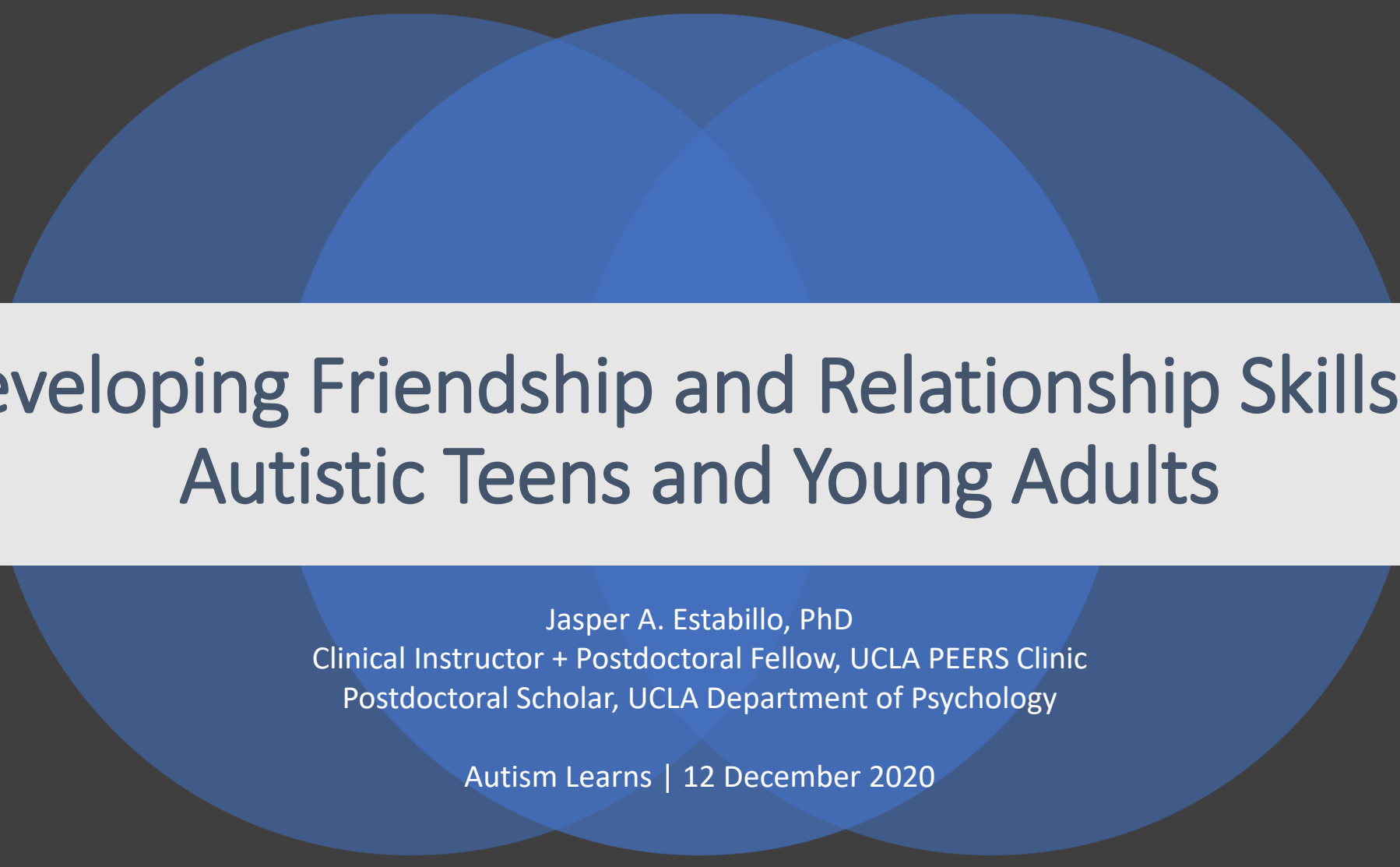




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Developing Friendship and Relationship Skills in Autistic Teens and Young Adults

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Clinical Instructor + Postdoctoral Fellow, UCLA PEERS Clinic
Postdoctoral Scholar, UCLA Department of Psychology

Autism Learns | 12 December 2020

Agenda

- Social challenges in autistic individuals
- Importance of teaching friendship and relationship skills
- PEERS® background and skills covered
- Starting conversations
- Get-togethers
- Resources

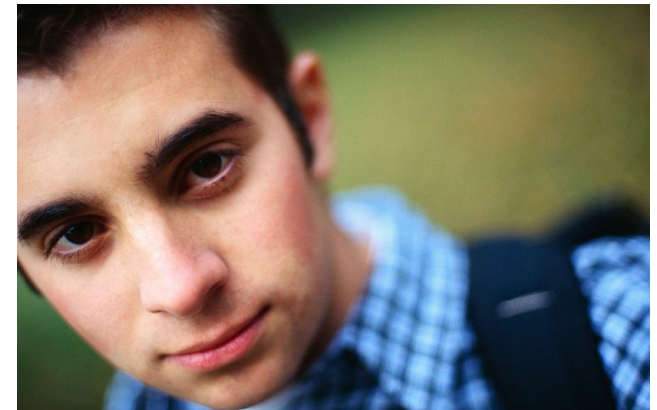
Social Difficulties Among Individuals with ASD

