

# The Science of Making Friends: Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Adults



**Dr. Elizabeth Laugeson**

*Assistant Clinical Professor*

*Director, The Help Group - UCLA Autism Research Alliance*

*Director, UCLA PEERS Clinic*

# Acknowledgements

## Funding Support

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



## Research Collaborators

Fred Frankel, Ph.D., ABPP (co-developer)  
Andrew Leuchter, M.D. (post-doc mentor)  
Alex Gantman, Psy.D.  
Catherine Mogil, Psy.D.  
Helena Johnson, Ph.D.  
Mirella Dapretto, Ph.D.  
Josh Mandelberg, M.D.  
Jeff Rudie  
Natalie Colich  
Mina Park, Ph.D.  
Enjey Lin, Ph.D.



## Administrative Support

Yasamine Bolourian, M.A.  
Jessica Hopkins  
Shannon Bates, M.A.  
Lara Tucci, M.A.  
Ashley R. Dillon, Ph.D.  
Jennifer Sanderson, Psy.D.  
Ruth Ellingsen, M.A.  
Clare Gorospe  
Jilly Chang, Ph.D.



## THG Research Assistants

Mariya Kriv  
Stephen Kapp  
Kaely Orenski  
Georgia Yu, M.A.  
Dali Tung, M.A.  
Jan Stolpe  
Dawn Mitchell, M.A.  
Rosanna Rivero, M.A.  
Mary Goodarzi, M.A.  
Alex Friedman  
Sarah Bohlman  
Lindsay Henry  
Summer Vilkins  
Maile Adolphson Horn, M.A.  
Michelle Jackson, M.A.  
Sarah Taylor  
Melissa Wasserman, M.A.  
Lindsay Hughes, M.A.  
Ellie Mellon  
Daniel Janulaitis, M.A.  
Rohini Bagrodia  
Kathryn Fitzpatrick  
Tiana Bayrami, M.A.  
Jason Tinero  
Elizabeth Shipley, M.A.  
Jessie Sanchez  
Khadija Noorbhai

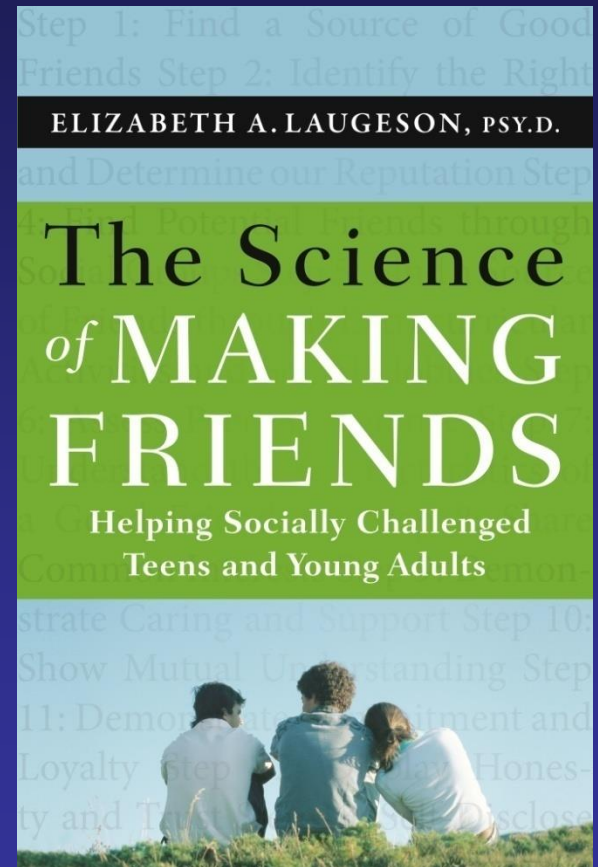
## UCLA Research Assistants

Jin Lee, M.A.  
Amanda Lenvin  
Cordelia Ross  
Kristine McGlennen  
Dana Lieberman  
Siena Whitham  
Allison Vreeland  
Lucy Vo  
Chloe Koeffler  
Alea Baron, M.A.  
Laura Knoll  
Ahoon Karimian, M.A.  
Kathleen Jorgenson, M.A.  
Rebecca Fountain, M.A.  
Erin Cornack, M.A.  
Emily Chen, M.A.  
Kandyse Christopher  
Devi Beck-Pancer  
Ben Schwartzman  
Elan Javanfard, M.A.  
Meredith Kalies, M.A.  
Meagan Cronin  
Lyndsay Brooks  
David Diaz  
Cecilia Costa

*We gratefully thank the families who have inspired us and made this research possible!*

# Overview of Lecture

- Importance of friendship
- Consequences of social deficits
- Overview of PEERS<sup>®</sup>
- Effective methods for teaching social skills
- Ecologically valid social skills
  - Conversational skills
  - Starting individual conversations
  - Entering group conversations
  - Handling teasing
- Brief summary of research findings
- Current research
- Resources



# Why Study Friendships?

Having one or two close friends:

- Predicts later adjustment in life
- Can buffer the impact of stressful life events
- Correlates positively with self-esteem
- Increases independence
- Correlates negatively with depression and anxiety



(Buhrmeister, 1990; Matson, Smiroldo, & Bamburg, 1998; Miller & Ingham, 1976)

# Consequences of Peer Rejection

Peer rejection is one of the strongest predictors of:

- Juvenile delinquency
- Early withdrawal from school
- Mental health problems



(Buhrmeister, 1990; Matson, Smiroldo, & Bamburg, 1998;  
Miller & Ingham, 1976)

