

## Peer Relations in Adolescence: Lessons Learned From Interventions

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*SRA Peer Preconference, March 7, 2012*

### Four Lessons Learned about Peer Relations

- ✦ Peer relation skills can be improved
- ✦ Improvements in peer relations lead to change in related outcomes
- ✦ Peers can provide a supportive Rx context
- ✦ Peer processes can be harnessed as sources of influence

### Lesson 1: PEER RELATIONS CAN BE IMPROVED

- ✦ Malleable skills or stable dispositional characteristics



### Type of Interventions

- ✦ Social skill training (SST)
- ✦ Social problem-solving training
- ✦ Social-emotional learning—covers a range of programs

### Who Benefits?

- ✦ Universal—help all youth
- ✦ Selected/indicated— help youth with peer relations problems

## Social Skills Training

- ✦ Training in discrete social skills such as communication, compromise, use of gesture, coping with rejection
- ✦ Emphasis on **actual behavior** rather than thoughts or feelings
- ✦ Training involves discussion, modeling, rehearsal, feedback

## Selected/Indicated

- ✦ Social skills training typically focus on identified risk
  - ✦ ASD/ Asperger's: PEERS Program (UCLA) high functioning ASD, significant gains in social skills following intervention (Cappadocia & Weiss, 2011)
  - ✦ Delinquency: Positive Talk/ART

## Concerns

- ✦ Culture bound? Are there universal peer relations skills?
- ✦ How do we integrate with context?
- ✦ What about cognition and affect?

## SIP Interventions

- ✦ Improving peer relations through information processing skills.
- ✦ Encoding cues, generating solutions, thinking about multiple consequences, etc.



## SIP for Teens

- ✦ Also focuses on selected/indicated
- ✦ Aggressive, delinquent, not ASD
- ✦ SIP Skills can be improved (Brugman & Bink, 2011; Dierkhsing, Williamson, & Natsuaki, 2012; Guerra & Slaby, 1990).

## SEL Programs

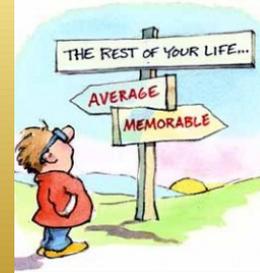
- ✦ Broad range—less distinction between social skills and SIP—including recognizing emotions, achieving goals, making responsible decisions, dealing with conflict.
- ✦ Many programs are universal—linked to improvements (Durlak et al., 2011).

## Lesson 1: Conclusions

- ✦ Peer relations skills are malleable for all youth and for those most at-risk due to skill deficits (main effect)

## Lesson 2: IMPROVEMENT IN SKILLS PREDICT IMPROVEMENTS IN ADJUSTMENT AND BEHAVIOR

- ✦ Peer relations skills as mediators of positive and negative outcomes



## Peer relations and aggression

- ✦ Many interventions with younger children: improved peer relations predicts reductions in aggression over time (CPPRG, 2010)
  - ✦ Particularly for boys (Witvliet, vanLier, Cuijpers, & Koot, 2009)

## Concerns

- ✦ Fewer studies with teens
- ✦ Less research with long-term follow-up and tests of mediation

## Lesson 2: Conclusions

- ✦ Experimentally induced changes in peer relations lead to corresponding improvements in behavior, particularly reductions in aggression.

## Lesson 3: PEER GROUP CAN PROVIDE A SUPPORTIVE CONTEXT FOR Rx

- ✦ For teens, can provide for normalization of problems
- ✦ Personal fable-no one is like me.



### Selected/Indicated Intervention

- ✦ CBT for trauma and grief—components of social support in groups predict outcomes (Layne, Pynoos, & Cardenas, 2001)
- ✦ Linked to sharing and support in group (Saltzman et al., 2001; Stice et al., 2011)
- ✦ Weight loss intervention: Social support predicts weight loss (Jelalian et al., 2011)

### Lesson 3: Conclusions

- ✦ Interventions that harness peer support to provide normalization for trauma and stress-related problems yield positive outcomes—the peer group process can be leveraged for beneficial outcomes.

### Lesson 4: Peers as Change Agents

- ✦ Peer Models
- ✦ Changing peer group norms to change individual behavior



### Peers Models: Leaders and Teachers

- ✦ Peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS)
- ✦ Class-wide peer tutoring
  - Positive effects on social skills and achievement (Greenwood et al., 2010)

### Peers and Attitude Change

- ✦ ASSIST (A stop smoking in school intervention) trained “peer supporters” (the influential students) to encourage others not to smoke and provided anti-smoking messages)
  - ✦ Reduced smoking at 2-year follow up (Campbell et al., 2008)

### Changing Peer Norms

- ✦ Media and school-wide campaigns to shift norms, e.g., bullying prevention—some evidence but usually younger children
- ✦ Identified peer group, typically antisocial and delinquent youth

### Can we change antisocial norms?

- ✦ Positive Peer Culture (PPC) and Guided Group Interaction (GGI) shown to be ineffective with delinquents (Gottfredson, 1987)
- ✦ Gang prevention programs to change gang norms not effective (Guerra et al., 2012).

### Deviant Peer Contagion

- ✦ Not only difficult to change peer norms from antisocial to prosocial, but group process when antisocial youth in the same group may yield negative effects (Dishion et al., 1999)
- ✦ Not always (Weiss et al., 2005)

### Lesson 4: Conclusions

- ✦ Peers learn from others—this can work for intervention or against it, but norms are difficult to change through interventions

### Conclusion

- ✦ Peer relations skills can be improved but peer group norms are resistant to change.
- ✦ Causal link between peer relations and adjustment (mediation)
- ✦ Peer support can help normalize behaviors (social support and deviancy training)

### The End

