Thriving through Friendships: Improving Social Outcomes for Young Adults with ASD

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Overview of Presentation

- Social deficits among adults with ASD
- Consequences of social deficits
- Treatment priorities related to social outcomes for adults with ASD
- Evidence-based treatments for adults with ASD
- Overview of PEERS® method for teaching social skills
- Clinical examples:
  - Starting conversations
  - Letting someone know you like them
- Research overview
- Resources
Social Deficits Common Among Adults with ASD

- Poor social communication
  - Problems with topic initiation
  - Use repetitive themes
  - One-sided conversations
- Poor social awareness
  - Difficulty understanding social cues
- Poor social motivation
  - Less involvement in social activities
  - More social isolation
- Poor social cognition
  - Difficulty understanding the perspectives of others

Poor Social Outcomes Among Adults with ASD

- Higher underemployment and unemployment
- Less post-secondary education
- More dependence on caregivers
- Less likely to live independently
- Less likely to have a driver’s license
- Greater social isolation
- Fewer close meaningful friendships
- Poor friendship quality
- Fewer romantic relationships
- Higher incidence of comorbidities
  - Anxiety, depression

Friendships Among Young Adults with ASD

- Very few close reciprocal friendships
- Poor friendship quality
- Increased social isolation upon entering adulthood
- Less involvement in social activities
- More online friends than real life friends

- Peer rejection
  - ADHD, impulse control issues, dysregulation
- Social neglect
  - Anxiety, depression

(Howlin et al., 2013; Orsmond et al., 2013; Howlin et al., 2014; Tobin et al., 2013; Reichow et al., 2010)
Romantic Relationships for Young Adults with ASD

- Fewer romantic relationships
- Less likely to marry
- Greater incidence of stalking behavior
- Less sexual knowledge and awareness
- Greater risk for sexual exploitation and victimization
- Higher risk for financial exploitation

(Stokes et al., 2005; Stokes et al., 2007; Howlin et al., 2013; Ormond et al., 2013; Howlin et al., 2014; Tobin et al., 2013; Reichow et al., 2010)
Lack of Services and Research for Adults with ASD

- Lack of evidence-based treatments to improve social skills in adults with ASD
- Most interventions are focused on young children
- Research funding has historically ignored adults with ASD
- Among the limited evidence-based interventions for adults, most have focused on young adults (18-24)
- Social demands change and increase over the lifespan
- Interventions are failing to meet the changing and increasing social demands across development
- Access to services greatly diminishes after the age of 21

(Eaves et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2011; Howlin et al., 2004; Hendricks et al., 2009)
Background about PEERS®

• International program
  – Developed at UCLA in 2004
  – Adolescent program has been translated into over a dozen languages
  – Used in over 35 countries

• Evidence-Based Social Skills Programs:
  – PEERS® for Preschoolers
  – PEERS® for Adolescents
  – PEERS® for Young Adults
Friendship and Romantic Relationship Skills:

• Finding and choosing good friends and romantic partners
• Conversational skills
• Starting and entering conversations
• Exiting conversations
• Electronic communication
• Appropriate use of humor
• Get-togethers
• Dating etiquette
  – Letting someone know you like them
  – Asking someone on a date
  – Organizing and planning a date
  – General dating do’s and don’t
Managing Conflict and Rejection Skills:

- **Dating etiquette**
  - Taking no for an answer
  - Politely turning someone down for a date
  - Handling unwanted sexual pressure
- **Handling arguments**
- **Handling direct bullying**
  - Teasing and embarrassing feedback
  - Physical bullying
- **Handling indirect bullying**
  - Cyber bullying
  - Rumors and gossip
PEERS® Evidence-Based Methods for Teaching Social Skills

- Small group format
  - 10-12 adults
- Concurrent social coaching groups
  - Caregiver-assisted
- Didactic lessons
  - Concrete rules and steps of social etiquette
  - Ecologically valid social skills
  - Socratic method of teaching
- Role-play demonstrations
  - Model social behavior
  - Appropriate and inappropriate demonstrations
  - Perspective taking questions
- Behavioral rehearsal exercises
  - Practice skills with coaching
- Homework assignments
  - Practice in natural social settings
  - Helps generalize skills
  - In vivo caregiver coaching
- Homework review
  - Individualize the treatment

(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)
Clinical Example: Starting Conversations

QUESTIONS:

What are most young adults with ASD told to do to meet new people?

What do many young adults with ASD do to meet new people?
PEERS® Clinical Example: Starting Conversations

1. Casually look over
2. Use a prop
3. Find a common interest
4. Mention the common interest
   - Make a comment
   - Ask a question
   - Give a compliment
5. Trade information
6. Assess interest
   - Are they looking at you?
   - Are they facing you?
   - Are they talking to you?
7. Introduce yourself (optional)
Clinical Example:
Asking Someone On a Date

QUESTIONS:

What are most young adults with ASD told to do to ask someone on a date?