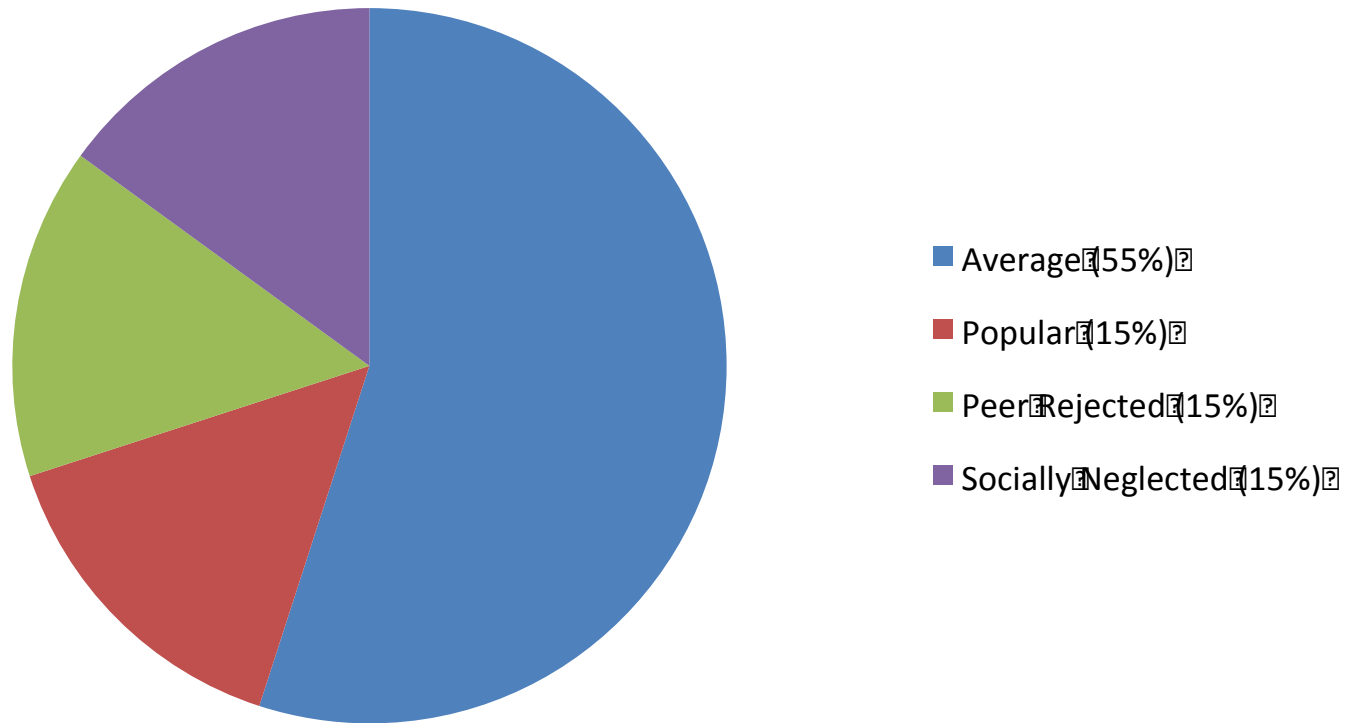
# Identifying the Peer Rejected and Socially Neglected

- Peer rejection
  - Teasing and bullying
  - Bad reputations
  - Autism, ADHD, Mood disorders, Conduct Disorders
- Social neglect
  - Isolated and withdrawn
  - Ignored and unnoticed
  - Autism, Anxiety, Depression
- Both lack close reciprocal 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; Twatchman-Cullen, 1998; Hemphill & Siperstein, 1990; Church, Alisanki, Amanullah, 2000)

# Categories of Peer Acceptance in Adolescence



# PEERS®

*Program for the Education & Enrichment of Relational Skills*

- Research launched in 2004 at the UCLA Semel Institute
- Manualized group treatment
- Parent-assisted program
  - Concurrent parent and teen/young adult sessions
  - Parents provide social coaching
- 14-16 week curriculum
  - 90 minute weekly sessions
- Evidence-based
  - Teens in middle and high school
    - Autism, ADHD, ID, FASD
  - Young adults with Autism

*Photo of PEERS courtesy of Associated Press*



*UCLA PEERS® Clinic  
(310) 26-PEERS*

[peersclinic@ucla.edu](mailto:peersclinic@ucla.edu)  
[www.semel.ucla.edu/peers](http://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers)



# Evidence-Based Methods for Teaching Social Skills

- **Didactic lessons**
  - Concrete rules and steps of social etiquette
  - Ecologically valid social skills
- **Role-play demonstrations**
  - Model social behavior
  - Appropriate and inappropriate demonstrations
- **Behavioral rehearsal exercises**
  - Practice with coaching
- **Homework assignments**
  - Practice in natural social settings
  - Helps generalize skills
- **Parent/caregiver or teacher coaching**

*Photo of PEERS courtesy of Associated Press*



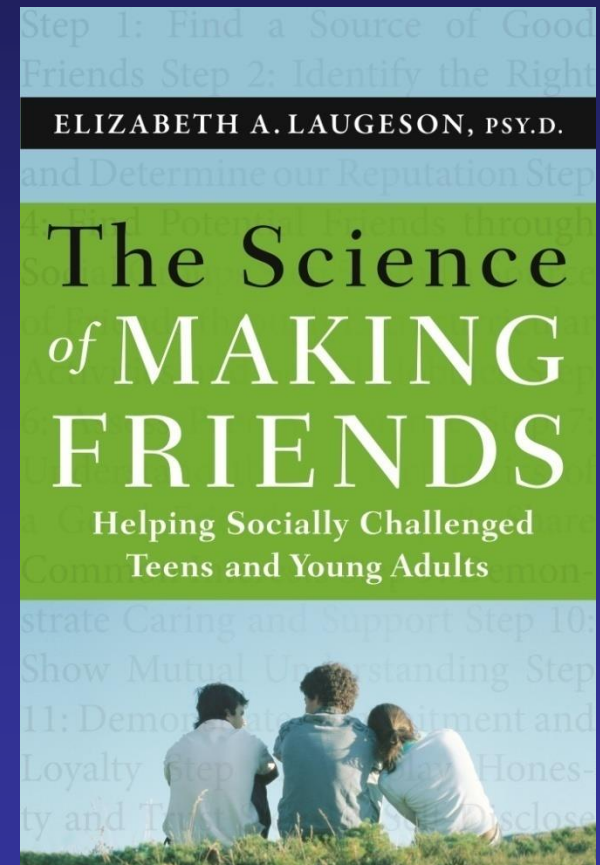
(Matson, 1984; Davies & Rogers, 1985; Fleming & Fleming, 1982; Mesibov, 1984; Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Gralinski & Kopp, 1993; Rubin & Sloman, 1984, Frankel & Myatt, 2003; Rao, Beidel, & Murray, 2008; Laugeson et al., 2008)

# The Science of Making Friends:

## Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Young Adults

(Laugeson, 2013)

- Parent book based on research from UCLA PEERS<sup>®</sup> Clinic
- Friendship skills
- Handling peer rejection and conflict
- Parent section
  - Narrative lessons
  - Social coaching tips
- Teen and young adult chapter summaries
- Chapter exercises
- Companion DVD
- Mobile App: *FriendMaker*



