As professionals engaged in creating innovative ways of practicing research, who better to teach us than those with lived experience? Autistic people and their families want to engage with services and supports to promote their mental health and well-being, and to help manage stress. Such supports are limited, and those that are offered tend to be in-person, inaccessible, have long waitlists, and rarely include autistic individuals in their design and delivery.

To overcome these issues, we (clinicians, researchers and autistic adults) co-developed and designed two virtual-based mindfulness interventions for autistic people and their parents. To date, we have run 7 virtual mindfulness groups, 2 of which were for autistic adults and 2 were for parents and their son or daughter with autism.

From running these groups, we have learned there are several benefits to providing virtual Mindfulness groups to help autistic adults and their parents to manage stress and improve well-being.   For example, this delivery may  allow for better treatment delivery in comparison to conventional in-person formats, can  avoid the  schedule-related stresses that come with in-person participating (e.g., requiring childcare, commuting), and can allow those whose anxiety prevents them from leaving their home to benefit from treatment.

We have also learned that including autistic advisors in the design and delivery of the interventions is essential. Given that autism is a social communication difference and a unique way of learning, both the language used in teaching the curriculum and the approach of the facilitator in delivering the intervention has to be tailored to meet the needs of the participants. This is why our team included two autistic advisors to provide feedback and guidance throughout our virtual mindfulness groups. By including them in a meaningful way,  we feel confident that our  program is strongly  oriented to the target audience.  The finished product  delivers the Mindfulness  curriculum in consideration of the learning needs, communication differences, and dignity of participants. Our discussion, we will delve deeper into our virtual-based mindfulness intervention research in progress at CAMH.