**EMPOWER: A PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL GROUP PROGRAM TO FOSTER
STRESS REDUCTION IN ADOLESCENTS**

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I dedicate this work to

my family

without whose love and support

this journey would

not have been

possible.

Abstract

This project includes a review of empirically supported interventions (i.e., group and individual) to use with adolescents who are experiencing stress. It also presents an eight-week psycho-educational stress reduction/management group program manual, entitled Empower *(Empower)*, for school counsellors to use in a school setting. The aim of the program is to empower adolescents to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress, learn a variety of stress reduction strategies to manage the stressors in their lives, as well as to assist them in moving towards achieving their individual goals. It is not the intent of *Empower* to be used in a lock-step approach, but as a resource to implement the program, facilitate weekly group sessions, and incorporate the strengths and skills of the group members and group leader. Each session includes a list of required material, objectives, resources, activities, and blackline masters for handouts and/or overheads. Strengths and limitations of the project are reviewed along with future recommendations.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The journey from child to adult is known as adolescence. Adolescence is a time of tremendous change thus leaving adolescents to face numerous stressors. The purpose of this project is to provide school counsellors with a resource to plan and implement an eight-week psycho-educational stress reduction group program for adolescents in a school setting. Chapter I provides a statement of the problem, purpose of the project, and definitions of key terms.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescence is a time of rapid physical, emotional, social, and cognitive change. It is a period of time where the relationships outside of the family deepen and take on new meaning (Colton & Gore, 1991). These relationships are both a means of support and stress. Today adolescents live in an information age and the rate of change has accelerated exponentially. It is not surprising that the rate of stress-related illnesses has also increased at an alarming rate (Davis, Eshelman & McKay, 2000). These changes, combined with an increased emphasis on peer acceptance and academic success, contribute to adolescents exhibiting a multitude of signs of stress (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). When stress becomes overwhelming, serious concerns can arise.

Stress is no longer exclusive to the adult clientele. Psychiatric and emotional problems are consistently identified as a major health concern for adolescents (Weir & Bidwell, 2000). Poor management of stress can lead to interpersonal conflicts, maladjustments, psychological difficulties, impaired memory, and other health concerns. Stress not handled well can manifest into physical, cognitive, and emotionally debilitating concerns in adulthood (Colton & Gore, 1991; Davis et al. 2000; Humphrey, 2004). Stress-related concerns are further elaborated in chapter III of this project.These

identified concerns substantiate the need to develop a psycho-educational stress reduction group program to counsel, inform, educate, and provide skill training for adolescents in a school setting.

Purpose of the Project

This project introduces *Empower: A Psycho-educational Group Program to Foster Stress Reduction in Adolescents* (*Empower*). *Empower* is designed to provide school counsellors with the necessary techniques to engage adolescents, make the group counselling experience meaningful, and provide means to enlist feedback appropriately; thus reducing the risk of rupturing the therapeutic alliance (Safran, & Muran, 2000). This program is intended for use in a school setting, serving adolescents attending grade eight or nine, who are experiencing ordinary stress; not for adolescents who are suffering from severe anxiety or depression. The essential goals of the group program are to support adolescents to learn how to recognize stress and symptoms, and to practice strategies to reduce his or her stress. Since stress among adults is likely to have germinated during childhood, "it is extremely important to begin teaching the stress concepts with children at an early age" (Humphrey, 2004, p. xiii). Attainment of these goals is designed to help adolescents work towards achieving a healthy and successful future.

Before turning to a literature review, it is necessary to clarify a few terms that will be used in this project. For the purpose of this project, the following definitions constitute the framework from which this project is built. These definitions are provided to allow a common understanding of key terms that are essential in this final project.

Definitions

Adolescent is a term used to describe a given age group corresponding with the onset of puberty, generally between the ages of 9 to 18. Merriam-Webster (1990) defines

adolescence as "the process or period of growth between childhood and maturity" (p. 28). Puberty marks the onset of dramatic changes occurring cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially. Therefore it is imperative to have an understanding of these unique variables when working and designing programs for this special population.