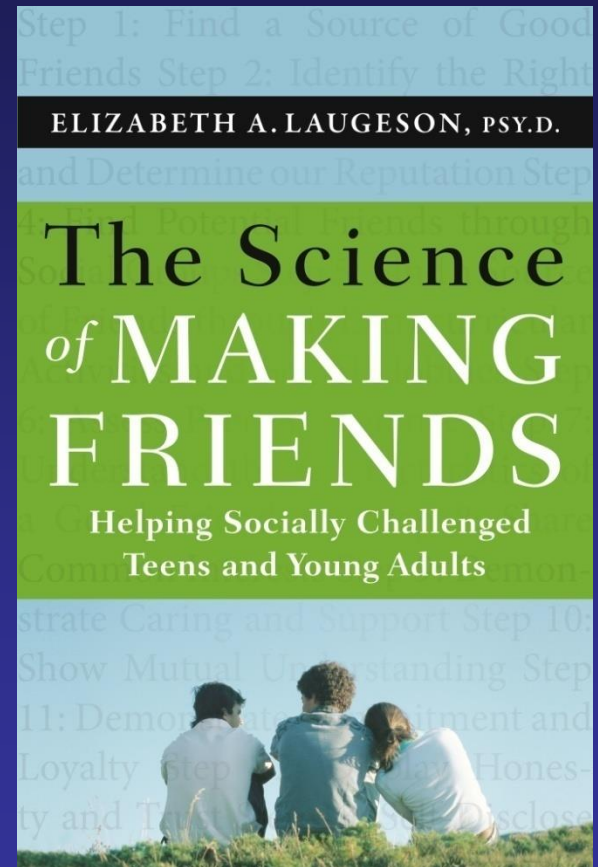
# Summary of Friendship Skills

## Making and Keeping Friends:

- Finding and choosing good friends
- Conversational skills
- Starting and ending conversations
- Exiting conversations
- Electronic communication
- Good sportsmanship
- Get-togethers

## Handling Peer Conflict and Rejection:

- Arguments
- Teasing
- Cyber bullying
- Rumors and gossip
- Physical bullying
- Bad reputations

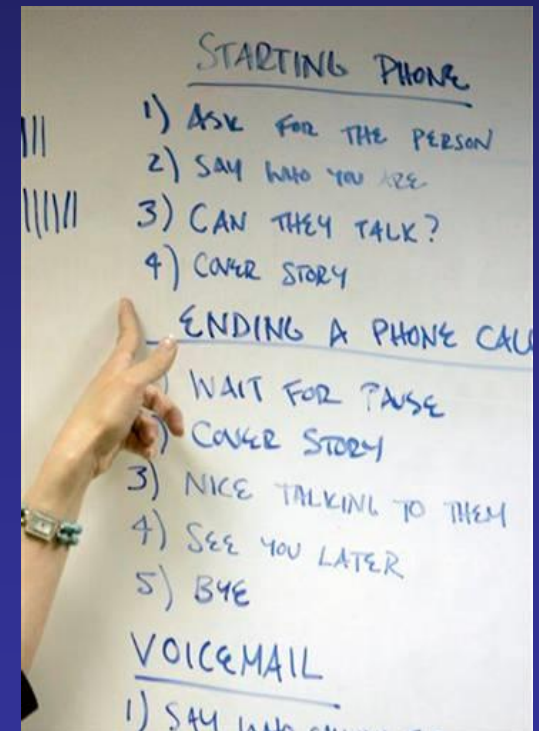


The Science of Making Friends  
(Laugeson, 2013)

# Development of Rules and Steps of Social Behavior

- Ecologically valid social skills
  - DO'S
- Common social errors committed by those with social difficulties
  - DON'TS
- Create rules around ecologically valid skills and common social errors
- Break steps down into concrete parts

Photo of PEERS® courtesy of Associated Press



# Clinical Example

## QUESTION:

What are common social errors committed by teens and young adults when talking to others?



# Role-Play: Conversational Skills



# Common Conversational Error: Conversation Hogging

- One-sided conversations
  - Elicit fewer extended responses from others
  - Fail to identify common interests
- Use repetitive themes
  - Perseverate on personal interests
  - Disregard the other person's interests
- Autism, ADHD, Bipolar Disorder
- Rule: Don't be a conversation hog



The Science of Making Friends  
(Laugeson, 2013)

# Perspective Taking Questions: Conversation Hogging

- What was that like for Ben?
- What did Ben think of Alex?
- Will Ben want to talk to Alex again?





# Role-Play: Conversational Skills



# Common Conversational Error: Policing

- Poor social cognition
    - Difficulty predicting social world
  - Dichotomous thinking
    - Black-and-white thinking
  - Rule-driven
  - Notice rule violations
  - Feel compelled to point out rule violations
  - Autism, OCD, Anxiety
- 
- Rule: Don't police



# Perspective Taking Questions: Policing

- What was that like for Ben?
- What did Ben think of Alex?
- Will Ben want to talk to Alex again?

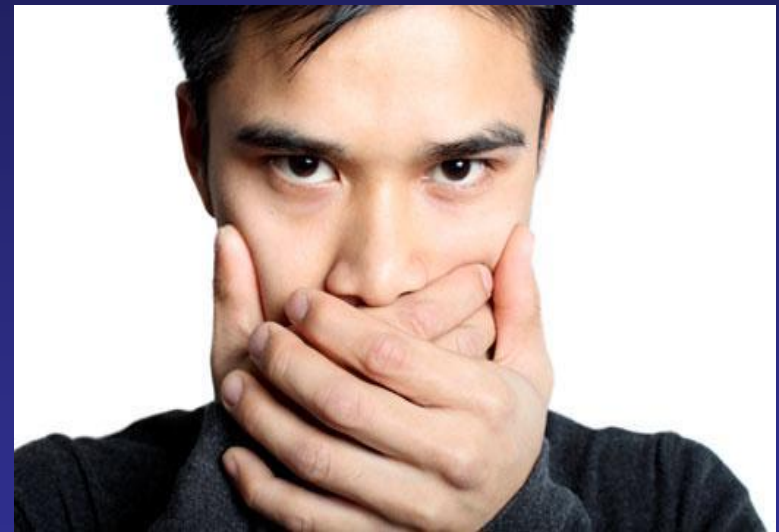


# Role-Play: Conversational Skills



# Common Conversational Error: Getting Too Personal

- Poor social cognition
  - Difficulty taking on the perspectives of others
  - Difficulty picking up on social cues
- Asks personal questions of others
- Shares too much information
- Autism, ADHD, Mood Disorders
  
- Rule: Don't get too personal



The Science of Making Friends  
(Laugeson, 2013)

# Perspective Taking Questions: Getting too Personal

- What was that like for Ben?
- What did Ben think of Alex?
- Will Ben want to talk to Alex again?



