

Metacognition Mediates the Effect of Social Communication and Internalizing Behaviors on Self-Management of Daily Life Tasks for Diploma-Track Autistic Youth

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What was the focus of the study?




Autistic* youth who plan to graduate with a regular high school diploma often complete high school successfully but face difficulty with employment, college, and independent living (Roux et al., 2015). For these roles, youth need to be able to take on **responsibility for managing their daily life tasks**, like planning and following a schedule, managing finances, or grocery shopping. Prior research tells us that autistic youth often have challenges managing their daily life tasks and responsibilities (First et al., 2016), which may explain why the transition to adulthood is difficult for these youth even though they have good academic skills.

Who participated in the study?

46 autistic adolescents and their parents. All youth were in high school and preparing to graduate high school with a regular high school diploma.

What was the goal of the study?

We wanted to find out which factors might be important to be able to manage daily life tasks. We focused on three youth factors that we thought might play a significant role in **managing daily life tasks**:


-  The youth's **social communication skills**
-  The youth's **mental health**, specifically **internalizing behaviors**, such as how much youth show signs of withdrawal, anxiety, and depression.
-  The youth's **metacognitive skills**, such as how well they are able to plan, start, keep track of, organize, and adjust to things they are doing. Metacognitive skills are executive function skills, which are complex ways of thinking that influence how one behaves.


How did we measure youth characteristics?

Parents completed online survey measures which asked about their youth's social communication skills, metacognitive skills, and ability to manage daily tasks. Youth completed an online survey measure about their mental health. Scores from the assessments showed the youth's skills or level in that area.

*We decided to use identity-first language (e.g, "autistic youth") to honor the preferences of autistic adults, acknowledging that different stakeholders have different perspectives regarding terminology (Kenny et al., 2016).

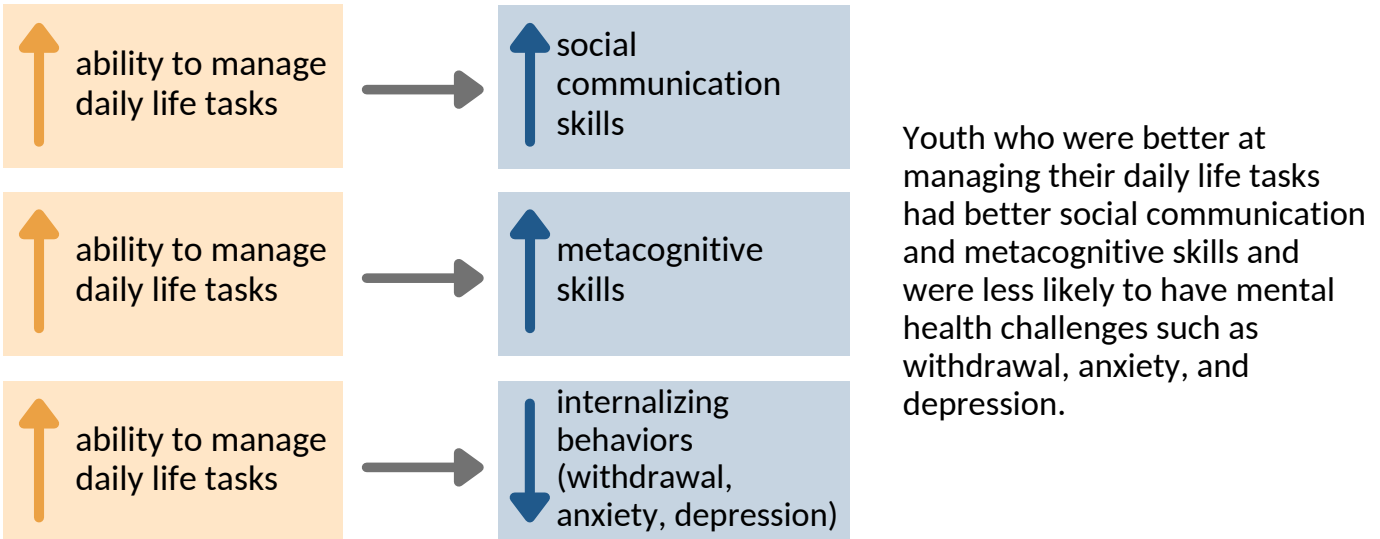
For more information: <http://bu.edu/autismconnections/>

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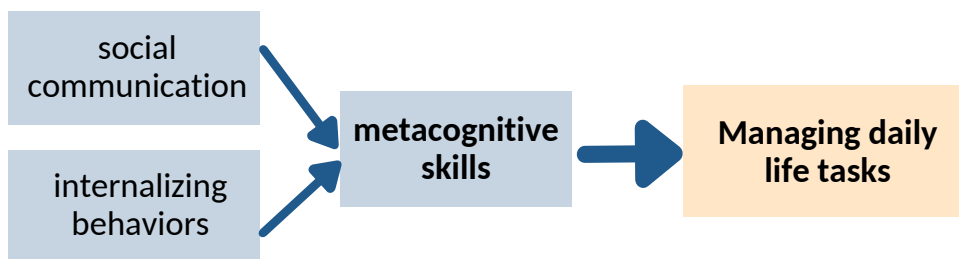
 <https://twitter.com/RoadStudy>

What did we find?

We found that older autistic adolescents had more difficulty managing their daily life, compared to the general population of adolescents. Younger autistic youth still had difficulty but were less delayed compared to their peers.



Then, we looked at which factor was most important to be able to manage daily life tasks. **We found that although social communication and internalizing behaviors were important, metacognitive skills were more important.** Metacognitive skills partly explained why social communication and internalizing behaviors predicted the ability to manage daily life tasks. That is, social communication skills were associated with metacognitive skills, which in turn explained why these youth had difficulty managing daily life tasks. We also observed the same with internalizing behaviors. Youth's internalizing behaviors were associated with metacognitive skills, which in turn partly predicted the ability to manage daily life tasks.



What does this mean?

These 3 factors have complex relationships with each other, and with the ability to manage daily life tasks. To best support autistic youth with managing daily life tasks, it is important to address these other factors as well, especially metacognitive skills.

Overall, the findings from this analysis show that parents and youth should advocate for individualized supports that take into account all the youth's areas of challenge and strength. For example, youth with stronger metacognitive skills like planning, initiation, and flexibility may be able to rely on those skills to compensate for challenges with social communication.

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