Empower is defined by Merriam-Webster's dictionary (1990) as "to enable". Enabling adolescents to manage the stressors in their lives embraces the spirit of the *Empower* program. This definition is reinforced by soliciting group members' input in determining the themes explored in the middle five sessions.

Stress is a part of life. All kinds of life experiences can produce stress. However, it is the individual's interpretation of the experience that determines whether the experience stresses or relaxes her or him (Davis, et al. 2000). Simply put, stress is any change, real or perceived, to which the individual must adapt. For the intent of the project, stress is defined as "a state which arises from actual or perceived demand-capability imbalance in the organism's vital adjustment actions, and which is partially manifested by a non-specific response" (Humphrey, 2004, p. 15). Not all stress is detrimental; in fact, some stress is desirable and essential (Davis, et al.). Stress cannot be eliminated from life; it is a natural phenomenon and this understanding is one of the important steps in dealing with stress.

Stressor is the term used to describe the internal or external agent, sometimes known as the trigger, which causes a stressful state (Humphrey, 2004). Davis et al. (2000) identify four basic stressors: environmental, social, physiological, and psychological. It is the adolescent's perception of these agents which determines whether these agents are negative stress producing.

Psycho-educational group is a counselling group with a focus on the development of a group member's cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills through "… imparting, discussing and integrating factual information" (Corey & Corey, 2006, p. 11). When determining group members for a psycho-educational group, Corey and Corey suggest soliciting adolescents who exhibit skill deficits, and are generally well functioning. With a clear understanding of the purpose of the project, and key terms, the focus of this project now shifts to the methods used to conduct the literature review portion of this project.

Chapter II: Method

This chapter provides an overview of the method used to complete the literature review. Specific databases and keywords were used to explore the literature to determine the effectiveness of group counselling for adolescents, as well as empirically sound interventions for stress reduction with an adolescent population. The chapter concludes with a general outline of the *Empower* manual.

Information Sources

Research was initiated by searching the University of Calgary's library catalogue. Articles and books published between 1990 and 2007 were included in this literature review. Keywords and subjects related to group counselling with adolescents in a school setting were used. Specific terms searched included: group counselling, adolescents, teenager, stress management, stress reduction, therapy, counselling, psycho-educational, interventions, and strategies. Searches were completed on Academic Search Premier and PsycInfo databases. A further search of pertinent references identified in the articles retrieved initially through the electronic searchers was then undertaken. Both qualitative and quantitative English language-based studies were used. Finally, books that focused on adolescent group counselling were explored. Details of the literature review will be discussed in greater detail in chapter III.

Structure of the Manual

The proposed psycho-educational stress reduction group manual will be referred to as *Empower*. This manual provides school counsellors with the necessary information and resources to plan and facilitate an eight-week psycho-educational stress reduction group program designed for an adolescent clientele. The *Empower* manual is designed to guide facilitators to work efficiently and effectively in helping this clientele. It is user-

friendly and employs empirically supported strategies with research-based resources. The manual consists of implementation considerations and plans for eight group sessions. Each session includes an outline, objectives, a list of required materials, activities, and blackline masters for handouts and/or overheads.

Empower is a unique program because it provides both structure and client choice. The first two sessions and the last session are scripted and mandatory. *Empower* allows the middle five sessions to be determined by the needs and wants of the group members, and the expertise of the group leader. A variety of stress reduction topics from which the group members can choose are provided. The group leader determines the order and the amount of time spent on each chosen topic.

Chapter III elaborates in greater detail the importance of involving adolescents in the design of group programs, as well as exploring other essential theoretical foundations that are necessary to successfully run group counselling programs.