# Rules and Steps for Starting Individual Conversations

- Find a common interest
  - Make a comment
  - Ask a question
  - Give a compliment
- Trade information
  - Ask the person about him/herself
    - Usually related to common interest
  - Answer your own questions
  - Ask follow-up questions
- GOAL: Find common interests
  - Friendships are based on common interests



The Science of Making Friends  
(Laugeson, 2013)

# Role-Play: Peer Entry

## Starting an Individual Conversation

### Perspective Taking Questions:

- What was that like for Ben?
- What did Ben think of Alex?
- Will Ben want to talk to Alex again?





# Clinical Example

## QUESTIONS:

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

What is a common social error made by teens and young adults when entering conversations?



# Role-Play: Peer Entry

## Entering Group Conversations

### Perspective Taking Questions:

- What was that like for the group?
- What did the group think of Yasamine?
- Will the group want to talk to Yasamine again?



# Steps for Entering Group Conversations

- Watch / Listen
  - Watch from a distance
    - Using a prop is helpful
  - Listen for the topic
  - Identify common interests
  - Make periodic eye contact
  - Watch to see if you know someone
  - Make sure they're talking nicely
- Wait
  - Wait for a pause in the conversation
- Move closer
  - Arm's length away
- Join
  - Make a comment or ask a question that is ON TOPIC



The Science of Making Friends  
(Laugeson, 2013)

# Role-Play: Peer Entry

## Entering Group Conversations

### Perspective Taking Questions:

- What was that like for the group?
- What did the group think of Yasamine?
- Will the group want to talk to Yasamine again?



# Clinical Example

## QUESTIONS:

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

What are the common social errors made by teens and young adults in response to teasing?



# Rules for Handling Teasing

- Do not walk away, ignore the person, or tell an adult
- Don't show you're upset or tease back
- Act like what the person said did not bother you
- Provide a **SHORT COMEBACK** that shows 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



The Science of Making Friends  
(Laugeson, 2013)

# Role-Plays: Handling Teasing

Male Example



Female Example



# PEERS<sup>®</sup> Research: Parent-Assisted for Teens with Autism

J Autism Dev Disord (2009) 39:596–606  
DOI 10.1007/s10803-008-0664-5

ORIGINAL PAPER

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

Elizabeth A. Laugeson · Fred Frankel ·  
Catherine Mogil · Ashley R. Dillon



J Autism Dev Disord  
DOI 10.1007/s10803-011-1339-1

ORIGINAL PAPER

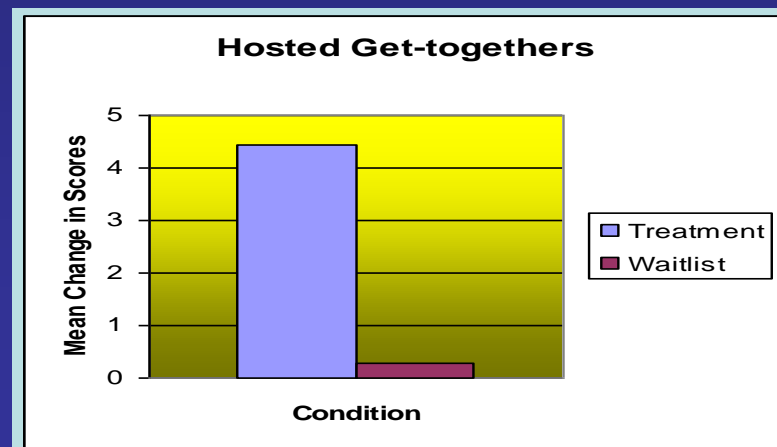
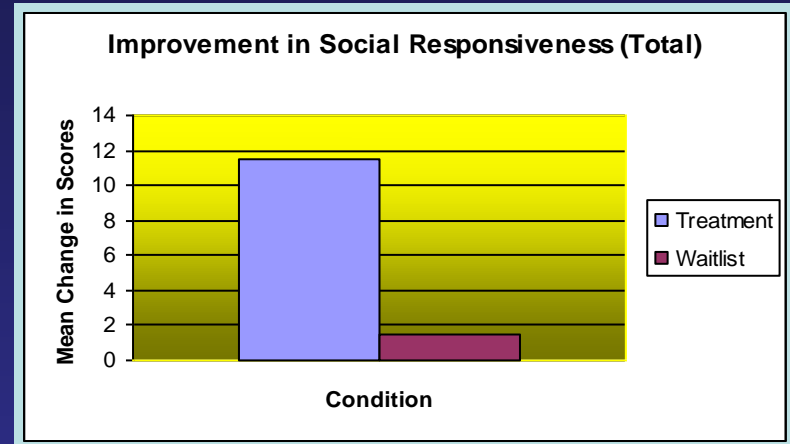
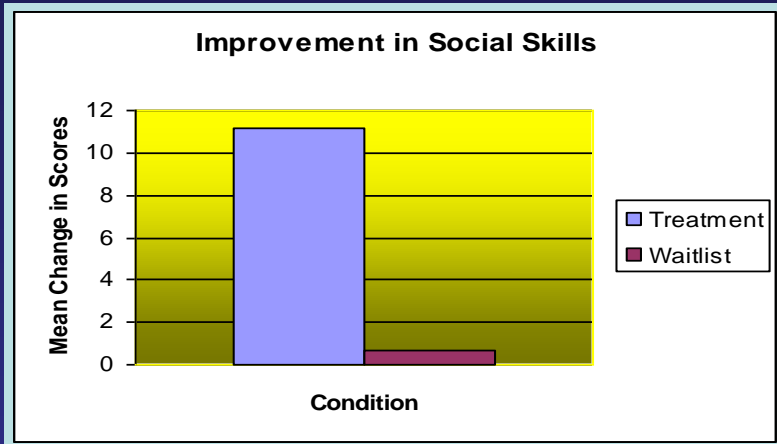
## Evidence-Based Social Skills Training for Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders: The UCLA PEERS Program

Elizabeth A. Laugeson · Fred Frankel ·  
Alexander Gantman · Ashley R. Dillon ·  
Catherine Mogil