- Social communication challenges
 - Problems with topic initiation
 - Use of repetitive themes: perseveration on restricted interests, ignore other person's interests
 - One-sided conversations: elicit fewer extended responses, give fewer reciprocal responses, fail to identify common interests
 - Difficulty providing relevant information
 - Make unexpected leaps in topics
 - Pedantic speaking style
 - Poor speech prosody
 - Difficulty interpreting verbal and nonverbal social cues: voice tone, sarcasm, gestures, social touch

(Volkmar & Klin, 1998; Baumringer & Kasari, 2000; Orsmond, Krauss, & Seltzer, 2004; Koning & Magil-Evans, 2001; LeCouteur et al., 1989; Marks, Schrader, Longaker, & Levine, 2000; Ghaziuddin & Gerstein, 1996; Twatchman-Cullen, 1998; Hemphill & Siperstein, 1990; Church, Alisanki, Amanullah, 2000; Constantino, 2005)

Social Difficulties Among Individuals with ASD

- Social awareness challenges
 - Poor eye contact
 - Difficulty understanding social cues
- Social motivation difficulties
 - Less involvement in social activities
 - Less peer entry attempts
 - Fewer social initiations
- Social cognition challenges
 - Difficulty understanding others' perspectives
 - Poor theory of mind
 - Deficits in cognitive empathy



(Volkmar & Klin, 1998; Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Orsmond, Krauss, & Seltzer, 2004; Koning & Magill-Evans, 2001; LeCouteur et al., 1989; Marks, Schrader, Longaker, & Levine, 2000; Ghaziuddin & Gerstein, 1996; Twatchman-Cullen, 1998; Hemphill & Siperstein, 1990; Church, Alisanki, Amanullah, 2000)

Peer Rejection and Social Neglect

- Peer rejection
 - Teasing and bullying
 - Bad reputations
 - Actively seeking out peers
 - Autism, ADHD, mood disorders, impulse control disorders
- Social neglect
 - Isolated and withdrawn
 - Ignored and unnoticed
 - Actively avoiding peers
 - Autism, anxiety, depression, internalizing disorders



Photo of PEERS® courtesy of Associated Press

(Volkmar & Klin, 1998; Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Orsmond, Krauss, & Seltzer, 2004; Koning & Magill-Evans, 2001; LeCouteur et al., 1989; Marks, Schrader, Longaker, & Levine, 2000; Ghaziuddin & Gerstein, 1996; Twatchman-Cullen, 1998; Hemphill & Siperstein, 1990; Church, Alisanki, Amanullah, 2000)

Consequences of Peer Rejection

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Low self-esteem
- Substance use
- Poor academic performance
- Early withdrawal from school
- Suicidal ideation and attempts



Photo of PEERS® courtesy of Associated Press

(Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Nansel et al., 2001; Buhrmeister, 1990; Matson, Smirolido, & Bamburg, 1998; Miller & Ingham, 1976)

Why Target Friendships and Relationships?

- Having 1 or 2 close friends:
 - Predicts later adjustment in life
 - Can buffer the impact of stressful life events
 - Correlated positively with:
 - Self-esteem
 - Independence
 - Correlated negatively with:
 - Depression
 - Anxiety

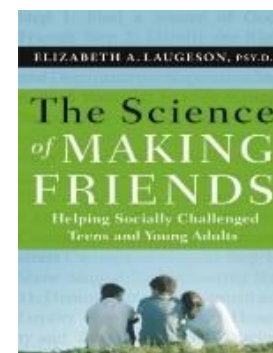
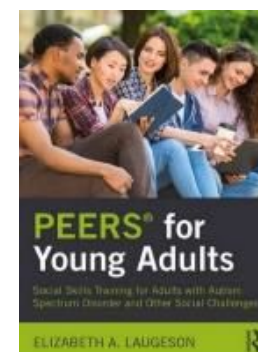
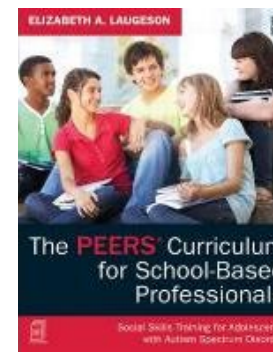
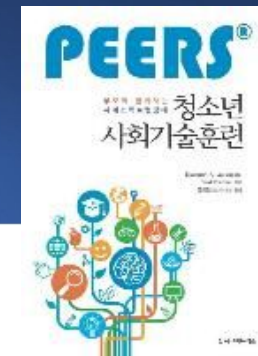
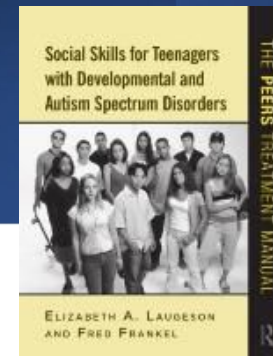


Photo of PEERS® courtesy of LA Times

(Buhrmeister, 1990; Matson, Smirolodo, & Bamburg, 1998; Miller & Ingham, 1976)

Background about PEERS®

- International program
 - Developed at UCLA in 2004
 - Programs have been translated into over a dozen languages
 - Used in over 85 countries
- Evidence-based social skills programs:
 - PEERS® for Preschoolers
 - PEERS® for Adolescents
 - PEERS® for Young Adults
- Research programs:
 - PEERS® for Careers
 - PEERS® for Dating
 - PEERS® L-Dopa



