

A College Transition Program for Students on the Spectrum: Increasing College Self-Efficacy and Growth Mindset

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Abstract

Many adolescents on the autism spectrum entering college are less likely to graduate than their neurotypical peers. Prior research has suggested students on the spectrum may struggle with organization, socializing with peers, communication with faculty and staff, self-advocacy, and coping with emotions. The Introduction to College Life Program is a two-week online college transition workshop consisting of six classes designed to increase participants' college self-efficacy by developing social and communication skills related to various aspects of university life (e.g., time-management, utilizing academic support services, communicating with students and faculty, classroom/online etiquette, and self-care.) This research will investigate the effectiveness of the program in increasing participant college self-efficacy and their growth mindset, in addition to gathering feedback about their program experience. Participants will be approximately 10 high school students between the ages of 17 to 19 years old and who self-report an autism spectrum diagnosis. To measure changes to college self-efficacy and growth mindset, participants will complete the abbreviated College Self-Efficacy Scale (CSEI) and the Growth Mindset Scale before and after the program. After completing the workshop, the participants and program assistants will be interviewed for feedback about the program. Interviews will be transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes. We anticipate participants will report increased self-efficacy and growth mindset scores and will share feeling more prepared and less anxious about college. Finally, recommendations for changes to the program, limitations of the study, and future research will be discussed.

Introduction

- Many adolescents on the autism spectrum entering college are less likely to graduate than their neurotypical peers. Prior research has suggested students on the spectrum may struggle with organization, socializing with peers, communication with faculty and staff, self-advocacy, and coping with emotions (e.g., Jackson et al., 2017).
- Growth Mindset Scale that calculates the degree to which subjects believe they are or can do, if they put effort into it (Dweck, 1999).
- College Self-Efficacy Inventory (CSEI) asks subjects to rate their confidence regarding various aspects of college life (e.g., talking to university staff, making friends, managing time effectively) (Solberg, et al., 1993).
- The current study aims to investigate the effectiveness of a transition program that was created to assist high schoolers on the Autism Spectrum transition from high school to college. This program will emphasize the importance of a Growth Mindset and utilizing college supports by holding conversations that normalize the challenges in learning and the importance of utilizing resources for aid and support as needed.
- Research Questions:
 - Did participants' college self-efficacy and growth mindset increase after the completion of the program?
 - Which program sessions were found to be helpful? Unhelpful?

Method

- Participants will be recruited from local high schools, community colleges, and mental health practitioners who work with adolescents on the autism spectrum.
- The program will include 6 synchronous online sessions which will introduce students to the following aspects of college life:
 - time-management, communicating with faculty and college staff, socializing, self-advocacy and self-care.
- Before and after the program, participants will complete:
 - the College Self-Efficacy Inventory (Solberg, et al., 1993) and the Growth Mindset Scale (Dweck, 1999).
- After the program, participants will also participate in a brief interview led by the researchers about their experience in the program.



Results

- A repeated-measures ANOVA will be used to analyze changes to participant college self-efficacy and growth mindset.
- Qualitative data from the post-program semi-structured interview will be coded for themes.
- We anticipate participants will report increased self-efficacy and growth mindset scores and will share feeling more prepared and less anxious about college.
- Feedback from post-program interviews will also be utilized for further research and program design.

Conclusions

- This college transition program aims to increase participant college self-efficacy and growth mindset. Increasing one's self-efficacy and growth mindset may help students on the spectrum feel more confident in their ability to successfully complete various tasks necessary for college success, including accessing support resources as needed and recognizing this as part of the learning process.
- Following the completion of this college transition program, we will also highlight program components that participants found to be the most helpful as they prepare to transition from high school to college. These findings will be used for future program development.

References

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