Usability of SPAN for Adolescents with Social Anxiety Incorporating Pet Dogs
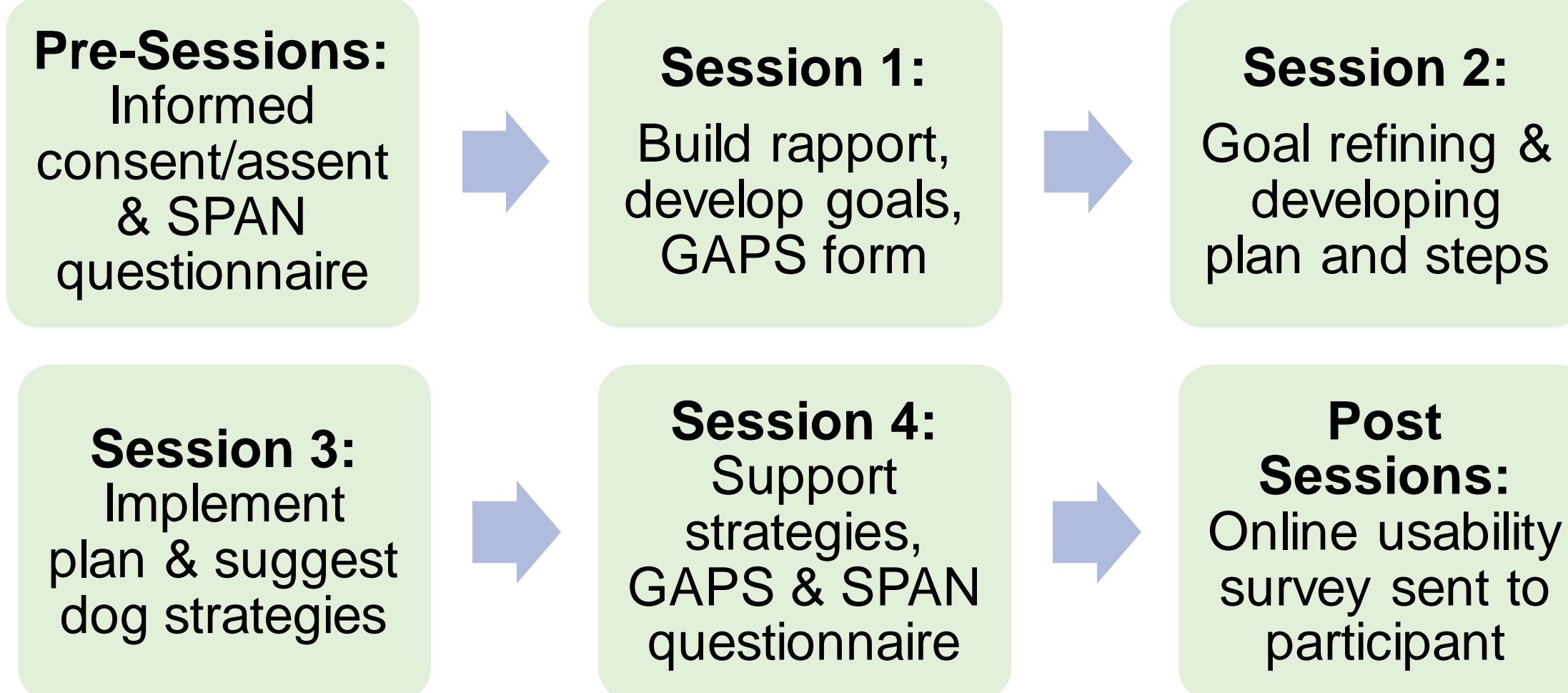
Emily Machado, OT/s, B.S., Gary Bedell, OT, PhD, Zachary Gould, OT/s, M.S., Nicole Porter, OT, OTD, Megan Mueller, PhD

Tufts University — Department of Occupational Therapy

SPAN — Get Out. Get Social.