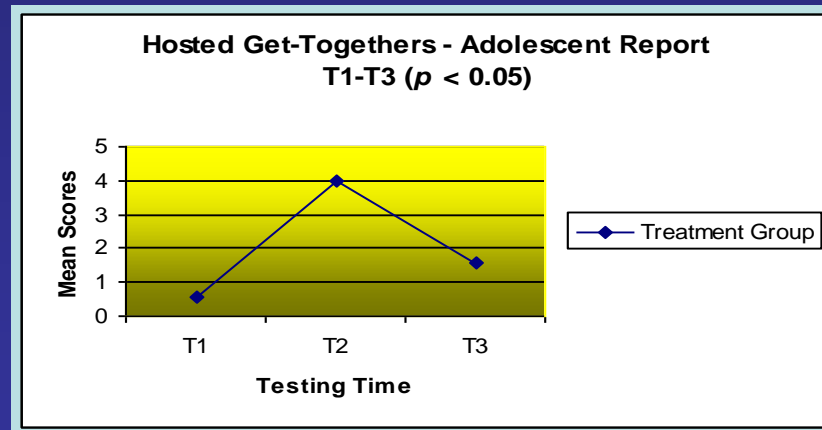
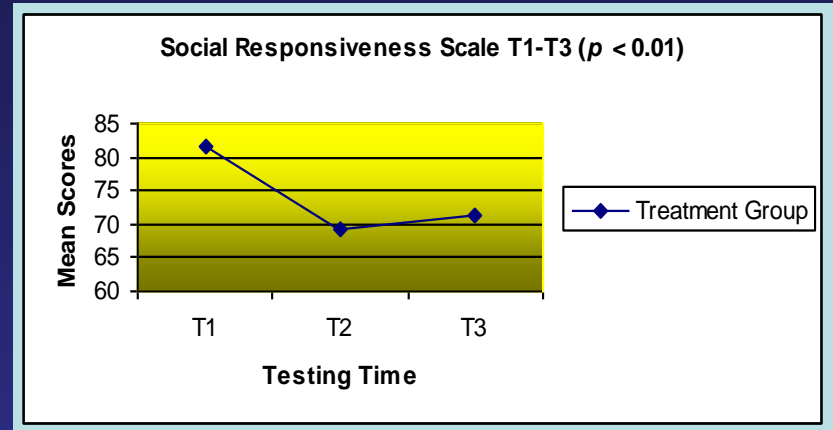
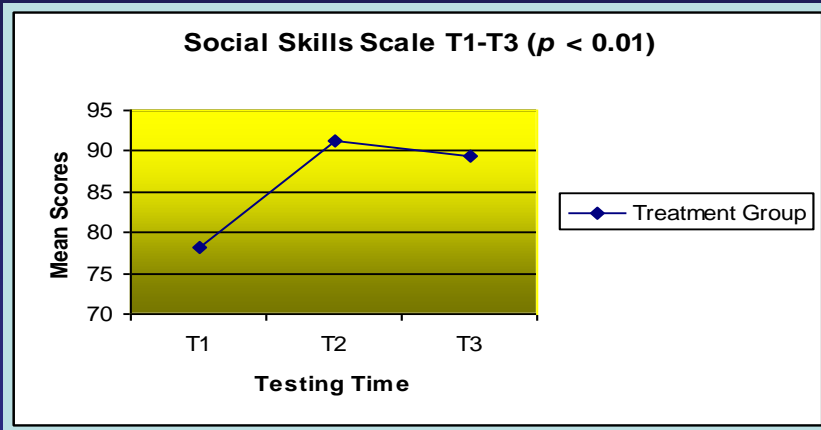


# PEERS<sup>®</sup> Research Snapshot: Parent-Assisted for Teens with Autism



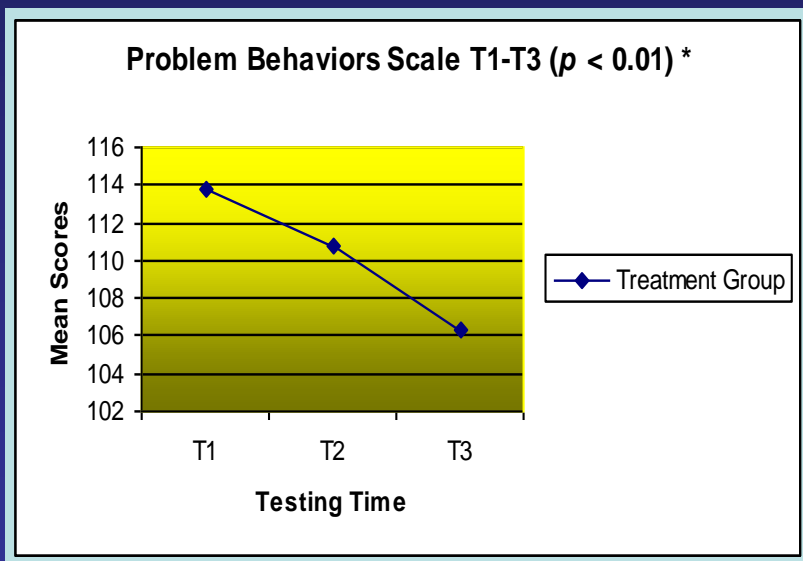
(Laugeson et al., 2012)

# PEERS<sup>®</sup> Research Snapshot: 14-week Follow-up for Teens with Autism

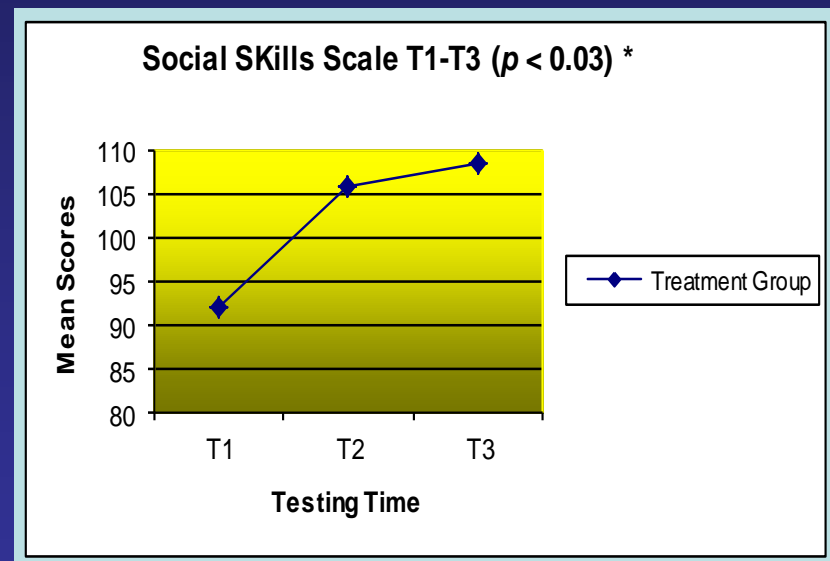


# PEERS<sup>®</sup> Research Snapshot: New Findings at 14-week Follow-up for Teens with Autism

Parent Report



Teacher Report



(Laugeson et al., 2012)