Chapter III: Theoretical Foundations

This chapter presents a literature review of topics relevant to this final project. The purpose of the literature review is twofold; to assess current, relevant literature to determine the effectiveness of group counselling with adolescent clients, and to identify empirically sound interventions to use in a group setting with adolescents who are experiencing stress. The realities of stress-related concerns for adolescents are initially presented. Secondly, a review of recent literature on the qualities of effective group counselling for an adolescent population is explored. Thirdly, interventions that are empirically proven to help adolescents manage their stress in a group setting are discussed. The exploration of these topics will establish relevancy for the *Empower* manual that is presented in chapter IV.

Stressors Adolescents Face

An increase in life experiences from childhood to adolescence "…suggests that middle adolescence may be the peak life period for experiencing changes. This is obviously a critical age period for developing effective coping styles" (Newcomb, Huba, & Bentler, 1991, p. 411). Colton and Gore (1991) state "both the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains serve as a source of psychological stress during adolescence" (p. 67). Stressful experiences are exacerbated by adolescents who are perfectionists by "…influencing the experience and response to the stressors both directly and indirectly" (Hewitt, Caelian, Collins, Flett, Sherry, & Flynn, 2002, p. 1056). Stressful events in either domain have shown to be associated with maladjustments and psychological concerns in this age group with no gender differences (Colten & Gore; Hewitt, et al.; Newcomb, et al.). Events combined with a lack of perceived social supports, early negative experiences, a sense of hopelessness, maltreatment, low self-esteem, and a lack

of problem solving skills, not only elevate stress levels but also increase the risk of suicide (Humphrey, 2004). These types of concerns frequently come to the attention of school counsellors. It is often a request, by school personnel, students, and parents, that school counsellors intervene to provide adolescents with the necessary skills to cope with these stressors.

Untreated Stress Implications

Stress can have numerous detrimental effects on adolescents. Generally many of the common everyday interpersonal occurrences, rather than major life events, have a greater impact on the adolescent's daily stress level (Colton & Gore, 1991). Stressors can be classified into four categories school, parents/family, siblings, and peer/interpersonal relationships (Donaldson, Prinstien, Danovsky, & Spirito, 2000). These stressors elevate the production of cortisol, a stress hormone, which not only impairs memory but general health. Anywhere from 50 to 80 percent of all diseases, at least in part, can be attributed to stress-related origins (Humphrey, 2004). There is a strong correlation between an increase in stressful events and a decrease in health and psychological functioning (Newcomb, et al., 1991).

Stressful experiences have ramifications on the adolescent's coping mechanisms, ability to function, and health outcomes, including heart disease, eating disorders, cancer, and infectious diseases (Davis et al. 2000; Frydenberg & Lewis, 2004; Humphrey, 2004). As long as the individual perceives a threat, the body remains aroused, leaving the stress response systems on, and increasing his or her risk of contracting a stress-related illness. If adolescents are not taught how to recognize and deal with stressors appropriately, depression and other dysfunctional behaviours can occur (Burlingame & Matthew, 1997; Hewitt, et al., 2002; Kendall, Flannery-Schroeder, Panicelli-Mindel, Southam-Gerow,

Henin, & Warman, 1997). If the body is unable to adapt and resist the stressor, it eventually moves into the exhaustion phase and could possibly result in death (Davis, et al.).

Stress is also a precursor for numerous behavioural problems in adolescents. High stress scores have been linked to higher disruptions in the classroom, poor academic performance, increased violence, impairment of problem solving ability, anxiety, and significantly increasing suicidal ideation (Chang, 2001; Frydenberg & Lewis, 2004; Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Miros, 2000). As stress levels increase, the adolescent experiences a deterioration of problem solving skills and abilities. As a result the adolescent can become careless in considering her or his options, and experience more negative thinking and actions. Suicide is the leading cause of death among adolescents aged 15 to 24, and researchers suggest a rise in rates for ages 15 to 19 (Chang). Not all adolescents are debilitated by stressors; however, the exploration of protective factors in adolescents must be considered. To understand what works, it is helpful to explore what does not work.