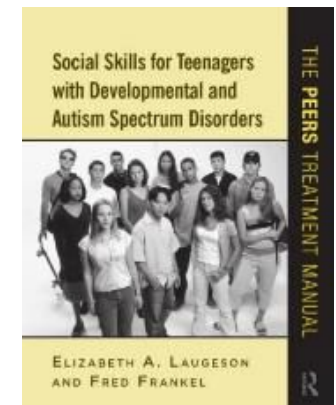
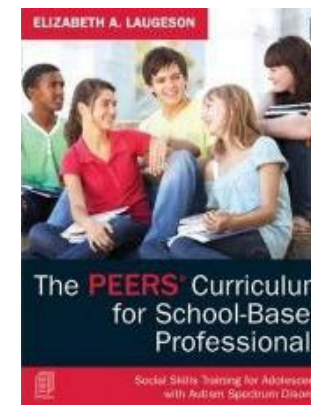
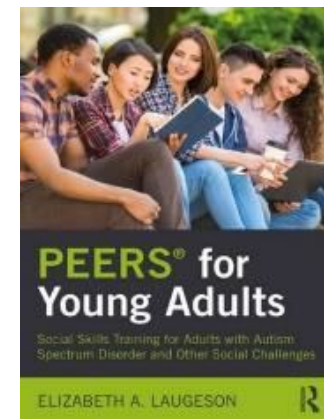
Unique Aspects of PEERS®

- One of the only evidence-based social skills programs
 - ONLY evidence-based social skills program with teens and adults with ASD and other social challenges
- Parent- or caregiver-assisted
 - Parents and other caregivers are trained as social coaches
- Only teaches **ecologically valid** social skills
 - Teaches rules and steps followed by socially successful people
- Cross-culturally adapted across the globe
 - 7 scientific papers published outside of the US

PEERS® Targeted Social Skills

Friendships and Romantic Relationships

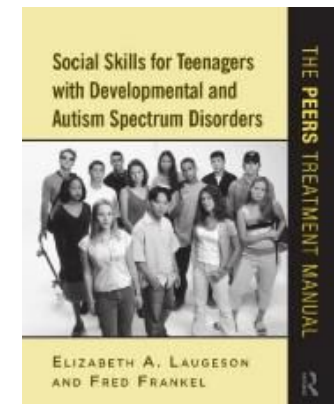
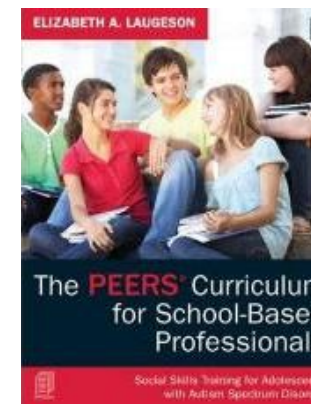
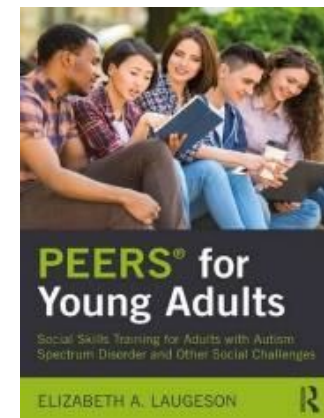
- Finding and choosing good friends
- Finding and choosing romantic partners (adults)
- Conversational skills
- Starting and entering conversations
- Exiting conversations
- Electronic communication
- Appropriate use of humor
- Get-togethers
- Good sportsmanship (teens)
- Dating etiquette (adults)
 - Letting someone know you like them
 - Asking someone on a date
 - Organizing and planning a date
 - General dating dos and don'ts



PEERS® Targeted Social Skills

Managing Conflict & Rejection

- Dating etiquette (adults)
 - Handling rejection
 - Politely turning someone down for a date
 - Handling unwanted dating pressure
- Handling disagreements
- Changing a bad reputation (teens)
- Handling direct bullying
 - Teasing and embarrassing feedback
 - Physical bullying
- Handling indirect bullying
 - Cyber bullying
 - Rumors and gossip



Finding and Choosing Friends and Romantic Partners

- Friendships and romantic relationships are based on **COMMON INTERESTS**
- People often affiliate with specific peer groups or crowds based on their interests
- Peer groups and crowds are important for:
 - Giving us a source of friends and romantic partners
 - Finding potential friends and romantic partners with common interests
 - Protecting us from individual bullying

(Laugeson & Frankel 2010; Laugeson 2013; Laugeson 2014; Laugeson 2017)

Acknowledge & Emphasize Choice

FRIENDSHIP IS A CHOICE!

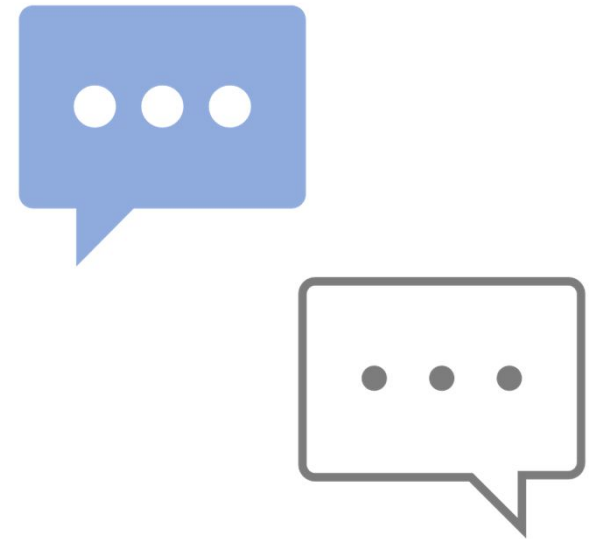
- We don't get to be friends with everyone, and everyone doesn't get to be friends with us

DATING IS A CHOICE!