# PEERS<sup>®</sup> Research: Caregiver-Assisted for Adults with Autism

J Autism Dev Disord  
DOI 10.1007/s10803-011-1350-6

ORIGINAL PAPER

## **Social Skills Training for Young Adults with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Randomized Controlled Pilot Study**

Alexander Gantman · Steven K. Kapp ·  
Kaely Orenski · Elizabeth A. Laugeson

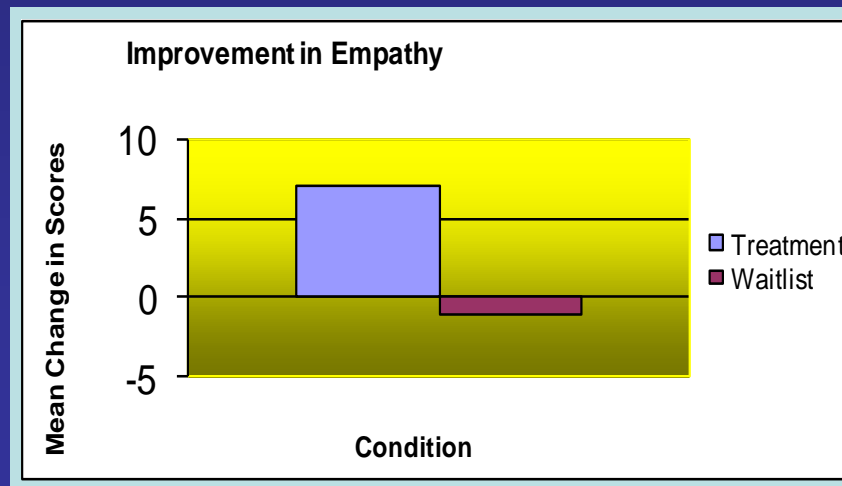
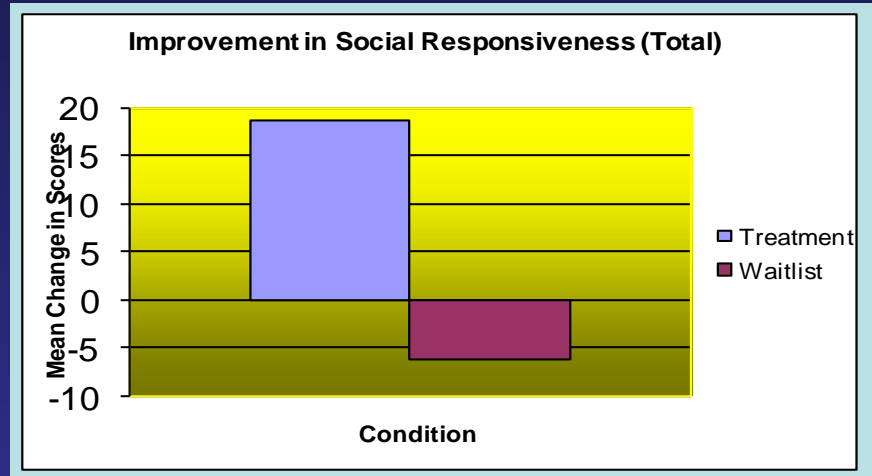
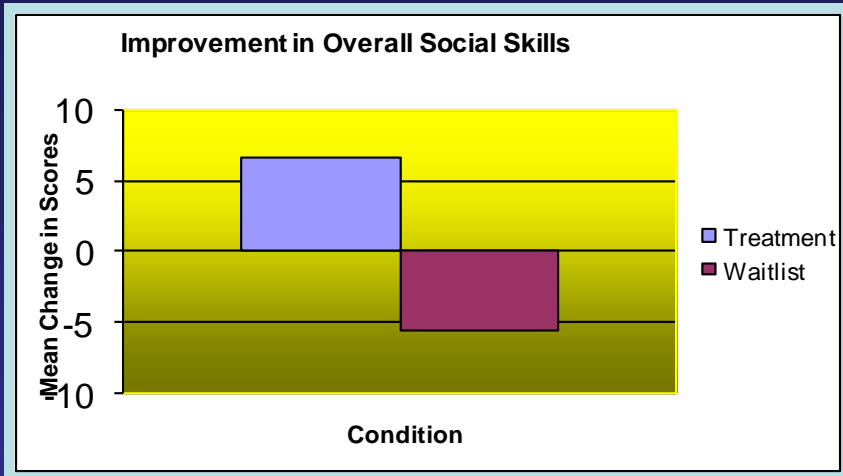
The Help Group  UCLA  

---

Autism Research Alliance

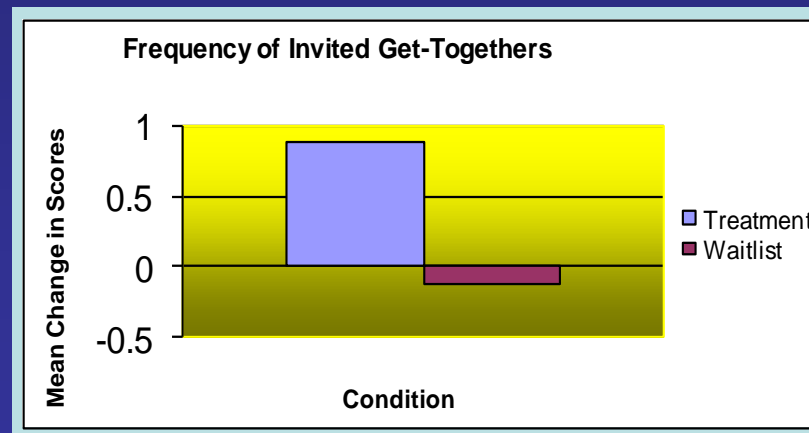
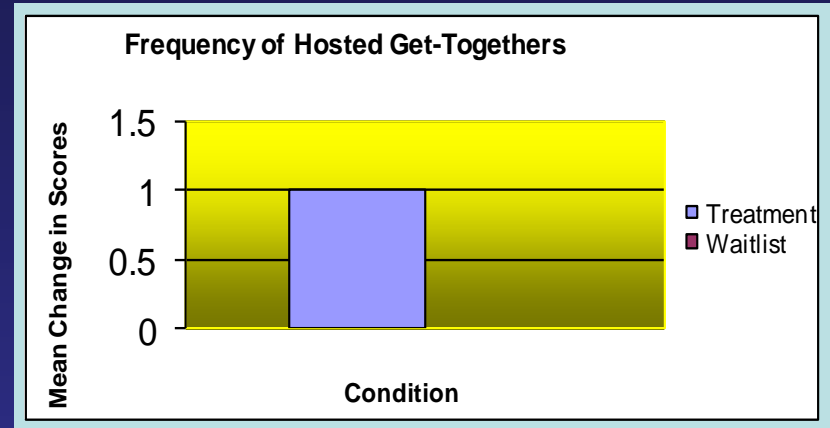
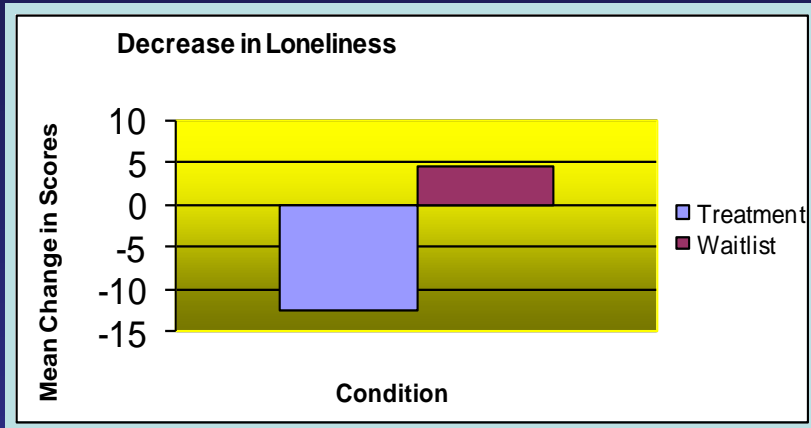


