

**Emerging Research in the Education &
Treatment of Children with ASD:
The Help Group – UCLA
Autism Research Alliance**



The Help Group Summit ~ September 2009

**The Help Group – UCLA
Autism Research Alliance**

Leading the way in applied research and intervention

GOALS OF THE ALLIANCE:

- Enhance and expand research in the education and treatment of children and adolescents with ASD
- Develop educational and clinical evidence-based best practice models
- Contribute to the greater understanding of best practice models for educators and mental health professionals working with individuals with ASD



**School-based Social Skills
Training for Teens with
Autism Spectrum Disorders:
The PEERS Program**



Elizabeth A. Laugeson, Psy.D.

Director, The Help Group - UCLA Autism Research Alliance

The Help Group Summit ~ September 2009

Social Deficits Among Adolescents with ASD

Social deficits include:

- Poor conversational skills
- Poor friendship quality
- Lack of peer entry attempts



Deficits often result in:

- Peer rejection
- Social neglect
- Isolation
- Lack of close friendships

(Volkmar & Klin, 1998; Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Orsmond, Krauss, & Seltzer, 2004; Koning & Magill-Evans, 2001; LeCouteur et al., 1989; Marks, Schrader, Longaker, & Levine, 2000; Ghaziuddin & Gerstein, 1996; Twachtman-Cullen, 1998; Hemphill & Siperstein, 1990)

Poor Quality of Friendships Among Adolescents with ASD

- More loneliness
- Poorer quality friendships
- Less companionship
- Less help from friends
- Less security within friendships

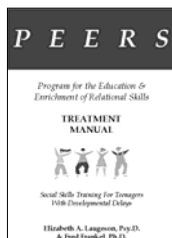


(Bauminger & Kasari, 2000)

PEERS

Program for the Education & Enrichment of Relational Skills
(Laugeson & Frankel, 2006)

- Manualized intervention
- Parent-assisted
- Address core deficits for ASD
- Ecologically valid skills
- Outpatient University medical setting
- 12-14 week curriculum
- 90 minute weekly sessions
- Middle and high school
- High-functioning autism or Asperger's Disorder



Previous Research Findings

(Laugeson et al., 2009; Laugeson & Frankel, in press)

- Increased adolescent social skills knowledge
- Increased number and frequency of peer get-togethers
- Decreased conflict during get-togethers
- Improvement in friendship quality
- Increased overall social skills
 - Parent reports
 - Teacher reports
- Most measures maintained or improved at a 3-month follow-up assessment

School-based Social Skills Training



because every child deserves a great future



Shapell Foundation Grant & Friends of the Semel Institute

- THG-UCLA Autism Research Alliance
- Develop and test a school-based PEERS curriculum
- Compare to pre-existing classroom social skills control group
- Daily 14-week program
 - Shorter didactics
 - More sessions (daily)
 - More behavioral rehearsal
- Teacher-facilitated
- Parents as collateral informants

Teacher-Assisted Treatment

- Direct supervision of peer interactions through coaching
- Immediate reinforcement in a naturalistic setting
- Guidance on interpersonal problem-solving
- Aid in treatment compliance
- Improvement in homework compliance



PEERS
(Laugeson & Frankel, in press)

Weekly Lesson Format

- Mondays
 - Homework Review
- Tuesdays
 - Didactic Lesson
 - Role Play
- Wednesdays
 - Lesson Review
 - Role Play
 - Behavioral Rehearsal
 - Homework Assignment
- Thursdays & Fridays
 - Didactic Summary
 - Teen Activity
 - Homework Assignment



Overview of Treatment

- Conversational skills
 - Trading information
 - Finding common interests
 - Having a reciprocal two-way conversation
 - Non-verbal communication
- Electronic communication
 - Voicemail, email, IM, text messaging
 - Online safety
- Choosing friends wisely
 - Choosing peer groups
 - Identifying extracurricular activities
- Appropriate use of humor
- Peer entry strategies
 - Entering conversations with potential friends
- Peer exit strategies
 - Exiting conversations when rejected



Overview of Treatment

- Get-togethers
 - Being a good host or guest during get-togethers with friends
- Good sportsmanship
 - Playing nicely during games and sports
- Peer rejection
 - Handling teasing
 - Differentiating between teasing and embarrassing feedback
 - Handling bullying
 - Changing a bad reputation
- Peer conflict
 - Handling arguments with friends
 - Handling rumors and gossip
- Graduation



Timeline for the Study

- **Year One**
 - Grant funding obtained
 - IRB application approved
- **Year Two**
 - Literature review conducted
 - Development of treatment manual
- **Year Three**
 - Recruitment (N=82)
 - Baseline assessment completed
 - Teacher training conducted
 - Implementation (current)
 - Treatment provided in Fall/Winter 2009
 - Outcome assessment: December 2009
 - Analyze and interpret data
 - Publish findings
 - Train Village Glen West middle school teachers



Acknowledgements

Funding Support

NIMH U54-MH-068172 (Sigman, PI)
 NIH T32 MH17140 (Leuchter, PI)
 Shapell Foundation (Laugeson, PI)
 Semel Scholar Award (Laugeson, PI)
 Friends of the Semel Institute

Group Leaders

Fred Frankel, Ph.D., ABPP (co-PI)
 Alex Gantman, Psy.D.
 Catherine Mogil, Psy.D.
 Helena Johnson, Ph.D.

Administrative Support

Ashley R. Dillon, M.A.
 Jennifer Sanderson, M.S.
 Ruth Ellingsen
 Clare Gorospe
 Jilly Chang



Research Assistants

Bobbie Celaya, M.A.
 Lani Gerzon, M.A.
 Robin Toblin, Ph.D.
 Henry Kimmel, M.A.
 Thao Trinh, M.A.
 Emily Chen, M.A.
 Renee Sitone, M.A.
 Shannon Denny, M.A.
 Natashia Lewis, M.A.
 Brooke Martin
 Martha Wang
 Jin Lee, M.A.
 Anett Abrahamian, M.A.
 Amanda Levvin
 Cordelia Ross
 Jennifer McNamara, M.A.
 Kristine McGlennen
 Siena Whitham
 Jeff Rudie
 Josh Mandelberg, M.D.
 Allison Vreeland
 Chloe Koeffler
