

# AUTISM COURSE FOR ROMANTIC PARTNERS

## AN ONLINE PROGRAM

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### Background

Autism symptoms can have a major impact on romantic relationships. Their romantic partners may seek individual help, but not yet relationship therapy, to ameliorate their relationship.

In 2005, the Autism Course for Spouses was developed as a group training program. It was found to be effective (Blijd-Hoogewys & Talboom, 2013). Women reported significant improvements concerning the interaction with their autistic husbands, their coping style, their general wellbeing, and their self-esteem.

In 2017, an online version was developed for Therapy Land, aimed at not only spouses but also husbands of adults with ASD.

### Objectives

The objective of this study was to test whether the online Autism Course for Romantic Partners is effective.

### Methods

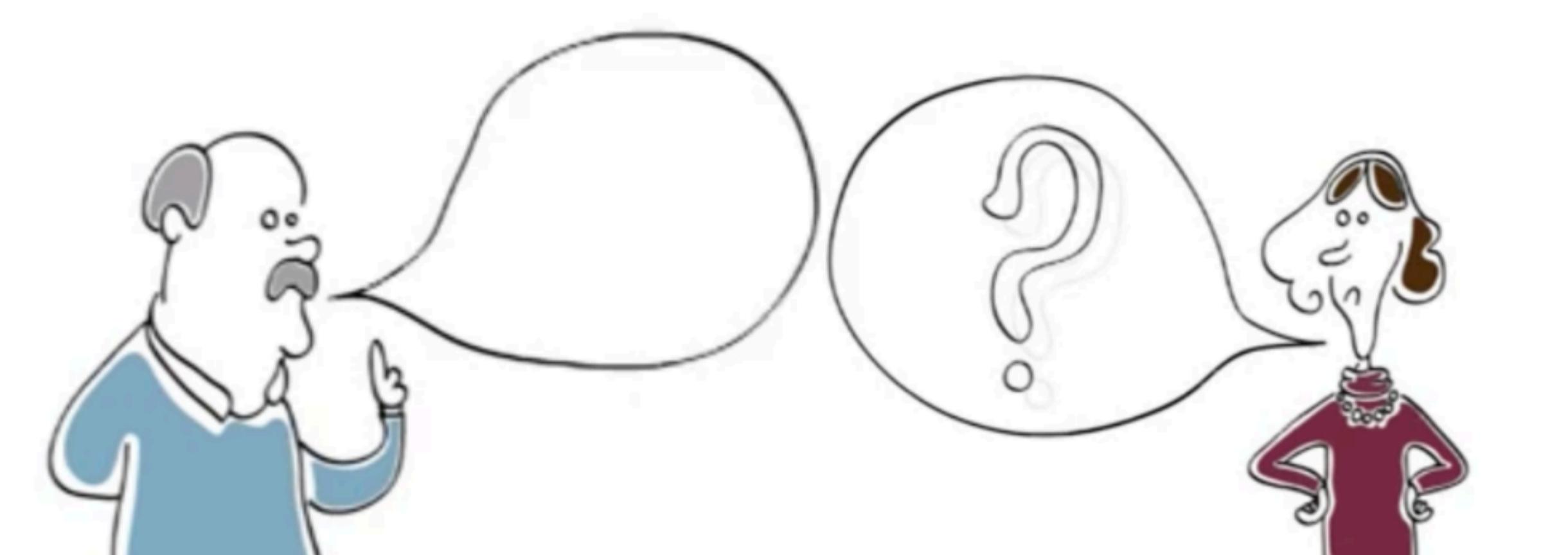
The online Autism Course for Romantic Partners contains seven sessions. They are ideally offered in a blended fashion: four internet sessions, alternated with three face-to-face sessions with a therapist. The participant can choose between two video therapists (a man or a woman who have recorded the films), next to their own face-to-face therapist. Both participant and face-to-face therapist can follow the online progress and can chat while using this online program.

The program focuses on autism characteristics (also including the more female autism phenotype), autism information processing, partner relationship issues, parenting issues, and communication skills. These subjects are explained in short films, can be read in a script, and are accompanied by multiple exercises that can be done at home.

Over the past two years, N = 238 romantic partners from all over the Netherlands were invited to take part in this online program (98 men, 140 women), of which N = 180 romantic partners started the program (76% acceptance rate).

