

AS a teenager, you always have parents and teachers telling you what is right and wrong; Sometimes you respond with "yeah, yeah," and don't take it as seriously as you should because to you, it's just more life lessons and things that "you'll understand when you're an adult." Peer mentors in the Social Thinking Groups help to make the information that Coach Sabra teaches more relevant to the teens so these "yeah, yeah" moments don't happen!

My name is Katy and being a peer model/mentor is my roll when I join into the Social Thinking Groups. When I point out the group members' social mistakes or reinforce Coach Sabra's lesson, the teens with high functioning autism take it more seriously because it is coming from someone their own age. Their peer is telling them that what they are doing or saying is coming off weird or socially odd and it holds much more weight than a teacher telling them.

Another way peer mentors come in handy is when we are talking about what is current or "in the now", such as the media or the hidden social rules in schools. Because I am in high school myself and observe these rules I can help Coach Sabra when we discuss what behaviors are expected and/or unexpected that are much different today than they were when she was in high school.

Having peer mentors participating in the groups also makes it so there is more than one set of eyes who can observe and take note of the expected and unexpected behaviors in the room which helps for more individualized instruction and documentation of behaviors.

But honestly, I too get so much out of the experience. I have had to learn how to get out of my comfort zone because I participate in all the same activities that the group members do. I have also learned valuable skills like how to communicate more effectively and have gained more self-confidence. I get to hang out with some fantastic peers every week; a few have crossed over from acquaintances to become friends over the time we have spent together. I leave with a smile on my face every week!

- Katy