- We don't get to date everyone, and everyone doesn't get to date us

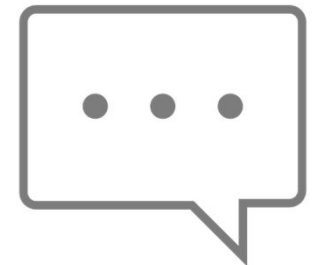
Trading Information

- Ask the other person questions
- Answer your own questions
- Find **common interests**
- Share the conversation
- Ask follow-up questions
- Ask open-ended questions



Trading Information

- Don't be a conversation hog
- Don't be an interviewer
- Don't get too personal at first
- Avoid risky topics: sex, money, politics, religion
- Don't brag
- Don't be argumentative
- Use good volume control
- Use good body boundaries
- Use good eye contact



Assessing Interest in Conversations

- Eye contact
 - *Are they looking at you?*
- Body language
 - *Are they facing you?*
- Verbal signs
 - *Are they talking to you?*



(Laugeson & Frankel 2010; Laugeson 2013; Laugeson 2014; Laugeson 2017)

Starting & Joining Conversations

QUESTION:

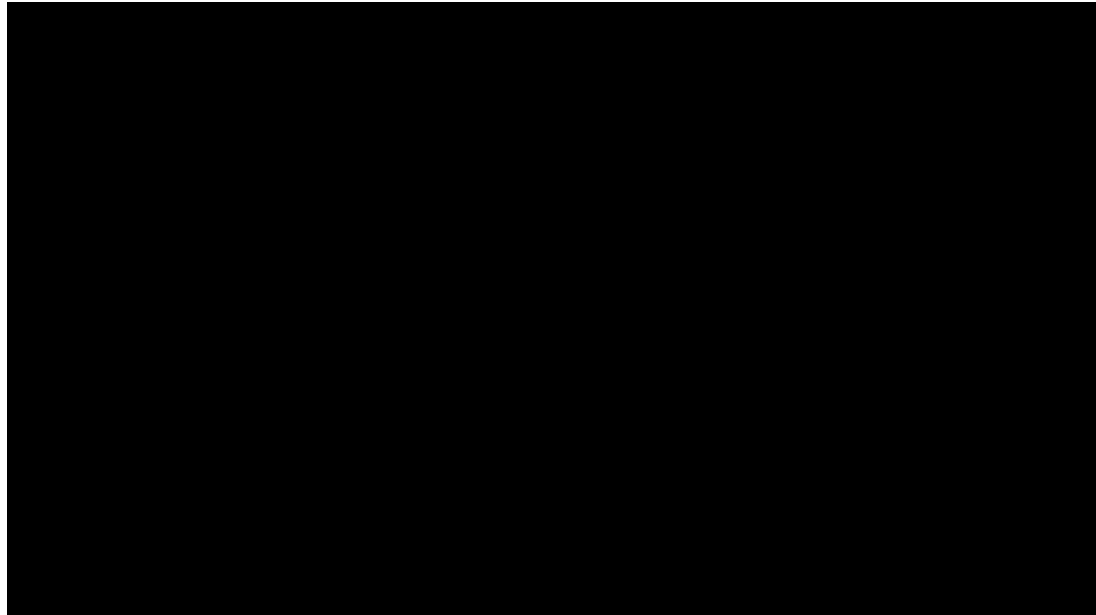
- What are most young people told to do to meet new people?



Starting Individual Conversations

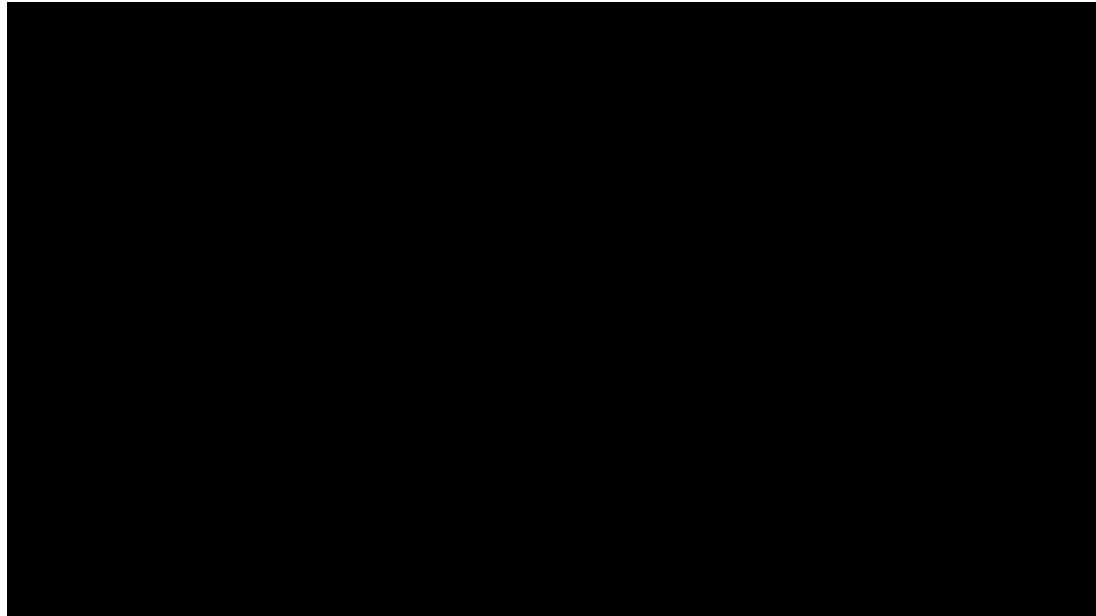
QUESTIONS:

- How do you start a conversation with another person?
- What social errors might a peer rejected person make when starting conversations?
- What social errors might a social neglected person make when starting conversations?



