



HEALTHY ADJUSTMENT IN TEENS STUDY (HATS)

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

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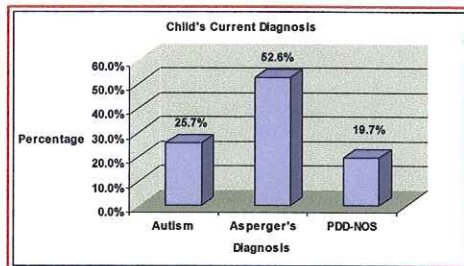
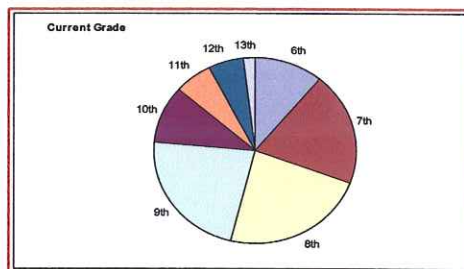
2010-2011

Thank you to everyone who participated in HATS! The purpose of this newsletter is to share the results of HATS with all the participating families, as well as provide resources and other helpful information regarding Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs).

Section 1: Who Participated?

The study had 152 families complete the survey from September 2009 to May 2010. Families hailed from 40 of the 50 States (including Hawaii!) and learned about the study in many different ways, including finding information online (e.g., Autism Speaks website), being contacted by an organization (e.g., Interactive Autism Network) or in person at a conference (e.g., Spring Fling for Autism Awareness).

We had lots of moms participate along with several dads and even a few grandmothers. The teens who participated were primarily male (80%), ranging from 6th - 12th grade and we even had a few post-high school students.



Our "PET" Project

Take our 2 minute survey to tell us whether or not your family has any furry friends!



We want to learn about how many of you have pets at your house! Would you be willing to take this 2 minute, voluntary survey? We will send out HATS email invitation that includes the link to our survey in the week! We can also arrange to have you answer these questions over the phone or mail you a form to complete. Please call us at 773-508-3204 with any questions.

Thank you for your support!

Section 2: Results

Our first goal was to learn more about what contributes to feelings of depression and loneliness in high functioning teens with ASDs.

What we learned:

- Parents and teens generally agreed about the teen's degree of distress and loneliness
- Teens with better social skills reported fewer depressive symptoms and loneliness. The quality of the teen's best friendship was not related to these same adjustment outcomes.
- Teens with better executive functioning skills (i.e., planning/organizing) have better social skills and fewer depressive symptoms and loneliness.



Executive Function
Problems



Social Skill
Problems



Depression & Loneliness

What's Next?

The next step will be to see whether teens who get more help to improve their social skills and executive functions report being less depressed and lonely than those who don't get any help. The ultimate goal is to see whether we can intervene earlier in the process and help them along the way so that youth do not feel as lonely and depressed as they become teenagers.

Our second goal was to identify if participation in organized, after school activities reduces depression and loneliness for those with ASDs.

What we learned:

- Teens involved in activities for more hours per week (intensity), as well as in a greater variety of activities (breadth) reported less depression and loneliness as well as better social skills.

Find ways to get your teen involved in organized activities!!!

What's Next?

The next step will be to see whether there are certain kinds of activities (e.g., sports, religious, academic) or combinations of activities that promote better adjustment and social skills. We will also investigate whether being involved in activities that include "typically" developing teens has a different impact on depression and loneliness than being involved in activities specifically designed for teens with ASDs. We will also see whether therapeutic activities (social support groups, pet therapy, etc.) have the same positive effect.

These results have been submitted to the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) for 2 presentations for their international meeting in the Spring of 2011. If accepted, we will be able to share the HATS results with hundreds of researchers, professionals, and educators from around the world.

Section 3: Resources and Research

Being involved in research and advocacy is a critical way to help increase knowledge and better understand Autism Spectrum Disorders. Here are some links to organizations that provide information on diagnoses and treatment as well as help connect families to local resources and research opportunities.

- Autism Society of America (www.autism-society.org)
- Autism Speaks (www.autismspeaks.org)
- Connect with other ASD researchers with the Interactive Autism Network (www.ianresearch.org)
- Visit the website for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention for tips and resource kits: (www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/families.html)
- Autism Society of North Carolina bookstore (www.autismbookstore.com)

THANKS

TO ALL THE FAMILIES WHO
PARTICIPATED

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