PEERS: A Social Skills Group for Teenagers with Developmental and Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Presentation Outline

* Brief Overview of ASD and Social Skills Deficits
* Consequences of Social Difficulties for Adolescents with ASD
* Importance of Friendship
* Description of PEERS
* PEERS videos
* Q & A
* Resources & References
Social Difficulties Among Adolescents with ASD

* Poor social communication/awareness
  * Lack of integrated eye contact
  * Difficulty picking up on social cues (verbal and nonverbal forms of communication – e.g., changes in voice inflections and gesturing)

* Impaired social cognition
  * Difficulty understanding others’ perspectives
  * Difficulty empathizing with others’ feelings

* Decreased social motivation
  * Less participation in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, clubs, teams)
Consequences of Social Difficulties for Adolescents with ASD

* Peer rejection
* Feelings of loneliness, depression, anxiety and isolation
* Social complications then can continue to negatively impact other important life areas and transitions:
  * College
  * Dating
  * Finding & Maintaining Employment
Friendship is a protective factor
Just having one or two friends
* Can help buffer the impact of stressful life events
* Predicts better adjustment in later life
* Increases self-esteem/confidence & supports independence
* Protects individuals from peer victimization
Lack of friends is strongly associated with depression and anxiety
What is PEERS?

* Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS)
* Adolescents (ages 11-17) with “higher functioning” ASD with sound cognitive (IQ at least 70 and above) and verbal ability.
* 14-week curriculum (90-min sessions) with concurrent structured parent involvement
  * Parents trained to become social coaches
* 1-5 year long-term treatment gains
Evidence-Based Methods for Teaching Social Skills

* Small group (7-10 participants) format
* Didactic instruction (concrete rules & steps) using Socratic questioning method
* Role-playing and modeling
* Perspective-taking questions targeting social cognition
* Behavioral rehearsal
* Social coaching from therapist(s) & parent(s) (several opportunities to get performance feedback)
* Homework exercises (with parent assistance; promotes generalization)
PEERS Videos

* Role Play example(s)
Other PEERS Programs

* School-Based
* Young Adult
* Preschool
Thank you!

* Questions?
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