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# UCLA PEERS Social Skills Intervention

A brief segment by CBS on PEERS Social Skills Program

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Andrea Levy, 13, hopes being a part of a study on teen autism will help her interact better at school.

"I think that I need the social skills, definitely, and then I'll have the courage more to approach more people," she says.

Andrea and about a dozen other high-functioning teenagers with autism are part of UCLA's "Peers" program. Only some felt comfortable enough to be on-camera, but all are taking the class to learn how to make and keep friends.

The 14-week program teaches these teens things like how to join and carry on a conversation and handling bullies and teasing, which has happened to Andrea.

"Teasing because you're quiet," she explains. "I'm very quiet at school, and if you're quiet, you're called retarded."

UCLA researchers started their studies four-years ago because they saw a huge gap in treatment for teens with autism.

"We haven't really caught up with the fact that our kids are growing up. They're getting older. They need new services. The social skills change," says Liz Laugeson, a researcher in the Peers program.

It's estimated that as many as 1 in 150 children born in the U.S. has some form of autism spectrum disorder.

Laugeson says autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability.

In the "Peers" program, parents discuss how their kids are socializing, and Andrea's mother Gina Levy hopes what they're learning can go beyond this study group.

"If we can bring these skills into the classroom and into the schools, it can help the kids who are just a little bit off socially," Levy says.

Researchers hope to expand their studies from teens to young adults with autism.

[Click here for more on that research.](#)

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