

*Research Briefs provide easy-to-read summaries of our original research publications.*

## Original Article

***A qualitative examination of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and adolescents with autism and their parents***

*Published in the Peer-reviewed Journal  
Research in Developmental Disabilities*

*The full article can be found here:*

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2022.104232>

## Key Terms

**Qualitative** studies examine non-numerical data to better understand participant experiences. For example, this study examined parent responses to open-ended survey questions.

**Grounded theory methodology** is a qualitative data analysis method that involves coding participants' responses to open-ended questions. Codes are organized into categories that are used to develop a conceptual model that describes participants' lived experiences.

**Peer-reviewed** journals include studies that have been read and critiqued by experts in the respective field to ensure they meet quality standards.

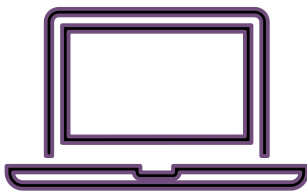
## Why was this study conducted?

- Unique resources and support required by many individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may make them and their families particularly vulnerable to emergency events like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This study was a part of a larger project that examined the experiences and needs of children with ASD and their families at multiple time points during the COVID-19 pandemic.

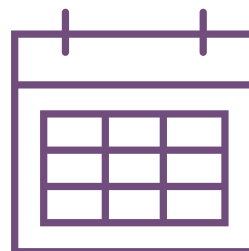
## What did the study involve?

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Parents of children with autism  
(ages 3 to 18 years)



Each parent responded to open ended questions about changes they observed in their child during the early months of the pandemic



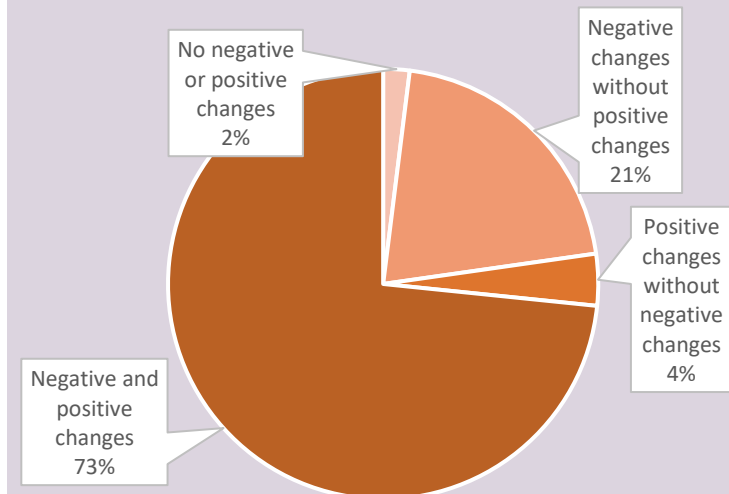
Data were collected at four time points over one year, beginning in July 2020.

This study reports the experiences of families over the first 4 to 5 months after initial stay-at home orders and school closures were issued in Arizona.

## What were the main study findings?

- Parents reported that public health measures associated with the pandemic led to new challenges for their child with ASD but also unexpected gains, like the development of daily living skills.
- Abrupt changes in functioning were reported by many parents, including potential skill regressions, increased challenging behaviors, and increased mood symptoms.
- Parents reported both positive and negative changes to family dynamics, which affected and were affected by the child with ASD.
- Several protective factors were identified, like continuity of educational and intervention supports, access to environmental resources, and child adaptability and perseverance.

### Parent-reported Behavioral Changes



Most parents reported both positive and negative behavioral changes in their child with ASD during the early months of the pandemic.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Most families experienced challenges that were perceived by parents to be more difficult than challenges faced by families of neurotypical children.

Families of children with ASD may benefit from increased supports to both recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and to prepare for future emergency events.

### Additional supports may include:

- Increased flexibility across educational and clinical services
- Parent/caregiver training
- Public supports for low-income and marginalized populations

### Original Article Citation

Stadheim, J., Johns, A., Mitchell, M., Smith, C. J., Braden, B. B., & Matthews, N. L. (2022). A qualitative examination of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and adolescents with autism and their parents. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*. doi: 10.1016/j.ridd.2022.104232

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