PEERS® Steps for Starting Individual Conversations

1. Casually look over
2. Use a prop
3. Find a common interest
4. Mention the common interest
 - Make a comment
 - Ask a question
 - Give a compliment
5. Trade information
6. Assess interest
 - Are they looking at you?
 - Are they facing you?
 - Are they talking to you?
7. Introduce yourself (optional)



Modified Steps for Starting Individual Conversations Online

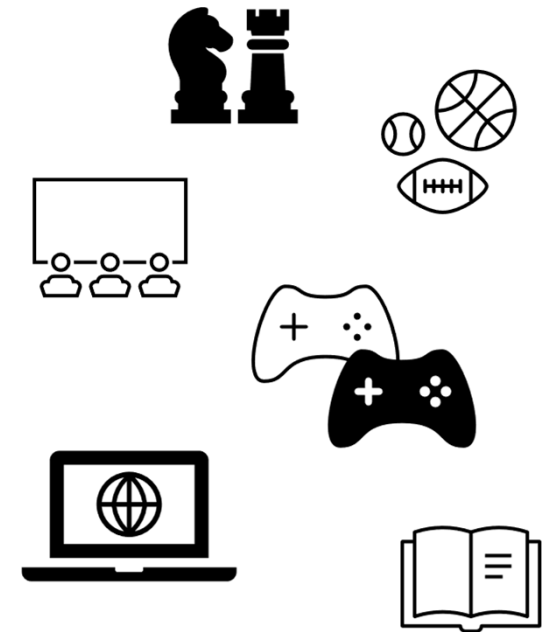
1. Casually look over
2. Find a common interest
3. Mention the common interest
4. Trade information
5. Assess interest
6. Introduce yourself (optional)



Get-Togethers

QUESTIONS:

- How do you develop close meaningful relationships?
- How do you organize get-togethers or dates?



Planning Get-Togethers

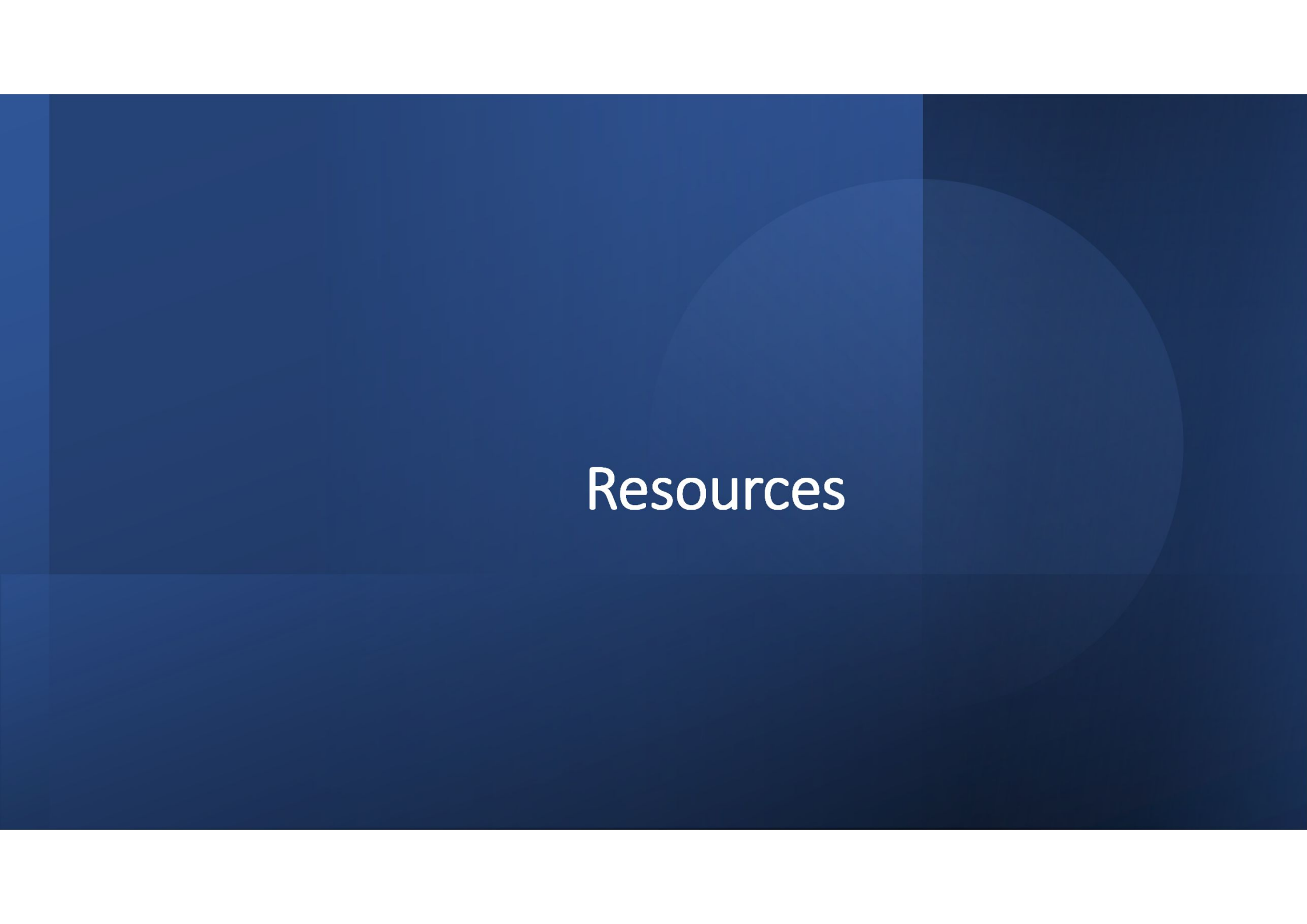
- Make a plan using the 5 Ws:
 - WHO is going to be there
 - WHAT you're going to do
 - WHERE you're going to get together
 - WHEN you're going to get together
 - HOW the get-together is going to happen



