Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a common childhood disorder that often contributes to impairment in multiple domains, including peer functioning. Specifically, youth with ADHD tend to have fewer friends and lower quality friendships, experience greater peer victimization, and engage in more inappropriate social behaviors than typically developing peers. Researchers have highlighted the need for long-term interventions that directly address peer difficulties, emphasize dyadic friendship-building, and include a parent component. Thus, the current pilot study will examine the effectiveness of PEERS, a parent-assisted, friendship-building program, at establishing mutual friendships and improving current peer relationships in adolescents with ADHD.

Participants in the study included 20 adolescents with ADHD (ages 11-16) and their parents. At baseline, adolescents completed measures related to friendship quality, social knowledge, social self-efficacy, get-togethers, and peer conflict. They also participated in a brief observation task as a measure of social interaction behavior. Parents completed measures related to get-togethers and peer conflict. All families completed the Program for the Evaluation and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS), a 14-week intervention. Following the intervention, families completed post-treatment measures and responded to a question regarding the initiation of a new friendship.

Analyses were conducted using a series of paired-samples t-tests examining differences from baseline to post-treatment. Results indicated that the majority of parents and adolescents reported the initiation of a new friendship over the course of treatment. Additionally, there was a significant improvement in adolescent social knowledge and a significant increase in hosted get-togethers. Effect sizes for these variables were large. While the remaining variables demonstrated changes in the expected direction, none of the analyses were significant. Effect sizes ranged from small to moderate.

The current pilot study demonstrated that, following participation in PEERS, adolescents demonstrated improvement in several peer functioning variables. While some analyses were not significant, moderate to large effect sizes were established for some variables, indicating that small sample size may have contributed to non-significant results. A larger sample will allow for better understanding of the effectiveness of PEERS for youth with ADHD and may highlight components of the program that require modification in order to better target the ADHD population.