Ineffective Coping Strategies

An individual's choice of coping strategy is consistent regardless of the stressor (Donaldson, et al., 2000; Frydenberg & Lewis, 2004). The Frydenberg and Lewis study concluded those who coped poorly (known as poor copers,) used both productive and non-productive coping strategies; however poor copers use less of the productive strategies such as problem solving, relaxation, seeking social supports, and working hard; and more of the less productive strategies such as self-blame, worry, ignoring the problem, keeping to self, and wishful thinking. *Fall Back* theory suggests that when adolescents find that their attempts at utilizing productive strategies are ineffective, they

turn to non-productive strategies (Frydenberg & Lewis). It is important for counsellors to have knowledge of the individual's coping patterns to design an effective intervention plan to "…attempt to minimize adolescent's use of non-productive coping strategies while simultaneously increasing the frequency and effectiveness of those coping responses that appear more productive" (Frydenberg & Lewis, p. 34).

There is a positive correlation with age and development of coping strategies (Donaldson et al., 2000). During adolescence the individual is able to use social supports as a stress buffer, (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2004) and employ a wide range of other coping behaviours. The use of group counselling programming with an adolescent population provides opportunities to capitalize on the strengths of others, and to learn and rehearse newly acquired skills in a safe arena. For this reason, the benefits of using a group approach to counselling are explored.

Benefits of Using a Group Approach to Counselling

There are numerous benefits to group counselling and the two most noted found in the literature review, were cost-effectiveness and time efficiency. Other benefits included effective peer interactions, breaking down social barriers, reduction of isolation and fear (Baker, 2001; Brandes, 1991; Burlingame & Matthew, 1997; Corey & Corey, 2006). In addition, peer learning produced increased knowledge, increased skill development, and increased self-awareness (Bergin, 1999; Phillips & Phillips, 1992).

Adolescence is a time of transition with unique developmental needs. During this transitional period there is a struggle for independence from authority figures that "…can make adolescents reluctant to seek individual counselling with an adult" (Bergin, 1999, p. 302). Research indicates that, "teens of all ethnic groups prefer not to seek help about personal problems with school professionals …but prefer to turn to their peers for advice"

(Broderick & Blewitt, 2006, p. 337). Peer groups increasingly become an important source of support for adolescents; therefore group interventions are often regarded as the preferred counselling treatment of choice for teenagers (Bergin, 1999; Corey & Corey, 2006; Roosa, Wolchik & Sandler, 1997). Bergin states "the invitation to join a group and to work with peers is more appealing, as it reduces the chances of being put in the "hot seat"; at the same time it increases the opportunity to relate with peers and gain their approval" (p. 303).

Peer group counselling is a useful approach for teens because it capitalizes on the adolescent's preference for peer input (Bergin, 1999; Ward, 2004). Individuals are influenced and best helped by those who share similar conditions. Egbochuk and Obiunu (2000) state, "deep lasting changes, individually and structurally ultimately come from sharing with like individuals" (p. 504). Group counselling is often the preferred intervention for adolescents, particularly those who desire peer affiliation, and acceptance. Groups also provide opportunities to build on existing strengths (Bergin; Corey & Corey, 2006).

Adolescents prefer group counselling to individual counselling as group counselling seems to have less stigma attached (Clarke, Coombs & Walton, 2003). Groups provide opportunities for an adolescent to receive feedback as to how peers perceive his or her behaviours (Brandes & Malcolm, 1991). Groups act as a peer arena providing opportunities for "…youth to save others as well as themselves" (Maclenn, 1991, p. 34). The group setting can shed insight on self-defeating behaviours, as Cormier and Nurmius state, "the mere act of self-observation can produce change" (2003, p. 589).

The value of group counselling for adolescents is increasingly recognized in the literature. For example, Zinck and Littrell (2000) found group counselling could meet the

same needs as individual counselling, and the changes made therein, endured beyond the termination of the group. The Burlingame and Matthew (1997) study concludes adolescents treated in a group setting improved significantly emotionally and behaviourally.

