Effective Mentoring for Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Background on PEER program

• Studies in the general population have shown that mentoring is an effective way to promote positive youth development, including improved social outcomes.

• Mentoring for youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders has not been described.

• We developed a short-term program in which college students served as mentors for teenagers with Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism, and assessed its effect on their self-esteem, social anxiety and quality of life.
Methods

• Nine youth, age 14-18, were each paired with a college-aged mentor to complete a 6-month program called Partners Exploring Education and Recreation (PEER).

• Mentoring pairs met once a week for two hours at a local Boys & Girls Club (BGC). They chose activities from six core areas: Art, Education, Leadership, Life Skills, Recreation and Technology.

• Program feasibility was evaluated by satisfaction reports from youth, parents, mentors, and BGC staff.

• Program efficacy was assessed by comparing baseline and outcome measures of quality of life, self-esteem, and social anxiety.
Come ye Men and Women of Tomorrow,
Here is an Open Doorway to Success &,
To Enter
Results

Mean Scores Before and After Intervention

- Teen Peds-QL
- Parent Peds-QL

[Bar chart showing mean scores before and after intervention for different categories such as Health & Activities, Feelings, Getting Along, School, Health & Activities, Feelings, Getting Along, School.]
Results

Self Esteem:

Social Worries Scale:
Results

**PARENTS:** All parents described the mentoring relationship as very positive. 75% of them reported their child’s progress on set goals was *somewhat* or *very successful*.

Parents on average reported increased quality of life in all domains, and somewhat fewer signs of social anxiety (see Figure).

**YOUTH:** 89% of teens reported that it was “very true” that they felt happy around their mentor, while 11% reported that this was “sort of” true.

Their reported self-esteem, social anxiety, and quality of life in all domains improved over the 6 months of the program (see Figure).

**MENTORS:** All mentors reported that the PEER program was a good experience.

**BGC STAFF:** Staff of the Boys and Girls Club rated the program as “very successful” and reported positive changes in mentees’ behavior.
The Autism Awareness Ribbon

The puzzle pattern of this ribbon reflects the mystery and complexity of autism. The different colors and shapes represent the diversity of people and families living with this disorder. The brightness of this ribbon signals hope - hope through research and increasing awareness in people like you.
“If you have met one person with Autism, you’ve met ONE person with Autism.”
Demographics

• 1 in 88 children have an ASD; some report as high as 1 in 50 (CDC, 2013)

• Boys are nearly five times more likely than girls to have an ASD

• ASDs across all ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses

http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html
Triad

• Language and Communication

• Social Interaction

• Repetitive Behaviors or limited interests
Common Strengths of individuals with ASD

- Good visual memory and long term memory
- Attention to detail
- Ability to learn rote material easily
- Tendency to be logical
- Perfectionism, eagerness to please.
- Taking things apart and putting them back together.
- Ability to learn routines, adherence to rules and schedules.
- Knowledge of specific subjects of interest.
- For some, exceptional abilities in art, music, technology etc.

http://www.ct-asrc.org/docs/autismpervasive.pdf
Hidden Curriculum

The *Hidden Curriculum* is skills we are all expected to know in order to function in society, such as:

- non-verbal communication
- conversational skills
- interpersonal skills
Pragmatics Exercise

Try saying the word “Really” five times in a row, but change the meaning each time as follows:

How cool is that?! 
I don't believe you. 
I'm shocked. 
I'm delighted. 
I'm telling the truth.
Literal Interpretation
Visual Communication

Visual Checklist
Helpful Strategies

Structure & routines
Clear, Consistent expectations
Preview and review
Visual Supports
  Schedule (transitions)
  Rules
  Timers, Clocks
Reinforcers

Curtin, Carol. PEER Mentor Training.
Five Roots of a Behavior

Attention
Tangible Demand
Avoidance
Escape
Stimulation
Role Modeling Proper Social Etiquette

- Practice set phrases
- Role-play difference scenarios
- Practice conversation skills
- Observe
Prosocial Behaviors to be Encouraged

- Initiate a greeting, small talk, or conversation.
- Respond to comments or questions from others.
- Reduce interruptions
- Stay on topic
- Make eye-contact and use nonverbal communication integrated with his or her words.

Taking turn at the appropriate time.
Making Social Opportunities Enjoyable

- Ensuring that the social demands aren’t too high and don’t require too much effort.

- Using a lot of humor, games and fun activities

- Incorporating youth’s special interests.

- Including people he/she likes
Tips for Encouraging Active Participation

- Meeting before youth enters activity
- Debriefing after activity
- Providing Covert Cues.
Nurtured Heart Approach

Relentlessly look for and reflect back the positive behaviors, qualities and success in the moment they are happening.

Consistently set limits on negative behaviors or broken rules with mild and brief consequences. (Example: taking a break).

Refuse to get drawn into, and feed negativity with attention and relationship.
Positive Reinforcement:

Following a behavior, a consequence that increases the likelihood that the behavior will happen again in the future:

✓ When you use your store discount card, you pay less for the stuff you need, and you’ll be more likely to use the card in the future.

✓ If a co-worker compliments your new hairstyle, you may wear it that way more often.

✓ When you wake up early to get to the gym before work, you feel energized and healthy all day. You may do early morning workouts more regularly.

Curtin, Carol. PEER Mentor Training.
Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcer: the consequence after a behavior (sometimes called “reward” or “incentive”)

Individualized
Some are intrinsic, some are extrinsic

General examples:
- Feelings of pride/ accomplishment
- Thank you note
- Compliment
- Credit card rewards programs
- Anything that serves to INCREASE BEHAVIOR.
Activity
Helping Children Understand their Peers with Autism

Examples for Explaining Differences in:

• Behaviors

• Sensory Experiences

• Communication
Tips for Facilitating Friendship

• Plan cooperative games and activities that build a team.

• Model an open and accepting attitude.

• Highlight the capacity of all children to “give”.

• Teach children to slow down.

• Establish your program as a “No Teasing Zone”

ANY QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU!!