

## Mother-Child Conversations about Emotions and Socio-Emotional Education in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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**Abstract :** Introduction: Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) tend to lack socio-emotional skills (e.g., emotional regulation and theory of mind). Eisenberg's theoretical model on emotion-related socialization behaviors suggests that mothers of children with ASD could play a central role in fostering the acquisition of socio-emotional skills by engaging in frequent educational conversations about emotions. Although, mothers' perceptions of their own emotional skills and their child's personality traits and social deficits could mitigate the benefit of their educative role. Objective: Our study aims to explore the association between mother-child conversations about emotions and the socio-emotional skills of their children when accounting for the moderating role of the mothers' perceptions. Forty-nine mothers completed five questionnaires about emotionally related conversations, self-openness to emotions, and perceptions of personality and socio-emotional skills of their children with ASD. Results: Regression analyses showed that frequent mother-child conversations about emotions predicted better emotional regulation and theory of mind skills in children with ASD ( $p < 0.01$ ). The children's theory of mind was moderated by mothers' perceptions of their own emotional openness ( $p < 0.05$ ) and their perceptions of their children's openness to experience ( $p < 0.01$ ) and conscientiousness ( $p < 0.05$ ). Conclusion: Mothers likely play an important role in the socio-emotional education of children with ASD. Further, mothers may be most helpful when they perceive that their interventions improve their child's behaviors. Our findings corroborate those of the Eisenberg model, which claims that mother-child conversations about emotions predict socio-emotional development skills in children with ASD. Our results also help clarify the moderating role of mothers' perceptions, which could mitigate their willingness to engage in educational conversations about emotions with their children. Therefore, in special needs' children education, school professionals could collaborate with mothers to increase the frequency of emotion-related conversations in ASD's students with emotion dysregulation or theory of mind problems.

**Keywords :** autism, parental socialization of emotion, emotional regulation, theory of mind

**Conference Title :** ICSNETDA 2023 : International Conference on Special Needs Education, Teaching and Different Approaches

**Conference Location :** Helsinki, Finland

**Conference Dates :** July 06-07, 2023