Adolescent psycho-educational groups are effective means for stress management treatment (Bergin,1999; Corey & Corey, 2006; Zinck & Littrell, 2000). Burlingame and Matthew's (1997) metacognitive evaluation of 111 group counselling studies over the last 20 years, concludes that group counselling is as effective as individual therapy. For group counselling to be an effective tool, certain structures need to be in place to ensure group success.

Qualities of an Effective Group

There are many elements that need to be considered when designing an adolescent psycho-educational group. One important factor is the establishment of "… a definite purpose with clearly defined and stated rules, and structured procedures" (Bergin, 1999, p. 311). Once these have been established Zinck and Littrell (2000) suggest incorporating three components into every group session; education, counselling and skill development. Also, the needs of the group members must be considered when determining the educational component for each group session.

The structure and process of the group is dependent on the stage of peer relatedness. A level of trust must be established before the adolescent can progress to a higher level of relational competencies (Fopma-Loy, 2000; Geldard & Geldard, 2000; Gregor, 2005; Mishne, 1986). The extent to which the adolescent has a say in the design and planning, the more likely he or she will accept and engage in the counselling group process.

Facilitators are cautioned not to use their preconceived notions of what teens want and/or need. Maclenn's (1991) position is that "no planning should take place in regard to youth without youth representation" (p. 35). It is important to choose topics of interest to the adolescent (Corey & Corey, 2006), while establishing a trusting, caring, accepting, understanding, and supportive environment (Bergin, 1999). At the very least, program topics should be validated with adolescent input (Hiebert, Collins, & Cairns, 1994). Adolescents are more likely to engage when they have a sense of co-designing the process. Hiebert (2001) states that the client is the expert in his or her experience and the counsellor is the expert in the counselling process. By tapping into both expertises, the development of group cohesion and program success is enhanced (Adams & Gullotta, 2005; Bergin, 1999; Ward, 2004).

A proactive and strength-based design is recommended when working with adolescents (Corcoran, 2006; Fernandes & Maree, 2003; Hurn, 2006; Myers, 2006). This approach is empowering and motivating to the adolescent. Programs that seek out strengths in the individual, and create opportunities for involvement, increase the effectiveness of a group. Proactive programs rely on the "…creation of a positive group climate, to support youth, to review their feelings about themselves" (Maclenn, 1991, p. 34). Many school counsellors work with adolescents who have not developed serious mental health issues and these professionals have opportunities to use a proactive approach (Geldard & Geldard, 2000). These among several other variables, need to be considered when designing a counselling group for adolescents.

Leadership Qualities

Adolescents need the support of a trained group leader. Numerous references are made stating the need for leaders to possess a deep understanding and respect of the

adolescent developmental process (Adams & Gullotta, 2005; Angelino, 1991; Broderick & Blewitt, 2006; Gregor, 2005; Mishne, 1986). For example, knowing the importance of social acceptance allows the group facilitator to minimize situations where the adolescent is set apart from peer norms. Geldard and Geldard (2000) suggest that "…synchronization between the counselling process and the adolescent experience allows a mutually beneficial working relationship to develop" (p.1). Adequate training to work with this dynamic population is crucial, because "an unskilled therapist can throw oil into the burning embers" (Brandes & Malcolm, 1991, p.159). For example, understanding the need for the adolescent to search for her or his emerging identity, allows the facilitator to accept and look past possible individual 'unique' forms of self-expression. This acceptance of the individual's ideas and modes of expression creates a safe environment for the individual to explore new options.

The primary role of the group leader is to facilitate the group process and establish a strong working alliance among group members (Bergin, 1999; Hiebert & Jerry 2004). This process begins with the assessment of needs, defining purpose and objectives, identifying and selecting group members, arranging permission for members to join, organizing the schedule of sessions, planning group activities, arranging space, and gaining the support of administrators, teachers and parents.

