

The Efficacy of Group Social Skills Interventions for Adolescents and Young Adults with Pragmatic Language Deficits

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Objective:

Social skills interventions (SSIs) are commonly used to address deficits in pragmatic language associated with a variety of conditions, including autism spectrum disorder. Two common SSIs are Social Thinking, primarily for children and adolescents, and PEERS (Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills), designed for young adults. These programs are both currently utilized at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC). The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of these two programs from two perspectives: the clinicians who administer the programs, and the caregivers of individuals who have participated in them.

Method:

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of two SSIs used at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics through retrospective questionnaires. Online questionnaires were distributed to caregivers whose children had participated in one of the programs, as well as clinicians who had administered them. Questions included statements about various aspects of the programs (e.g., length of program, helpfulness of homework assignments, etc.). Descriptive Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree were used to capture survey participants' opinions on these statements. Results were collected anonymously via Qualtrics over the course of three weeks. Nine clinicians and two caregivers responded to the survey. Results displayed reflect the results of the clinician survey. Analysis of survey results included estimation and interpretation of descriptive sample statistics.

Results/Conclusion:

A total of nine clinicians and two caregivers responded to the survey; given the small number of caregiver participants, results were drawn from the clinician survey only. Program length was the only factor where multiple participants indicated disagreement that the parameter was appropriate, indicating a lack of consensus about how many sessions are needed. Some members may benefit from more sessions to practice skills, while others may tire of multiple sessions covering the same topics. Optional extra practice sessions could address this need.

Lessons were considered helpful more consistently than homework or parent trainings. This could be expected, as the lessons take up the majority of session time. Clinicians can brainstorm ways to improve the effectiveness of homework and parent trainings, such as a mid-week check-in on homework assignments and parent mentorship from parents who have previously participated in the targeted programs.

Overall these SSI programs were considered helpful, indicating that they should continue to be offered at UIHC. However, the number of participants was extremely limited. Additional studies targeting a wider group of individuals could help to better understand client and caregiver perceptions of SSIs and determine what, if any, changes would be most beneficial.