

## Abstract

Previous research suggests that children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) use fewer mental state terms than typically developing children. The reduced occurrence of mental state terms is one aspect of the deficit in theory of mind (ToM) that is seen in many individuals with ASD, affecting communication, socialization, and behavior. This descriptive study compares the use of mental state terms in children with ASD and typically developing children while engaged in play in a natural setting (in the home of the child with autism). Archived transcripts of videotaped interactions were reliably coded. The transcripts were taken from a larger intervention study examining the impact of peer play intervention using adult and peer mediation on children's communicative functions and time engaged. Eighteen children (nine age matched dyads) between the ages of four and seven years participated in this study. The transcripts of baseline sessions prior to intervention were coded for the use of belief, desire, emotion and sensation terms. It was hypothesized that children with ASD would use all categories of mental state terms less than their typically developing peers when engaged in play. Significant results were found only for belief terms, revealing that typically developing children used more belief terms when engaged in play than children with ASD. Implications for intervention and future research are provided.