What do many young adults with ASD do to ask someone on a date?
PEERS® Clinical Example: Asking Someone On a Date

1. Wait for an appropriate time to ask
2. Trade information
3. Mention your common interests
4. Ask what they’re doing at a certain time (e.g., this weekend)
5. Assess their interest
6. Use common interests as a cover story for going out
7. Exchange contact information
8. Tell them when you’ll follow-up
Randomized Controlled Trial with Young Adults with ASD

(Laugeson, Gantman, Kapp, Orenski, & Ellingsen 2015)
Randomized Controlled Trial with Young Adults with ASD
(Laugeson, Gantman, Kapp, Orenski, & Ellingsen 2015)

Randomization (N=22)

Treatment (TX) Group (N=12)
- 16 Week Treatment
- T2 Post-Test Assessment
  - 16 Week Wait Period
  - T3 16 Week Follow-Up Assessment

Delayed Treatment Control (DTC) (N=10)
- 16 Week Wait Period
- T2 Baseline 2 Assessment
  - 16 Week Treatment
  - T3 Post-Test Assessment
    - 2 Drops (N=8)
    - 16 Week Wait Period
    - T4 16 Week Follow-Up Assessment
PEERS® Research Snapshot: Caregiver-Assisted for Young Adults with ASD

(Laugeson, Gantman, Kapp, Orenski, & Ellingsen 2015)

**Social Responsiveness Scale Total Score**

- **Treatment**: 9.22
- **Delayed Treatment Control**: 0.13

**Social Skills Rating System - Social Skills Score**

- **Treatment**: 12
- **Delayed Treatment Control**: 11.64

**Table 2. Mean difference scores, standard deviations and significance for outcome variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>TX ($n = 9$)</th>
<th>DTC ($n = 8$)</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$d$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Young adult measures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TYASSK</td>
<td>8.22 (3.46)</td>
<td>0.87 (2.10)</td>
<td>&lt;.001**</td>
<td>2.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>QS total get-togethers</td>
<td>3.56 (2.40)</td>
<td>1.13 (1.36)</td>
<td>.03*</td>
<td>0.92</td>
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<td>QS hosted get-togethers</td>
<td>1.55 (2.13)</td>
<td>0.13 (0.35)</td>
<td>.09+</td>
<td>0.93</td>
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<td>QS invited get-togethers</td>
<td>2.00 (2.06)</td>
<td>1.00 (1.41)</td>
<td>&gt;.10</td>
<td>0.57</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Caregiver measures</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>SRS total score</td>
<td>-9.22 (6.15)</td>
<td>-0.11 (7.57)</td>
<td>&lt;.02*</td>
<td>1.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRS social motivation</td>
<td>-7.00 (6.76)</td>
<td>1.38 (6.67)</td>
<td>&lt;.03*</td>
<td>1.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRS autistic mannerisms</td>
<td>-11.67 (5.45)</td>
<td>2.25 (11.65)</td>
<td>&lt;.01**</td>
<td>1.53</td>
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<td>SRS social communication</td>
<td>-9.00 (7.63)</td>
<td>-2.06 (7.17)</td>
<td>&lt;.07+</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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<td>SRS social awareness</td>
<td>-6.33 (6.96)</td>
<td>-2.38 (7.69)</td>
<td>&gt;.10</td>
<td>0.54</td>
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<td>SRS social cognition</td>
<td>-6.56 (7.55)</td>
<td>0.38 (9.44)</td>
<td>&gt;.10</td>
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<td>SSRS social skills score</td>
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<td>11.64 (4.96)</td>
<td>&lt;.03*</td>
<td>1.23</td>
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<td>SSRS cooperation</td>
<td>2.22 (2.82)</td>
<td>-0.13 (1.36)</td>
<td>&lt;.05*</td>
<td>1.06</td>
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<td>SSRS assertiveness</td>
<td>4.22 (3.60)</td>
<td>0.38 (1.41)</td>
<td>&lt;.02*</td>
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<td>SSRS responsibility</td>
<td>1.78 (2.91)</td>
<td>0.00 (1.60)</td>
<td>&gt;.10</td>
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<td>SSRS self-control</td>
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<td>QS total get-togethers</td>
<td>3.78 (1.64)</td>
<td>0.38 (0.52)</td>
<td>&lt;.001**</td>
<td>1.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>QS hosted get-togethers</td>
<td>2.00 (2.00)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.53)</td>
<td>&lt;.02*</td>
<td>1.37</td>
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*Difference scores measure change in scores from T1 to T2

** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$, + $p<.1$
PEERS® Research Snapshot: Caregiver-Assisted for Young Adults with ASD

(Laugeson, Gantman, Kapp, Orenski, & Ellingsen 2015)
PEERS® Research Snapshot:
Caregiver-Assisted for Young Adults with ASD
(Laugeson, Gantman, Kapp, Orenske, & Ellingsen 2015)
PEERS® Research Snapshot:
Caregiver-Assisted for Young Adults with ASD

