

## The Science of Making Friends: Teaching Social Skills to Adolescents and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders



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*The Help Group Summit – 2011*

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## Overview of Presentation

- Social deficits among adolescents and young adults with ASD
- Limitations of existing social skills interventions
- Effective methods of social skills instruction
- PEERS intervention strategies
  - Entering conversations
  - Handling verbal teasing
  - Handling peer pressure
- Summary of research findings
  - PEERS for Adolescents
  - PEERS for Young Adults

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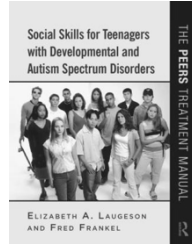
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## PEERS

*Program for the Education & Enrichment of Relational Skills*  
(Laugeson & Frankel, 2010)

- Manualized intervention
- Parent/caregiver assisted
  - Concurrent parent/caregiver and teen/young adult sessions
  - Caregivers/parents are trained as social coaches
- Addresses core deficits for ASD
- Focuses on friendship skills
- Teaches ecologically valid social skills
- 14-16 week curriculum
  - 90 minute weekly sessions
- Evidence-based for HFASD
  - Teens in middle and high school
  - Young adults (18-24 years of age)



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## Evidence-Based Methods of Social Skills Instruction

- Small group format
  - 7-10 group members
- Concurrent parent or caregiver sessions
  - Expand social opportunities
  - Social coaching
  - Homework compliance
- Didactic instruction
  - Structured lessons
  - Concrete rules / steps of social etiquette
  - Socratic method of instruction
- Role-playing / modeling
  - Appropriate and inappropriate demonstrations
- Behavioral rehearsal
- In session coaching
  - Performance feedback
- Real-life practice
  - Homework assignments
  - Parent or caregiver assistance



*Photo of PEERS courtesy of Associated Press*

(Matson, 1984; Davies & Rogers, 1985; Fleming & Fleming, 1982; Mesibov, 1984; Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Gralinski & Kopp, 1993; Rubin & Sloman, 1984; Frankel & Wyatt, 2003; Rao, Boidel, & Murray, 2008; Laugeson et al., 2008)

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## Overview of PEERS Curriculum

- Conversational skills
- Electronic communication
- Choosing appropriate friends
- Appropriate use of humor
- Peer entry strategies
- Peer exit strategies
- Get-togethers
- Good sportsmanship
- Dating etiquette (adults only)
- Peer rejection
- Peer conflict
- Peer pressure (adults only)
- Graduation

*Photo of PEERS courtesy of Associated Press*



*UCLA PEERS Program*  
<http://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers/>  
(310) 26-PEERS

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### Clinical Example: Entering Conversations

#### QUESTIONS:

What are most teens and young adults told to do when trying to meet a new group of people?

What do most teens and young adults with ASD do to enter conversations?



Photo of PEERS courtesy of Associated Press

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### PEERS Ecologically Valid Social Skill: Entering Conversations

- Watch / Listen
  - Listen for the topic
  - Watch from a distance
    - Using a prop is helpful
  - Make periodic eye contact
  - Identify common interests
- Wait
  - Wait for a pause in the conversation
  - Wait for a sign of receptiveness from the group
- Join
  - Move closer
  - Make a comment or ask a question that is ON TOPIC
- Assess interest
  - Did they OPEN the circle or CLOSE the circle
    - Body language
    - Eye contact
    - Verbal cues



Photo of PEERS courtesy of Associated Press

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### Clinical Example: Handling Verbal Teasing

#### QUESTIONS:

What are most teens and young adults told to do in response to verbal teasing?

What do most teens and young adults with ASD do in response to verbal teasing?



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## PEERS Ecologically Valid Social Skill: Handling Verbal Teasing

- Do not walk away, ignore the person, or tell an adult
- Do not tease them back
- Act like what the person said did not bother you
- Provide a BRIEF comeback that suggests what the person said was lame:
  - Whatever!
  - Anyway...
  - So what?
  - Big deal!
  - Who cares?
  - Yeah and?
  - And your point is?
  - Am I supposed to care?
  - Is that supposed to be funny?
  - (Shrug shoulders)
  - (Roll eyes)
- Then walk away or remove yourself



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## Clinical Example: Handling Peer Pressure

### QUESTIONS:

What are most teens and young adults told to do when confronted with peer pressure?

What do most teens and young adults with ASD do when confronted with peer pressure?



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## PEERS Ecologically Valid Social Skill: Handling Peer Pressure

- Do not necessarily have to end your friendship
- Do not preach or police others
- Just say no
- Give a reason
  - Make an excuse
  - Give a personal consequence
  - Play the support role
  - Make a firm personal statement
- Use the broken record
- Try stalling
- Reverse the peer pressure
- Try changing the subject
- Give them the cold shoulder
  - Walk away or remove yourself
    - Use a cover story for leaving



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### Randomized Controlled Trial for Adolescents with ASD



(Laugeson, Frankel, Mogil, & Dillon, 2011)

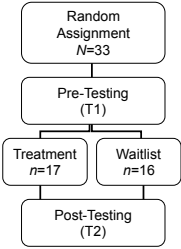
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders  
DOI 10.1007/s10803-010-0661-1

**ORIGINAL PAPER**

Parent-Assisted Social Skills Training to Improve Friendships in Teens with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Elizabeth A. Laugeson · Fred Frankel · Catherine Nagil · Abby R. Dillon



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### Results of Randomized Controlled Trial for Adolescents with ASD

(Laugeson, Frankel, Mogil, & Dillon, 2011)

**Table 4** Mean pre- and post-treatment scores for statistically significant outcome variables for treatment and Delayed Treatment Control groups (standard deviations are in parentheses)