# PEERS<sup>®</sup> Research Snapshot: Caregiver-Assisted for Adults with Autism



(Gantman et al., 2012)

# PEERS<sup>®</sup> Research Snapshot: Caregiver-Assisted for Adults with Autism



(Gantman et al., 2012)

# PEERS<sup>®</sup> Long-term Follow-up Assessment for Teens with Autism

- Data was collected 1-5 years post-treatment
- 53 of 82 potential subjects
  - 64% response rate
- Mean age at follow-up was 17.5 years and grade level was 11.4
- Mean time to follow-up was 29 months
- Maintenance of treatment gains with additional improvements
- Highlights power of parent coaching

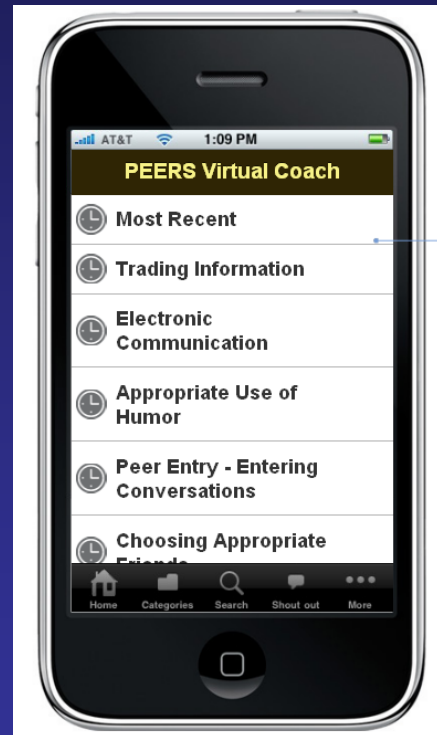


(Mandelberg et al., in press in Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities)

# Current Research Study: PEERS<sup>®</sup> Virtual Coach

## PEERS Virtual Coach (Laugeson, PI)

- High-functioning adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- $N = 30$
- Test the effectiveness of a “virtual coach” for teens with ASD
- Compare three groups:
  - PEERS parent-assisted treatment as usual
  - PEERS parent-assisted with virtual coach
  - Delayed treatment control





# Current Research Study: PEERS<sup>®</sup> for Preschoolers

## PEERS<sup>®</sup> for Preschoolers (Laugeson & Park, PIs)

- 16-week manualized social skills group
- 4-6 year old high-functioning children with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- $N = 30$
- Puppet-facilitated lessons
- Parent-assisted
- Compare treatment to delayed treatment control



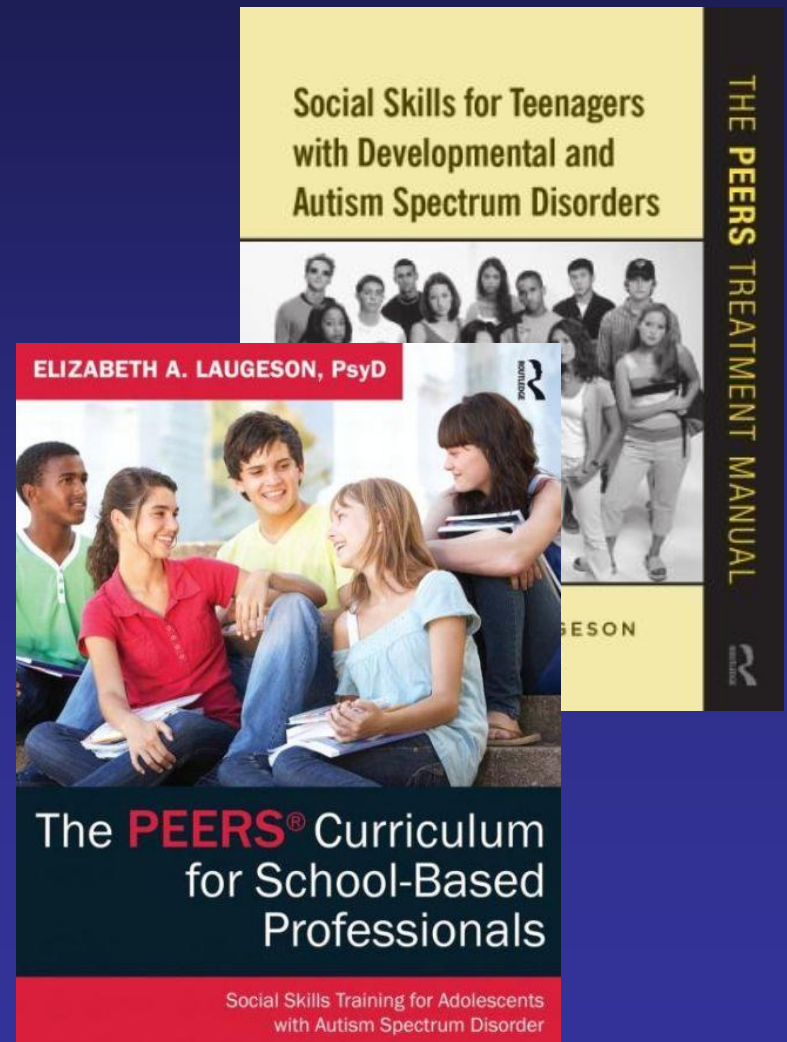
# UCLA PEERS<sup>®</sup> Research Partners