(Laugeson, Gantman, Kapp, Orenski, & Ellingsen 2015)
Final Thoughts

• Improving social outcomes in young adults with ASD is possible
• Evidence-based treatments to improve friendship and romantic relationships exist
  – Developed at UCLA
  – Disseminating treatments worldwide
  – Certified trainings are available
  – Published manuals and books available to the public
• More evidence-based treatment are needed to improve social outcomes in adults across the lifespan with ASD:
  – Employment
  – Romantic relationships
  – Sexual health and safety
  – Independent living
Current Research Opportunity

UCLA Treatment Study for Individuals with Autism

The purpose of this 16-week study is to examine the combined effects of medication (L-DOPA or placebo) plus a specialized behavioral intervention aimed towards increasing social skills.

You are eligible to participate if you:
- Are between 13-30 years
- Have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Participants will receive:
- PEERS (social skills training)
  (1 session/week for 16 weeks)
- Comprehensive diagnostic & cognitive evaluation
- Neurological testing
- L-DOPA or placebo (inactive medication)
- Questionnaires, interviews, psychological and laboratory testing
- Up to $550 if complete all visits

For more information, contact UCLA at 310 267 4798 or autismresearch@ucla.edu
Cross Cultural Validation and Replication of PEERS®
Future Research Opportunities:
College to Career Transition Program

• PEERS for Careers (Fall Quarter 2018)
  – 10 week course
  – Two 90-minute weekly classes
  – 3 unit class
  – Focused on employment skills
  – Concurrent career coaching group with undergraduate students

• UCLA Internship (Winter Quarter 2019)
  – On-campus employment opportunities
  – Support via UCLA CAN Clinic
  – Ongoing career coaching from undergraduate students

• Externship (Spring Quarter 2019)
  – Off-campus employment opportunities
  – Support via UCLA CAN Clinic
  – Ongoing career coaching from undergraduate students
Future Research Opportunities:
PEERS for Dating

- 16-week group-based social skills intervention focused on developing and maintaining romantic relationships for adults with ASD
- Concurrent dating coach sessions
- Recruitment begins Winter 2019

Proposed Curriculum

1. Choosing and finding appropriate people to date
2. Starting conversations
3. Maintaining conversations
4. Entering and exiting conversations
5. Electronic communication
6. Online dating
7. Letting someone know you like them
8. Asking someone on a date
9. Handling rejection
10. Going on dates
11. Dating do’s and don’ts
12. Handling sexual pressure
13. Relationship boundaries
14. Physical contact and sexual activity
15. Conflict resolution
PEERS® for Young Adults
Caregiver-Assisted Treatment

• Certified Trainings at UCLA:
  – July 30 – August 1, 2018
  – Research scholarships are available
• 16-week curriculum
• Weekly 90-minute young adult sessions and caregiver sessions
• Social coaching handouts
• Addresses core deficits for ASD
• Focuses on friendship and relationships skills and handling peer rejection and conflict
• Teaches ecologically valid social skills
PEERS® for Adolescents
Parent-Assisted Treatment

- Certified Trainings at UCLA:
  - September 5-7, 2018
  - Research scholarships are available
- 14-week curriculum
- Weekly 90-minute teen sessions and parent sessions
- Parent handouts
- Addresses core deficits for ASD
- Focuses on friendship skills and handling peer rejection and conflict
- Teaches ecologically valid social skills
PEERS® for Adolescents
School-Based Curriculum

• Certified Training at UCLA
  – June 27 - 29, 2018
  – Research scholarships are available
• Teacher-facilitated curriculum
• 16-week program
• Daily lesson plans
• Focuses on friendship skills and strategies for handling peer rejection and conflict
• Includes weekly comprehensive parent handouts
• Evidence-based treatment for ASD
  – Middle school
  – High school
The Science of Making Friends: Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Young Adults (Laugeson, 2013)

- Parent book
- Friendship skills
- Handling peer rejection and conflict
- Parent section
  - Narrative lessons
  - Social coaching tips
- Chapter summaries for teens and young adults
- Chapter exercises / homework
- Companion DVD
  - Role-play videos
- Mobile App: FriendMaker
  - Virtual social coach
UCLA PEERS® Clinic

• Preschool Groups
  – Tuesdays 3:30 – 5:00 PM
    • Children 4-6 years of age
    • Autism Spectrum Disorder

• Adolescent Groups
  – Middle and high school
  – Wednesdays 4:30 – 6:00 PM
    • Autism Spectrum Disorder
  – Wednesdays 6:30 – 8:00 PM
    • ADHD, depression, anxiety, etc.

• Young Adult Groups
  – Mondays 4:30 – 6:00 PM
  – Mondays 6:30 – 8:00 PM
    • 18-35 years of age
    • Autism Spectrum Disorder and other social challenges
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