

**Centennial Honors College
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ABSTRACT

Major: Psychology

Poster

Faculty Mentor(s): Leigh Ann Fisler

Exploring the PEERS® Program with an Online Adaptation in a Community Setting

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The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS®) is an evidence-based social skills program for autistic teens and adults traditionally consisting of 16 weekly group sessions with didactic lessons aimed to improve skills such as making and keeping friends, conflict, bullying, and rejection. With over a decade of research, PEERS® has proven outcomes for autistic adolescents in the areas of social skills and social relationship building. PEERS® has shown improvement in overall social skills knowledge, an increase in hosting and having invited get-togethers, and lower rates of social problems (Laugeson et al., 2012; Schohl et al., 2014). With recent needs in a post-pandemic era, PEERS® has been adapted from its traditional in-person format to an online model (Estabillo et al., 2022), possibly enhancing accessibility. We hypothesized that the participants would show a reduction in social anxiety and loneliness and that parents who showed more active engagement during the intervention would demonstrate improvement in their ratings of parental empowerment as the level of support for their adolescent changes.

Participants were 7 adolescents (mean age 14.4 years) and their parent/caregiver participated in the program, also completing pre- and post-surveys. Paired samples t-tests were conducted, revealing a significant reduction in social anxiety in teens post-intervention ($t = -2.78, p < .05$), with a positive correlation ($r = .99, p < .001$). While loneliness scores also correlated ($r = .93, p < .01$), a non-significant change post-intervention was observed ($t = 1.10, p = .32$). Ratings of parental empowerment showed no significant change ($p = .21$).