Variable	Group		Delayed Treatment Control		p
	Treatment (n = 17)		Control (n = 16)		
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	p <
<b>Teen measures:</b>					
TASSK	13.3 (2.4)	19.6 (1.4)	12.6 (3.6)	13.3 (3.8)	0.001
QPQ Host	1.1 (1.4)	3.2 (2.2)	0.6 (0.9)	1.1 (1.3)	0.025
FQS	16.8 (3.4)	17.2 (4.0)	18.1 (3.9)	16.6 (4.6)	0.05
<b>Parent measures:</b>					
SSRS social skills	80.2 (8.8)	89.7 (12.1)	77.9 (12.1)	79.8 (11.7)	0.05

**RESULTS:**

- Adolescent self-report:
  - Social Skills Knowledge (TASSK)
  - Frequency of social interaction with peers (QPQ)
  - Changes in friendship quality (FQS)
- Parent-report:
  - Overall Social Skills (SSRS)
- Teacher-report:
  - Overall Social Skills (SSRS)
  - Trend ( $p = .07$ )

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### Second Clinical Trial for Adolescents with ASD



(Laugeson, Frankel, Mogil, & Dillon, 2011)

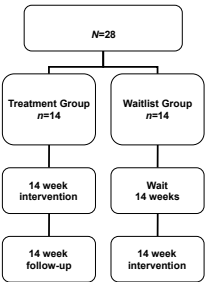
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders  
DOI 10.1007/s10803-010-0661-1

**ORIGINAL PAPER**

Evidence-Based Social Skills Training for Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders: The UCLA PEERS Program

Elizabeth A. Laugeson · Fred Frankel · Elizabeth Costello · Abby R. Dillon · Catherine Nagil



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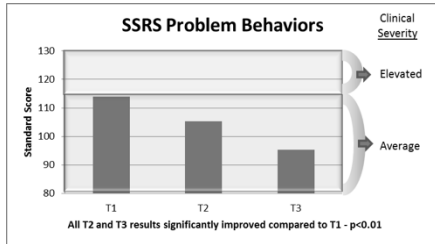
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**PEERS Long-Term Follow-Up Study:  
1-5 Years Post-Treatment (N=53)  
Parent-Reported Problem Behaviors on SSRS-P**  
*(Mandelberg, Laugeson, Frankel, Cunningham, Gantman, & Bates, 2011)*




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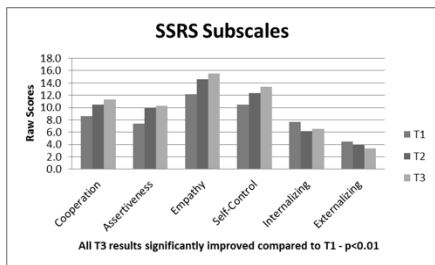
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**PEERS Long-Term Follow-Up Study:  
1-5 Years Post-Treatment (N=53)  
Parent-Reported Social Skills on SSRS-P Subscales**  
*(Mandelberg, Laugeson, Frankel, Cunningham, Gantman, & Bates, 2011)*




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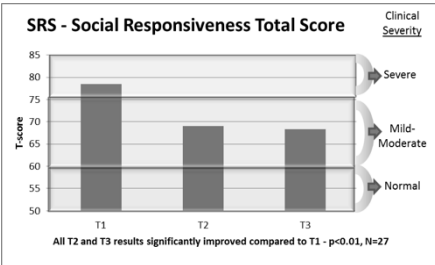
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**PEERS Long-Term Follow-Up Study:  
1-5 Years Post-Treatment  
Parent-Reported Social Responsiveness on SRS-P**  
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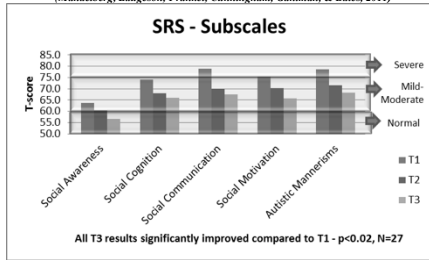
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**PEERS Long-Term Follow-Up Study:  
1-5 Years Post-Treatment**  
*Parent-Reported Social Responsiveness on SRS-P Subscales*

(Mandelberg, Laugeson, Frankel, Cunningham, Gantman, & Bates, 2011)




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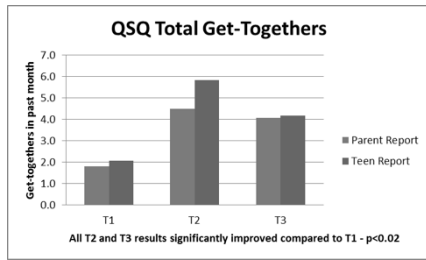
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**PEERS Long-Term Follow-Up Study:  
1-5 Years Post-Treatment (N=53)**  
*Frequency of Total Get-Togethers Per Month*

(Mandelberg, Laugeson, Frankel, Cunningham, Gantman, & Bates, 2011)




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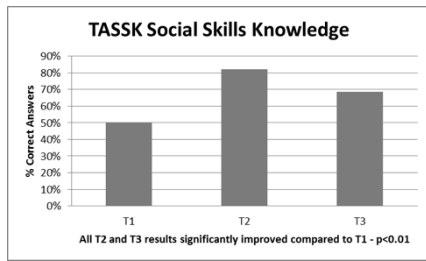
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**PEERS Long-Term Follow-Up Study:  
1-5 Years Post-Treatment (N=53)**  
*Teen Social Skills Knowledge on TASSK*

(Mandelberg, Laugeson, Frankel, Cunningham, Gantman, & Bates, 2011)




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