Photo of PEERS® courtesy of Associated Press

Conclusion

- Supporting friendship and relationship skills in autistic teens and young adults continues to be of high importance
- Skills should be taught using methods that help individuals with ASD learn
 - Concrete rules and steps
 - Perspective taking questions
 - Opportunities to practice and receive feedback
 - Assignments and social coaching to promote skill generalization
- Necessary to continue teaching ecologically valid skills across the lifespan

The background is a solid dark blue. A large, lighter blue circle is positioned on the right side, partially overlapping the edge. Two vertical lines of a slightly different shade of blue run from the top to the bottom of the frame, one on the left and one on the right, creating a sense of depth and structure.

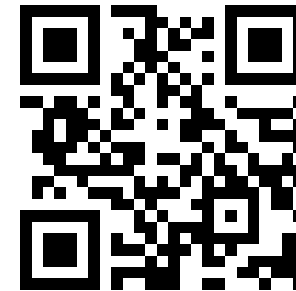
Resources

PEERS® Resources

- Role Play Video Library
<https://bit.ly/PEERSroleplays>



- Online Social Activities (living document)
<https://bit.ly/PEERSONline>



UCLA PEERS® Educational Classes

- 16-week program, plus optional 4 weeks of dating skills
- Teen group and young adult group
- Available for participants across the globe

TUESDAYS

4:30-6:00 pm PST

6:30-8:00 pm PST

Participants will learn about:

- Using social media and online platforms to develop and maintain friendships
- Conversational skills
- Friendship skills
- Organizing get-togethers
- Conflict resolution
- Good sportsmanship
- Changing a bad reputation
- Handling teasing and bullying



PEERS® Online Social Skills Class
Plus optional dating lessons!

- PEERS® is an evidence-based social skills intervention for motivated teens and young adults who are interested in making and keeping friends and/or handling conflict and rejection.
- Teens and/or young adults attend 16 weekly classes over Zoom for 90-minutes each week, plus an optional 4 weeks of dating skills.
- Participants are taught social skills through didactic lessons and role-play demonstrations, and practice these skills during online socialization activities.
- Social coaches attend separate classes simultaneously and are taught how to assist their teens in making and keeping friends.
- Groups for adolescents and groups for young adults are now enrolling!

Now enrolling families worldwide!

To enroll, please contact
(310) 267-3377
peersclinic@ucla.edu

For more information, visit
www.semel.ucla.edu/peers

 www.facebook.com/uclapeers  [@UCLAPEERS](https://twitter.com/UCLAPEERS)  [@UCLAPEERS](https://www.instagram.com/UCLAPEERS)

UCLA PEERS® Virtual Boot Camp

- 35 episodes
- Covers ALL the skills taught in PEERS®
- Go at your own pace
- Available on the UCLA PEERS® YouTube channel
- Access never expires

Open to all, including children, teens, young adults, parents, professionals, and educators.



PEERS® VIRTUAL BOOT CAMP

Includes **35 PRE-RECORDED EPISODES** covering **ALL PEERS® skills**

PRESENTED BY DR. ELIZABETH LAUGESON, DEVELOPER OF PEERS®,
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, UCLA PEERS® CLINIC

To register:
peersclinic@ucla.edu
(310) 267-3377

Topics Covered:

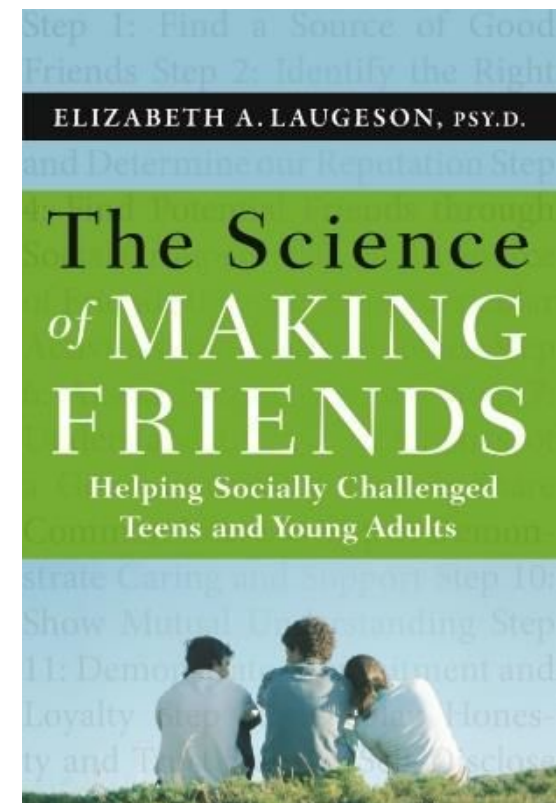
- Friendship skills
- Dating etiquette
- Conversational skills
- Conflict resolution
- Handling bullying