Once the group is in progress, the group leader is responsible for promoting development of group interaction, establishing rapport among group members, choosing developmentally appropriate interventions, leading the stages of group development, and encouraging members (Kingery, Roblek, Suveg, Grover, Sherrill, & Bergman 2006; Hurn, 2006). The group leader also models, reinforces, confronts resistance, redirects negative behaviour, enforces the rules established by the group, encourages efforts to

self-regulate, and evaluates individual and group progress (Fusick & Charkow Bordeau, 2004; Corey & Corey, 2006).

Leaders who exhibit a coaching or facilitating style are most effective when working with adolescents (Broderick & Blewitt, 2005). Geldard and Geldard (2000) state "it is helpful in putting a young person at ease with friendly conversation and humour, to balance the impact of the discussion of serious issues" (p.74). The literature also suggests leaders require strong relationship skills such as empathy, unconditional positive regard, non-defensiveness, and the ability to relate to the adolescent (Baker, 2001; Chen & Han, 2001; Geldard & Geldard; Hiebert, 2001; Ward, 2004). Other leadership qualities such as the courage to take risks, possessing unlimited stamina, and inventiveness are also considered assets (Corey & Corey, 2006). Foremost, the leader must possess a genuine regard and respect for adolescents to successfully engage and work with this population.

A consideration for larger groups is to have co-leaders, allowing one person to be active and the other to observe and attend to nonverbal behaviours (Bergin, 1999; Phillips & Phillips, 1992). Zinck and Littrell (2000) propose the use of mixed gender co-leaders to "provide positive exposure to positive models of respect and equity" (p. 53). Since adolescence is a time of individuation, testing social norms and establishing an identity, mixed gender co-leaders is an important consideration, whenever possible.

As the group progresses, the leader becomes less directive in his or her counselling approach (Corey & Corey, 2006). Since he or she is always under the critical scrutiny of the adolescent, the leader is required "…to model congruence between what is said and what is actually done" (Corey & Corey, p. 332). Leaders possessing both strong verbal and nonverbal attending skills further enhance the client counsellor relationship.

These actions promote involvement and inclusion of group members, allowing them to feel heard and understood (Hiebert, 2001).

Membership

Pre-screening of potential group members is vital. The most significant factor in the ultimate success of a group is membership selection (Bergin, 1999; Ward, 2006). Member selection can enhance or hinder the group's progress, and/or individual group members' experiences. Adolescence is generally recognized as one of the most difficult age groups to treat, and not all adolescents are good candidates for group treatment (Mishne, 1986). According to Mishne, adolescents who are deficient in self-control, and/or have minimal frustration tolerance, are not good candidates for group therapy. Clients who volunteer, or who are motivated to make positive changes, are considered good candidates for the *Empower* program. Pre-screening strategies are provided in the *Empower* manual.

Size

Research supports homogeneous gender grouping of adolescents aged 10 to 14 (Corey & Corey, 2006; Zinck & Littrell, 2000). Group size is best between 5 to 10 members (Bergin, 1999). As recommended by Phillips and Phillips (1992) "small enough to allow each participant the opportunity to contribute to the interaction, yet large enough to allow the group to continue if one or two members were absent" (p.392).

Setting

It is important for the adolescents to feel at ease, therefore groups should be conducted in familiar surroundings, employ techniques that are active, and use simple language (Brandes, 1991; Geldard & Geldard, 2000; Maclenn, 1991). To ensure privacy

and avoid stigma, groups occurring in a school setting should be located in quiet, low traffic areas.

Frequency

Bergin (1999) states that it is important to consider the age of participants when deciding on the length of individual sessions, because as group members' age increases, so does their attention span. Ideally, groups should meet weekly, approximately eight to twelve weeks, for 60 to 120 minute sessions (Baker, 2001; Bergin). When considering a timeframe, keep in mind that groups need time to warm up and adequate time to build group cohesion, address problems and come to closure. Zinck and Littrell (2000) report a successful group counselling study working with adolescents was delivered in a school setting that ran for ten sessions of approximately 65 minutes each.

