

## **The Young Adult PEERS Program** **at UAB Civitan-Sparks Clinics**

### **What is PEERS?**

The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS) is a 14 to 16-week social skills intervention for motivated young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders who are interested in learning ways to help them make and keep friends. The PEERS intervention has demonstrated significant positive outcomes in clinical trials and follow-up with teens and young adults (Gantman, Kapp, Orenski, & Laugeson, 2009; Frankel, Gantman, Mogil, & Dillon, 2008; Laugeson, Frankel, Mogil, & Dillon, 2009). During each group session, young adults are taught important social skills and are given the opportunity to practice these skills in session during socialization activities. Parents/caregivers are taught how to assist their young adults in making and keeping friends by providing feedback through coaching during weekly socialization homework assignments. The PEERS program requires commitment by both young adults and their caregivers. Dr. Sarah O'Kelley, Director of the Autism Spectrum Disorders Clinic at UAB Civitan-Sparks Clinics, received training at UCLA to become certified to provide the PEERS program. For more information about the original UCLA PEERS program, see [www.semel.ucla.edu/peers](http://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers).

### **What do young adults learn in PEERS?**

Participants learn important friendship-building skills including:

- How to use appropriate conversational skills
- How to find common interests by trading information
- How to use electronic forms of communication
- How to choose appropriate friends
- How to use humor appropriately
- How to enter and exit conversations between peers
- How to handle rejection, teasing, and bullying
- How to handle rumors and gossip
- How to be a good host during get-togethers
- How to be a good sport
- How to handle arguments and disagreements
- How to deal with peer pressure
- Dating etiquette/skills

### **How can my young adult and family become involved in PEERS?**

An application and in-person intake session will be required before being enrolled in the PEERS program to determine whether PEERS is appropriate for the family. Fees for groups will be due at the first session and may be covered by insurance. At this time, the PEERS program at UAB Civitan-Sparks Clinics will be offered for individuals with diagnoses of Autism Spectrum Disorder (including Asperger's Disorder and high-functioning Autism and PDD-NOS); individuals with other developmental disabilities may be included in future groups. Contact the UAB PEERS team at [peers@uab.edu](mailto:peers@uab.edu) for more information or to be added to a mailing list for PEERS intervention groups. Dr. O'Kelley can also be reached at 205-975-5781.

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