- Virginia Tech
  - ASD (Teens and adults)
    - fMRI – biomarker of treatment outcome
  - ADHD
  - Traumatic Brain Injuries
- Bar Ilan (Israel)
  - Manual translated into Hebrew
  - Randomized controlled trial
  - Teens with ASD
- Marquette University
  - Two published papers:
    - Replication study – social anxiety and parenting stress
    - EEG – first biomarker of treatment outcome
- South Korea
  - Manual translated into Korean
  - Randomized controlled trial (in press in Autism Research)
  - Teens with ASD
  - Korean manual published in 2013



# PEERS<sup>®</sup> Programs

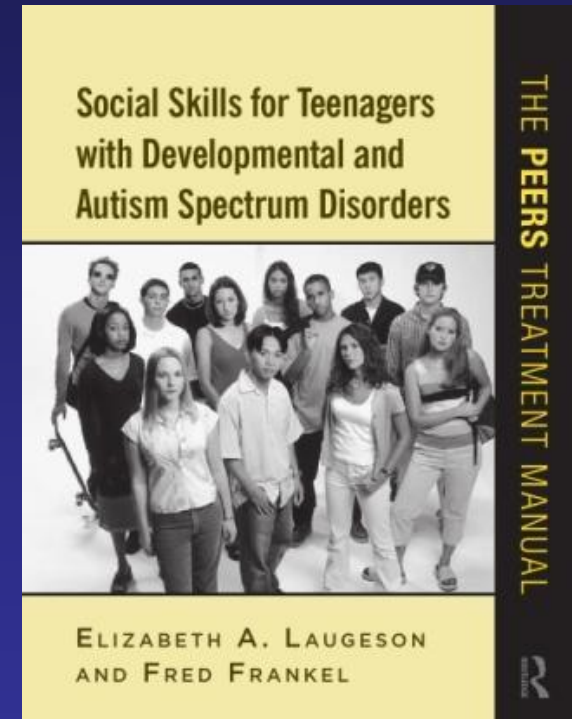
- PEERS<sup>®</sup> School-Based Program for Adolescents
  - 16-week teacher-facilitated daily class
  - Village Glen School at The Help Group
- PEERS<sup>®</sup> for Young Adults
  - 16-week caregiver-assisted weekly program (unpublished)
  - UCLA on Mondays 6:00-7:30 pm
- PEERS<sup>®</sup> for Preschoolers
  - 16 week parent-assisted weekly program (unpublished)
  - UCLA on Tuesdays 3:30-5:00 pm
- PEERS<sup>®</sup> for Adolescents
  - 14-week parent-assisted program
  - UCLA on Wednesdays 4:30-6:00 and 6:30-8:00 pm



# PEERS<sup>®</sup> Parent-Assisted Manual

(Laugeson & Frankel, 2010)

- PEERS<sup>®</sup> Treatment Manual
  - Offered in over a dozen counties
  - Translated into six other languages
    - Spanish
    - French
    - Hebrew
    - Korean (published)
    - Finnish
    - Swedish
- PEERS<sup>®</sup> Certified Training
  - UCLA
    - Parent-assisted treatment: November 5-8, 2013 and March 11-14, 2014
    - School curriculum: February 2014
  - National and international trainings
  - 3-4 day training (24 hours total)



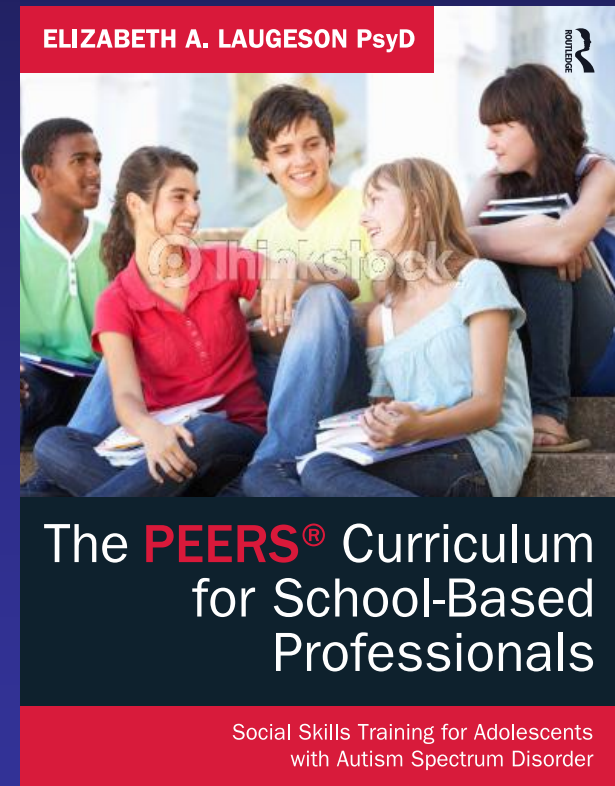
*Manuals available for purchase  
In the exhibitor hall*

# The PEERS<sup>®</sup> Curriculum for School-Based Professionals:

Social Skills Training for Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder  
(Laugeson, 2013)

- Published PEERS<sup>®</sup> curriculum
- Teacher-facilitated
- 16-week curriculum
- Daily lesson format
- Friendship skills
- Peer conflict and rejection
- Parent handouts included

*Manuals available for purchase  
In the exhibitor hall*



*Please join us  
for a book  
signing in the  
exhibitor hall  
after the lecture*

Step 1: Find a Source of Good  
Friends Step 2: Identify the Right

ELIZABETH A. LAUGESON, PSY.D.

and Determine our Reputation Step

4. Find Potential Friends through

Social Media

# The Science of MAKING FRIENDS

Helping Socially Challenged

Teens and Young Adults

Compassion

strate Caring and Support Step 10:

Show Mutual Understanding Step

11: Demonstrate Commitment and

Loyalty Step 12: Practice Honesty

ty and Transparency Step 13: Disclose



# Contact Information

UCLA PEERS<sup>®</sup> Clinic

(310) 26-PEERS

[peersclinic@ucla.edu](mailto:peersclinic@ucla.edu)

[www.semel.ucla.edu/peers](http://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers)



Facebook: UCLAPEERS