Introduction

- Appx. 7% of adult US population has social anxiety disorder with symptoms typically starting during adolescence[1]
- Coaching interventions can be an effective strategy for adolescents with social anxiety for increasing social participation[5]

Purpose: this brief 4-week program of Social Participation & Navigation (SPAN) incorporating pet dogs will determine usability and inform larger and longer program for social anxiety population

SPAN Program	Dog Companionship
Existing evidence-based virtual coaching program for adolescents with TBI or brain tumors to promote social participation[3]	Youth-dog interactions provide emotional support, promote social facilitation, support routines, & reduce physiological arousal

Methods

Pre-Sessions: Informed consent/assent & SPAN questionnaire → **Session 1:** Build rapport, develop goals, GAPS form → **Session 2:** Goal refining & developing plan and steps

Session 3: Implement plan & suggest dog strategies → **Session 4:** Support strategies, GAPS & SPAN questionnaire → **Post Sessions:** Online usability survey sent to participant

Participants:
- Recruited from existing participant pool
- N=8, 13–17 years-old (15.1±1.5 years) who own a pet dog
- 6 female; 6 White; 1 Hispanic/Latina
- Scored > 50 on Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A)[4] (Range: 52-74) (66.8±6.8)
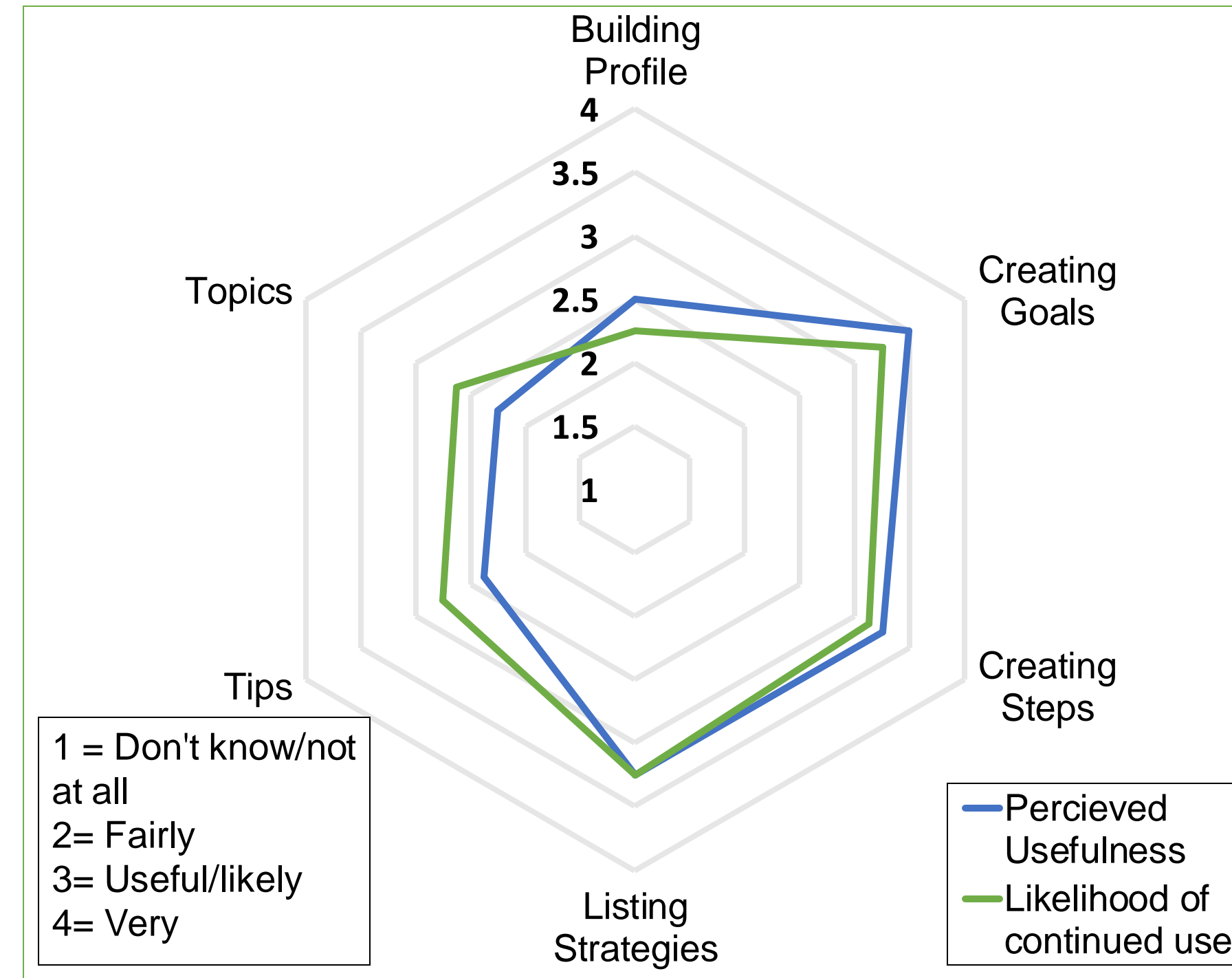