GO AT YOUR OWN PACE while receiving instruction on concrete rules and steps of social etiquette, video role-play demonstrations, and suggestions for practicing skills at the end of every episode.

www.facebook.com/uclapeers [@UCLAPEERS](https://twitter.com/UCLAPEERS) [@UCLAPEERS](https://www.instagram.com/uclapeers)

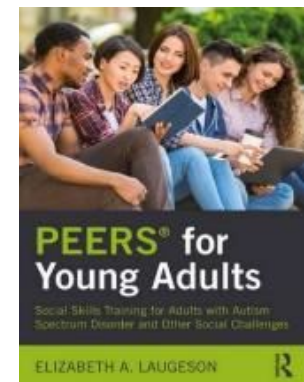
The Science of Making Friends: Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Young Adults

- Parent book
- Friendship skills
- Handling peer rejection and conflict
- Parent section
 - Narrative lessons
 - Social coaching tips
- Chapter summaries for teens and young adults
- Chapter exercises/homework
- Companion DVD
 - Role play videos



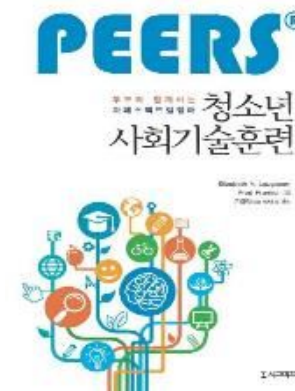
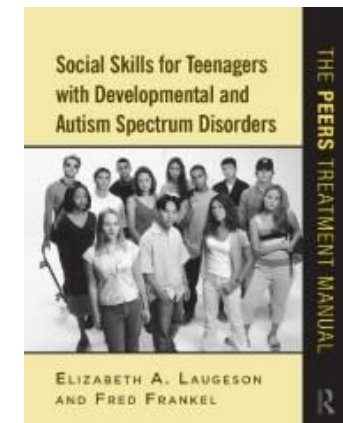
PEERS® for Young Adults Teleconference for Professionals

- Certified Teleconference at UCLA: February 3-5, 2021
- 16-week curriculum
- Weekly 90-minute young adult sessions and caregiver sessions
- Social coaching handouts
- Addresses core deficits for ASD
- Focuses on friendship and relationship skills and strategies for handling peer rejection and conflict
- Teaches ecologically valid social skills



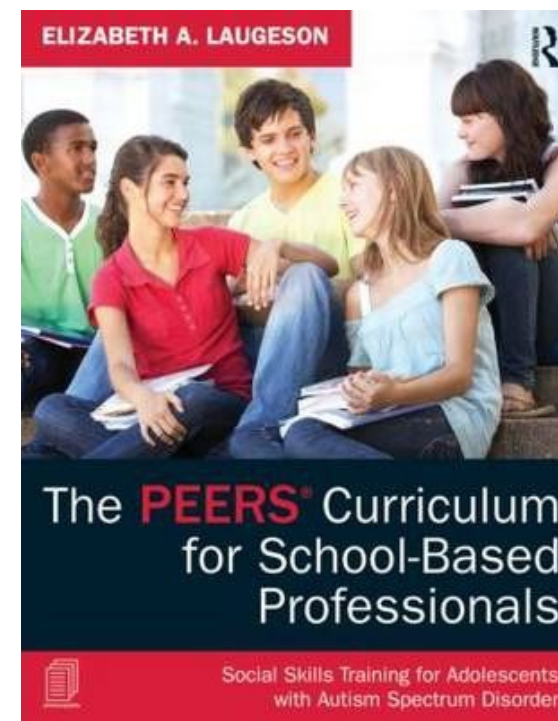
PEERS® for Adolescents Teleconference for Professionals

- Certified Teleconference at UCLA: April 19-21, 2021
- 14-week curriculum
- Weekly 90-minute teen sessions and parent sessions
- Parent handouts
- Addresses core deficits for ASD
- Focuses on friendship skills and strategies for handling peer rejection and conflict
- Teaches ecologically valid social skills



PEERS® for Adolescents School-based Certified Training

- Certified Training at UCLA: June 23-25, 2021
- Teacher-facilitated curriculum
- 16-week program
- Daily lesson plans
- Focuses on friendship skills and strategies for handling peer rejection and conflict
- Includes weekly comprehensive parent handouts



