

# Boxing as a Therapeutic Intervention for Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Preliminary Study

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**PURPOSE:** Boxing is a cardiovascular exercise that has been shown to benefit several clinical populations (Park et al., 2017). There is limited research on the effect of boxing on children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who may show various occupational deficits that interfere with their ability to participate in their environments (Case-Smith & Arbesman, 2008; Hobson et al., 2013). This study explored the effect of boxing on children with ASD in executive functioning, play, school, social participation, postural control, communication, and self-regulation.

**DESIGN:** Mixed-method survey using semi-structured interviews via Zoom.

**METHOD:** Three families were interviewed to explore parents' perceptions of the effect of boxing on their children. The survey incorporated items from existing assessment tools used with children with ASD, such as the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) rating scales and Gilliam Autism Rating Scale-Second Edition (GARS-2).

**RESULTS:** The three families had children with ASD who took boxing classes once a week for a year. All parents reported the following improvements in their children since starting the boxing program: following new activity instructions, making eye contact with the boxing instructor, responding to praise, and turn-taking. Parents also reported that their children were involved in after-school activities (n = 2), were more able to connect with friends (n=3), were comfortable engaging in social activities (n = 2), and were more comfortable playing with children on play dates and around other children (n = 3).

**CONCLUSION:** the preliminary results of this study can be helpful to occupational therapy practitioners (OT) working with children with ASD as it utilizes activity analysis to explore the aspects of boxing that are most beneficial for children with ASD. OT working with this population may consider recommending group boxing classes to their clients to improve engagement in occupations. Future larger studies are needed.

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