Measures:
- Usability Survey: assesses usefulness & benefits of program on a scale of 1-4 (1=not useful/likely at all, 4=very useful/likely)
- Coach Feedback Form: open-ended survey filled out by coaches at end of program to discuss usefulness, benefits, & improvements needed
- Coach Session Notes: documentation after each session describing plan, strategies, strengths, challenges, etc.
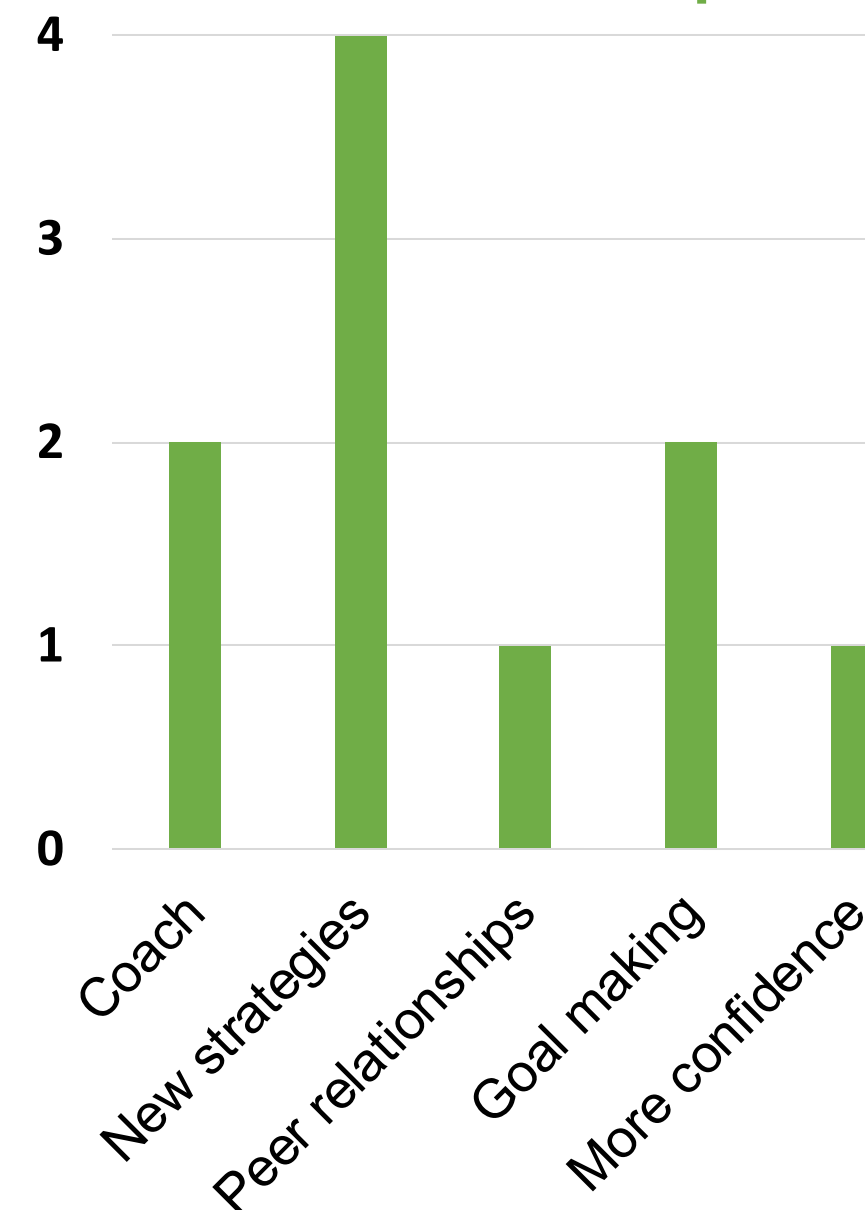
Content Analysis: Key qualitative information was extracted from usability survey, coach feedback form, & coach session notes & themes were developed and summarized in tables shown to the right
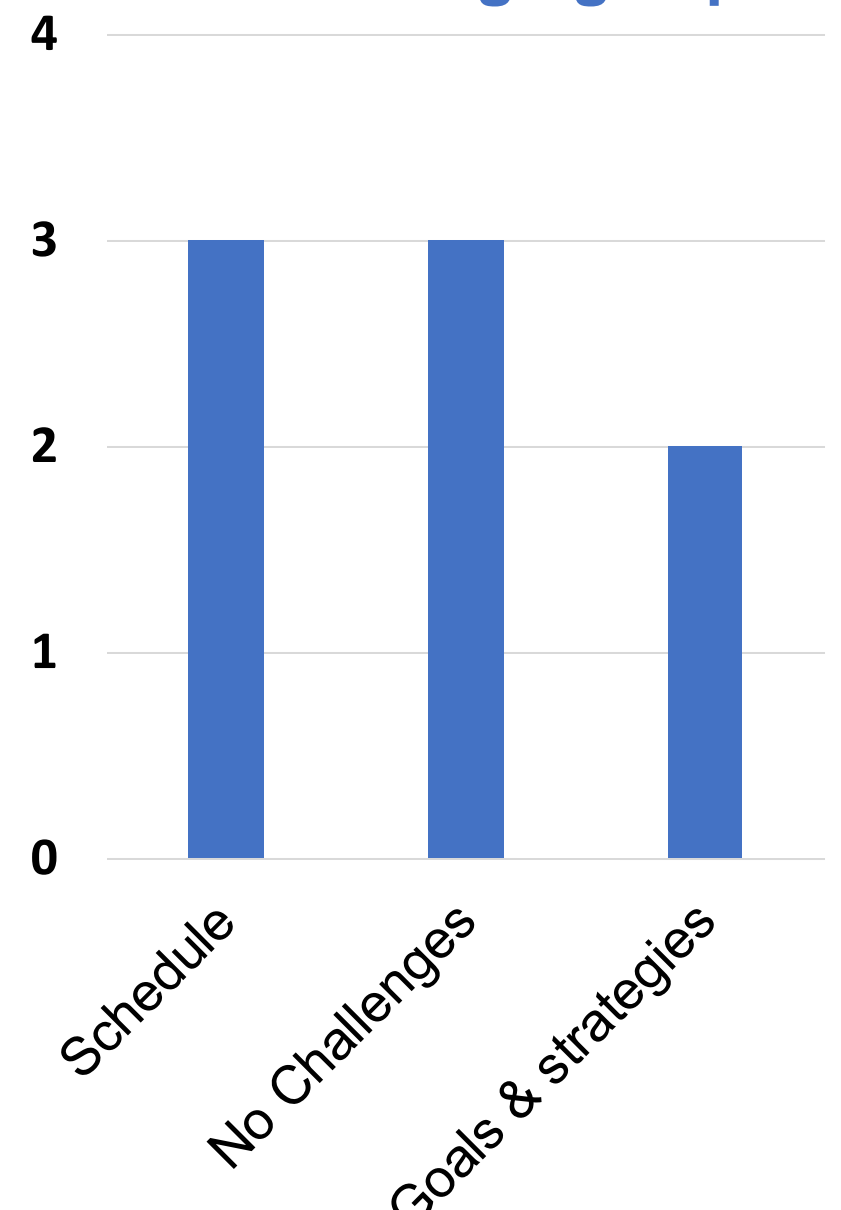
Results