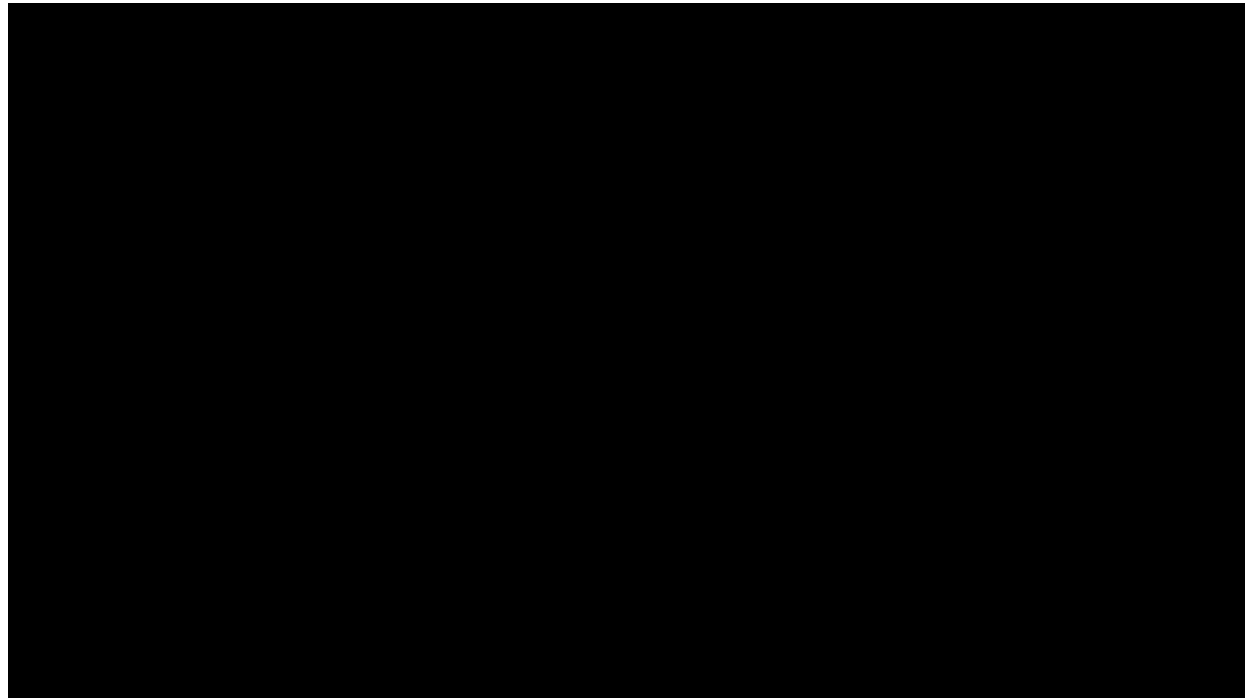
Contact

- PEERS Clinic – peersclinic@ucla.edu
 - Website: www.semel.ucla.edu/peers
 - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram: UCLA PEERS
- Dr. Jasper Estabillo – JEstabillo@mednet.ucla.edu



PEERS® Rules for Talking to Mutual Friends

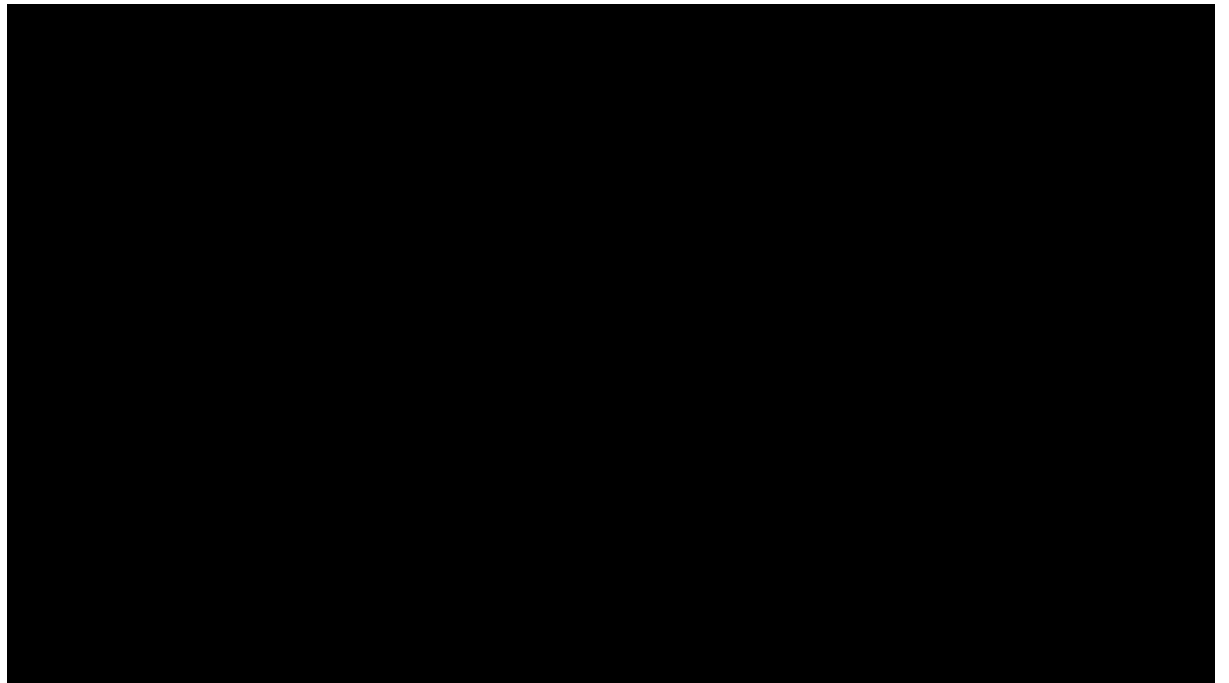
- Tell your friend you like the person
- Ask your friend if the person is dating anyone
- Ask your friend if they think the person would go out with you
- Ask them not to say that you said anything



Flirting with Your Eyes

QUESTION:

- How do people who don't know each other flirt in real life?



PEERS® Steps for Flirting with Your Eyes

1. Make eye contact
2. Give a slight smile
 - Not a big smile
 - No teeth
3. Look away
4. Repeat

