < .05$ .		

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to test the efficacy of an intervention designed to reduce the negative behavior of children with autism in a group setting. It was predicted that, compared with the control group, children who received the intervention would demonstrate a significant decrease in negative behavior following intervention. Results of the study supported the hypothesis; compared with a control group, children significantly reduced both the frequency and intensity of negative behavior following intervention. *[These results indicate that interventions that target children with autism at the group level can be a very effective means of changing behavior. Future research is needed to determine if the effects of the intervention hold up over time.]*

Author's conclusions based on the findings of the study.