

ICEEPSY

COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

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Transition to highschool : The experience of ASD students compared to their peers

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The transition from elementary school to junior high comprises routine and structural changes. It also involves exposures to novel environments, curricula and people. All such factors may act as stressors for the transitioning student. In addition to transitioning stressors, students must also cope with pubertal changes. Such a life stage, which is considered difficult for most teenagers (Lohaus, Elben, Ball, & Klein-Hessling, 2004), can be even more challenging for students with an ASD (Hannah & Topping, 2012) as this population is more socially isolated and is highly sensitive to any form of change (APA, 2003). Since teenagers with ASD tend to be more socially isolated, this transition period may prove difficult for them (Myles & Adreon, 2001).

Methods

Sample and procedure : The sample comprised of 24 students. Twelve 6th graders (2 girls and 10 boys) with ASD were selected to be part of group 1. These students were integrated in a regular classroom. Twelve other students, who did not present an ASD, were then matched to students from group 1 according to age and gender.

Measures: All students answered a homemade validated semi-structured interview by 3 experts. The participants were asked if they fear or not items; if they have positives anticipations and what could help them. They had to respond either yes or no. McNemar's tests were used : a non-parametric test has been designed to determine whether a change of binary state yields statistical significance between both groups ($p < 0,05$).

Results

There is no significant differences between the two groups. Students with ASD do not fear highschool more than their peers. They also do not have more positive anticipations or request more adaptations.

Results also show that student with ASD are more likely to be well prepared if they have the school map with them, if they have a friend to eat lunch with and if they know where their locker is and how to open it. Student without ASD displayed some of the same fears as ASD students; however, the fear levels were considerably lower. Students with ASD displayed fears of being bullied: They appeared to be more bullied than their peers in elementary school, which can explain why they anticipate being bullied. Students without ASD are more likely to enjoy their transition to highschool because of sports and activities available as well as all the new people they will encounter: " I look forward to going to highschool... it's a new environment". In contrast, students with ASD prefer to avoid change: " I don't want to grow up".

Conclusion

This study shows that students with ASD share a similar experience than that of their peers regarding the transition to junior high. It reveals that all students may need more strategies to cope with stress. Also, students with ASD integrated well in regular classrooms.

This study has certain limitations that should be addressed when interpreting the results. First, this case study comprised a small sample size. Second, the sample represents children from Montreal (QC) and can therefore not be generalized to the general ASD population.

References

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