



Understanding the Relationship Between Friendship Quality and Peer Conflict Following the UCLA PEERS® School-Based Curriculum



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BACKGROUND

- Deficits in social skills are a hallmark feature among individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), with the friendships of youth with ASD differing from those of their neurotypical counterparts (Bauminger, Solomon & Rogers, 2010).
- Adolescents with ASD often have more impaired friendship quality than their neurotypical peers, and their friendships may also be more prone to conflict (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000).
- The Program for Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS®), a parent-mediated, evidence-based group social skills intervention assists in developing and maintaining friendships for middle school and high school youth with ASD.
- Previous research investigating the efficacy of PEERS reveals significant improvements in friendship quality post-treatment (Laugeson et al., 2009; Laugeson et al., 2012); however, the relationship between friendship quality and degree of conflict during social interactions post-treatment has yet to be examined.

OBJECTIVES

- This study examines the relationship between friendship quality and peer conflict during social interactions following participation in a school-based PEERS intervention.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

- 146 middle and high school students participated in a larger treatment outcome study investigating the effectiveness of a teacher-facilitated, parent-assisted PEERS curriculum in a non-public school setting.
- Adolescent participants were previously diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS; Constantino, 2005) Total Score: ($M = 76.17$ $SD = 14.55$)
- Age: 11-18 years ($M = 15.1$; $SD = .55$)
- Gender: 16% Female ($n = 24$); 84% Male ($n = 122$)
- Ethnicity: 60% Caucasian ($n=87$); 18% Latino/Hispanic ($n = 26$); 8% African American ($n = 12$); 4% Asian American ($n = 5$); 2% Middle Eastern ($n = 2$); 1% Native American ($n = 1$); 7% Other ($n = 10$)

MEASURES

ADOLESCENT MEASURES:

- Friendship Qualities Scale (FQS; Bukowski, Hoza, & Bolvin, 1994)
 - Assesses level of adolescent-reported overall friendship quality in close friendships
- Quality of Socialization Questionnaire-Adolescent (QSQ-A; Frankel & Mintz, 2008)
 - Measures peer conflict during get-togethers

PARENT MEASURES:

- Quality of Socialization Questionnaire-Parent (QSQ-P; Frankel & Mintz, 2008)
 - Measures parent perceptions of teen's peer conflict during get-togethers

METHODS

PROCEDURES

- Adolescent participants received daily social skills instruction in the classroom for 20-30 minutes, five days per week, for 14 weeks.
- Instruction was provided by classroom teachers who were trained and supervised on the PEERS school-based intervention.
- Parents were invited to participate in weekly 90-minute meetings that taught them strategies to assist their teens in improving their friendship skills.
- As part of a larger clinical trial, adolescents completed the FQS and QSQ-A at post-treatment, while parents completed the QSQ-P at post-treatment.
- In order to understand the relationship between friendship quality and peer conflict following treatment, bivariate correlations were conducted on the FQS, QSQ-A, and QSQ-P.
- Partial correlations were also conducted in order to control for potentially extraneous variables.

RESULTS

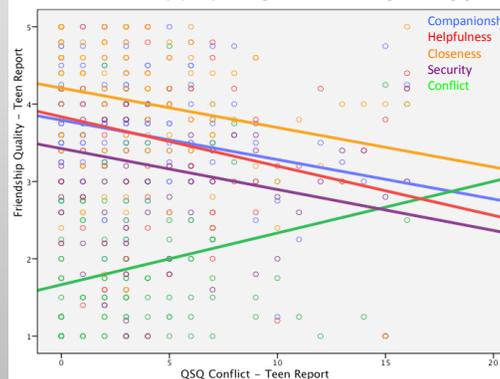
- Results reveal that higher adolescent-reported overall friendship quality on the FQS predicts less conflict on the adolescent QSQ ($p < .001$), particularly in the areas of Companionship ($p < .01$), Helpfulness ($p < .05$), Closeness ($p < .05$), Security ($p < .01$), and Decreased Conflict ($p < .01$).
- Higher adolescent reported conflict on the FQS also predicts more conflict on the adolescent QSQ and the parent QSQ.

Pearson Correlations for friendship quality and degree of peer conflict during social interactions in adolescents with ASD

Scale	QSQ-A Conflict	QSQ-P Conflict
FQS Overall Friendship Quality	-0.36***	-0.09
FQS Companionship	-0.24**	-0.04
FQS Helpfulness	-0.22*	-0.02
FQS Closeness	-0.23*	0.03
FQS Security	-0.25**	-0.07
FQS Conflict	0.29**	0.31*

Note: FQS=Friendship Qualities Scale; QSQ-A=Quality of Socialization Questionnaire—Adolescents; QSQ-P=Quality of Socialization Questionnaire—Parents
 * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Correlations for friendship quality and degree of conflict during social engagements



DISCUSSION

- Results suggest that greater friendship quality is related to decreased peer conflict during social interactions following participation in the 14-week PEERS School-Based Curriculum.
- Adolescent perceptions of friendship quality in close friendships improved in the areas of companionship, helpfulness, closeness, security, and decreased conflict in relation to self-perceived decreased conflict during get-togethers with peers.
- Adolescent perceptions of conflict in close friendships were also correlated with parent perceptions of conflict during get-togethers with peers.
- Results reveal that adolescents' feelings of unity and intimacy about their close friendships, as expressed by the FQS, overtly emerge during peer social interactions.

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