

PEERS — THE ART OF SOCIALIZING

For many people, making and keeping friends does not come easy. The nuances of how to handle difficult situations, or how to keep a conversation going are not intuitive which can be stressful and frustrating. Add on the confusion of getting advice on how to handle these situations (especially bad advice!) and the whole process can seem very overwhelming.

Miscommunication can make it hard for adults with autism to navigate the social world. Reciprocal conversation skills can be lost in translation with the many hidden social rules and subtle body language cues that they may not pick up on. For children with autism, there is a huge emphasis on early intervention programs to teach these necessary skills. However, as we grow and develop many of these skills change and become more diverse, making the information taught in these early intervention programs a bit out-dated for an adult trying to socialize with peers.

PEERS for Young Adults is an educational program that can help with these very issues.

It is a social skills training program for adults with autism spectrum disorder and other social challenges. In the summer of 2016, we offered our first PEERS program at ARC to help our members with some of these communication skills. PEERS is a social skills curriculum program, which uses evidence based techniques to teach concrete social skills to young adults on the spectrum. Throughout the program, young adults learn how to communicate appropriately to find, make and keep friends. The program then teaches the young adults how to use these skills to form romantic relationships as well.

In March of 2016 the Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders published an article titled The Effectiveness of Social Skills Training Groups for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, explaining that “individuals with ASD experience high rates of anxiety, particularly social anxiety, with an estimated 50% of adults with ASD experiencing an anxiety disorder.” The article goes on to explain that because of this social anxiety, many adults with ASD tend to avoid social situations and have trouble making friends. The PEERS program aims to help with this social anxiety by teaching young adults concrete social skills, which in turn will decrease the amount of negative social interactions they experience. Once social interactions become a positive experience, social anxieties will begin to disappear.

As mentioned earlier, the PEERS program is an evidence-based curriculum, and has been the topic of interest for many studies. Research has proven that with the help of PEERS, young adults are not only able to increase their social skills but also maintain them once the program is over.

In 2015 a study of 22 young adults who attended the PEERS program at UCLA found strong evidence linked to the effectiveness the program in the improvement, generalization, and durability of social skills related to the development and maintenance of relationships for young adults on the autism spectrum.

Although we are only in the second session of our PEERS program through ARC, we hope to have the same results.

If you want more information on PEERS please call ARC at (306) 569-0858.