### Results

After the program, the romantic partners reported a 33% decrease of their problems. Their therapists reported a 57% decrease of observed problems, a 78% improvement of overall therapy quality and a 67% reduction in face-to-face contacts needed.



Communication problems between romantic partners

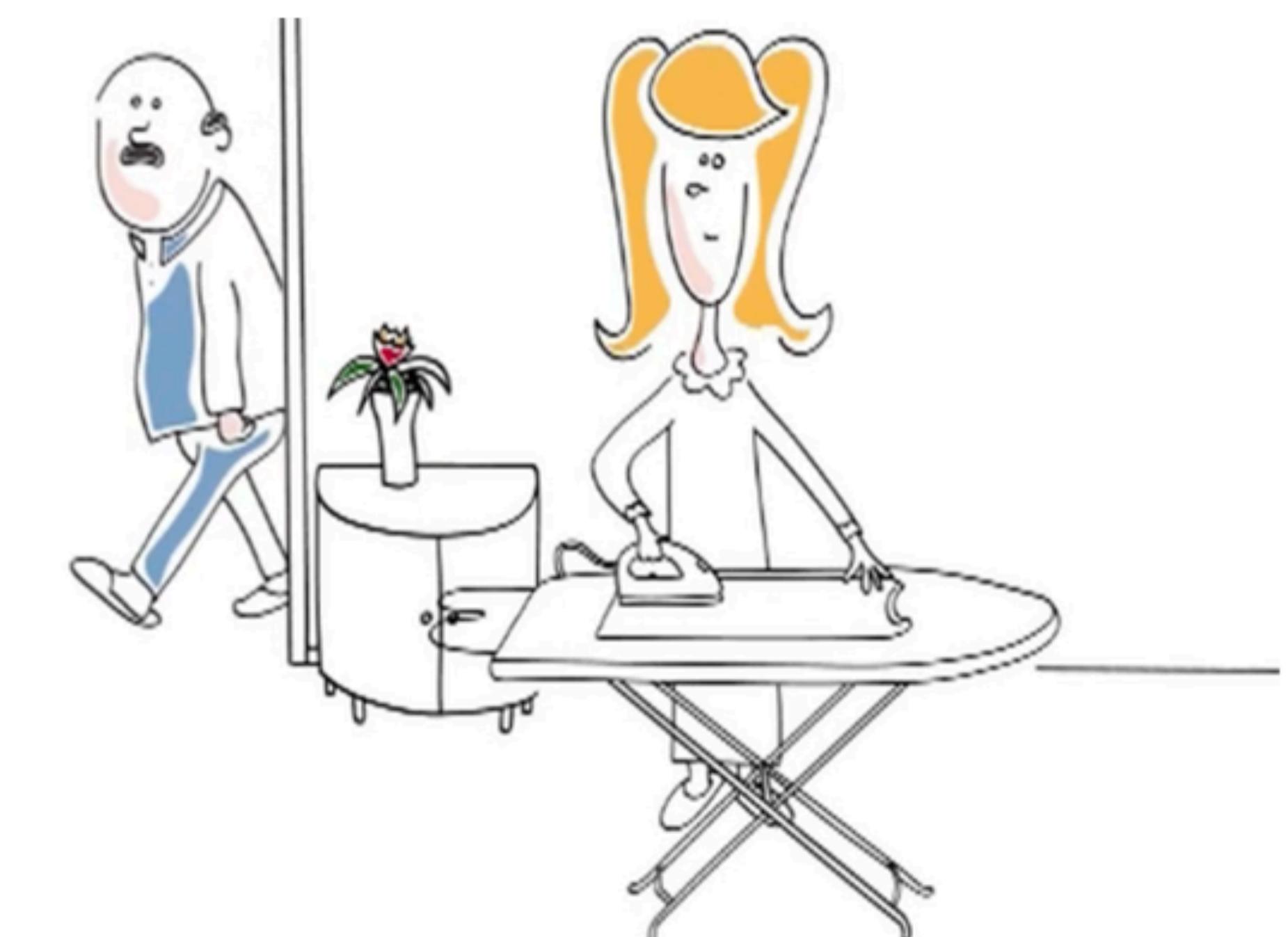
### Conclusions

Results show that the online Autism Course for Romantic Partners Spouses seems an effective training program. Further research is warranted.



### References

Blijd-Hoogewys, E.M.A., & Talboom, J.P.C.M. (2013). The Autism Course for Spouses Is an Effective Training Program . Poster presentation at IMFAR San Sebastian, Spain.



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