SPAN Website/App Usefulness & Continued Use

Radar chart axes: Building Profile, Creating Goals, Creating Steps, Listing Strategies, Tips, Topics

1 = Don't know/not at all
2 = Fairly
3 = Useful/likely
4 = Very

— Percieved Usefulness
— Likelihood of continued use

Most Beneficial Aspects — Coach, New strategies, Peer relationships, Goal making, More confidence

Most Challenging Aspects — Schedule, No Challenges, Goals & strategies

Usability of Resources & Coaching Process:
- All found resources for addressing social challenges useful & reported they are likely to continue to use them
- All agreed that they felt respected by coach, were able to work on things important to them, & successfully manage their social challenges
- All would recommend program to other adolescents

Use of Strategies, Dogs, & Tips & Topics Sheets:
- 7/8 used tips & topics sheets from website with Keeping Positive & Joining Groups & Conversations used most
- All used website/app for inputting goals, steps, & strategies
- 5/8 made additional charts for strategies for certain times (i.e., before or after a stressful event) or specific stressors

Coach Feedback:
- All found the coach training beneficial, as well as coach supervision meetings & also considered measures to be thorough & informative
- Suggestions for the website/app include adding more tips & topics & displaying them better & making website mobile compatible
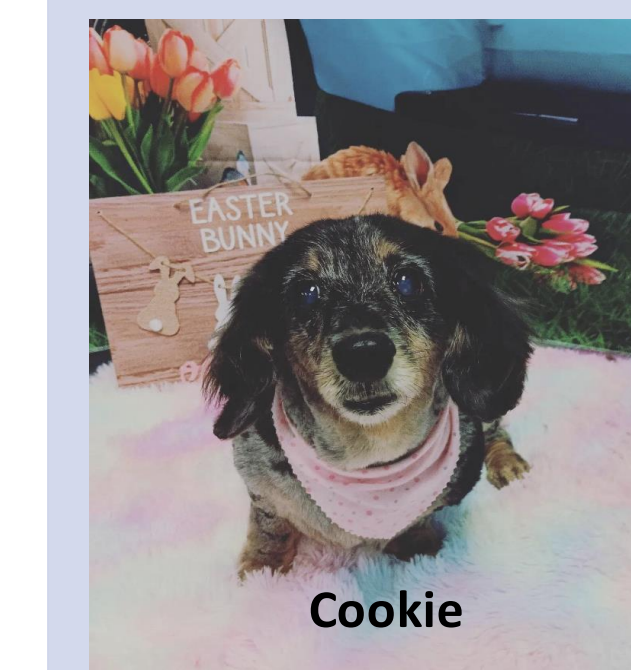
Most Important Things Learned By Participants

	n	Examples
Social Skills	5	Starting conversations, inserting into groups, handling challenges
Working Towards Goal	3	Accomplishing goal, making goal plan
Using SPAN resources	1	Utilizing available resources

Participant Suggestions for SPAN Program

	n	Examples
Website/App	5	Less crashing, see other profiles, mobile friendly
Dog	3	More dog incorporation & strategies
No Changes	2	Program is great as is
Social Skills	1	More resources & examples for social challenges

Strategies Used By Participants Throughout Program

Dog Strategies	General Strategies
• Walking dog (8) • Cuddling dog (4) • Talking to dog (4) • Being with dog when anxious or stressed (4) • Playing with dog (2) • Sending pictures of dog (2) • Bringing dog to events (2) • Going to dog park (1)	• Positive self talk (7) • Mindfulness (7) • Support from others/school (7) • Practicing a social interaction (4) • Activities for distraction (3) • Utilizing phone to communicate (3) • Conversation topics (2) • Talking to someone trusted (2) • Taking a break (2) • Utilizing earbuds in loud settings (1) • Holding self accountable (1) • Avoiding crowds (1)
Total:8 Strategies	**Total:12 Strategies**

Cookie

Discussion

Coaching Process
- All participants & coaches felt respected & enjoyed building rapport throughout program & would recommend program
- Participants found creating goals, steps & strategies with their coach the most useful part of SPAN
- All were able to successfully manage social challenges with resources worked on with coach
- 12 different general strategies were utilized with most frequent being positive self-talk, mindfulness, & support from others

Dog Incorporation
- Both participants & coaches wish dogs were incorporated more in program with more strategies involving dogs provided
- 8 different dog strategies were used with all participants identifying walking their dog as effective
- More general strategies than dog strategies being used supports wishes for more dog involvement

Website/App
- Both participants & coaches feel if website/app crashed less & was mobile compatible, it would be utilized more
- Some participants wished there were opportunities to interact and see others' profiles on app

Conclusion

Results support usability of program for promoting social participation of adolescents with social anxiety

Limitations:
- Small sample size not allowing for generalization
- Coach held dual role as researcher allowing for potential bias
- Abbreviated 4-week program led to less completed goals

Future Directions: include mobile compatibility for website/app, more incorporation of dog strategies, & longer program
- Modified materials will be used in a longer pilot study

Connection to Occupational Therapy (OT): Social participation is an occupation that is within the scope of OT & can increase quality of life. OTs are qualified to address mental health concerns like social anxiety by promoting living skills and managing symptoms through roles & routines for this population[2]

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3. Wade, S. L., Bedell, G., King, J. A., Jacquin, M., Turkstra, L. S., Haarbauer-Krupa, J. & Narad, M. E. (2018). Social Participation and Navigation (SPAN) program for adolescents with acquired brain injury: Pilot findings. *Rehabilitation psychology, 63(3),* 327-337
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5. Schohl, K.A., Van Hecke, A.V., Carson, A.M. *et al.* A Replication and Extension of the PEERS Intervention: Examining Effects on Social Skills and Social Anxiety in Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 44, 532–545 (2014). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-013-1900-1

Contact: Emily Machado emily.machado@tufts.edu, Gary Bedell gary.bedell@tufts.edu, or Megan Mueller megan.mueller@tufts.edu