<div align="center">*Group Development*</div>

Corey and Corey (2006) identify four stages of group development: the initial stage, transition stage, working stage and final stage. Covering issues such as confidentiality, group norms, and ground rules during the initial stage, cultivates a trusting, safe, and caring environment (Corey & Corey). Time invested in the initial stage develops a strong working alliance that is essential for groups to progress (Brandes, 1991; Hiebert, 2001). The transition stage explores group members' possible reluctance to participate, and begins to address the concerns that brought individuals to the group (Corey & Corey). The working stage is characterized by group progress and productivity (Corey & Corey). The final stage reviews individual and group goals, achievements, and facilitates group closure.

The literature search revealed numerous activities for use in the initial stage (for example getting to know you and ice breaker activities). It stresses the importance of

identifying and addressing conflicts early to deepen self-disclosures, thereby allowing the group to progress into the transition and working stages (Chen & Han, 2001; Corey & Corey, 2006). The literature lacked clarity in identifying specific activities to use in the transition and working stages. This may be due to the fact that group work is not a linear process; some groups may never reach the working stage while others may oscillate back and forth between the various stages (Corey & Corey). A variety of activities for use in the final stage were present in the literature review (for example acknowledging and celebrating progress and achievements).

Productive psycho-educational groups require careful preparation of both the client and the group leader. After careful consideration of these variables the next topic for consideration is effective interventions.

Interventions

Hiebert (1998) suggests that it is a moral imperative for schools to develop the whole student so he or she can become an active and contributing member of society. Schools are responsible for the academic development of students as well as fostering individual physical, social and emotional growth. The school counsellor's role is to provide leadership in offering interventions and education addressing students' social and emotional needs. The group manual developed for this project embraces this holistic view and is intended to be used as a resource for school counsellors.

The literature reviewed for this project was rich with stress reduction programs and intervention suggestions (for example, Adams & Gullotta, 2005; Baker, 2001; Brandes & Malcolm, 1991; Corey & Corey, 2006; Cormier & Nurmius, 2003; Fernandes & Maree, 2003; Hiebert, 1998; Hurn, 2006; Lethem, 2002; Maclenn, 1991; Myers, 2006; Ollendick & King, 1998; Paylo, 2005; Roosa, Wolchik & Sandler, 1997). A variety of

interventions have shown to be effective in stress reduction for adolescents, as measured by pre/post tests, surveys and qualitative interviews (for example, Black & Rosenthal, 2005; Burlingame & Matthew, 1997; Zinck & Littrell, 2000). Interventions such as cognitive restructuring, progressive relaxation training, assertiveness training (Baker, 2001; Burlingame & Matthew, 1997; Kendal et al. 2001; Kingery et al. 2006; Mascott, 2004), solution focused therapy (Hurn, 2006: Lethem, 2002; Paylo, 2005) modeling, artistic expression, journaling, and role playing (Adams & Gullotta, 2005; Brandes & Malcolm, 1991; Corey & Corey, 2006; Mascott, 2004) have been successfully applied as effective interventions by adolescent stress reduction groups. However, relevant interventions should be tailored to the unique developmental and individual needs of the adolescent.

The interventions chosen for use must be empirically sound and fit with school counsellors' individual counselling styles, beliefs, and strengths. Regardless of the interventions used, a strong working alliance is essential to individual success and group progress (Hiebert & Jerry, 2004). These interventions will be expanded upon shortly.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Traditional stress reduction interventions such as psychosocial treatments that depend heavily on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) appear to be effective with adolescents (Kendall et al., 1997; Kingery et al., 2006; Brown, 2005; Zinck & Littrell, 2000). Corsini and Wedding (2000) define CBT as "an active attempt to alter maladaptive thought patterns and behaviours, replacing them with more adaptive cognitions and behaviours" (p. 462).

Projects explored used pre/post checklists, interviews and/or surveys to measure the effectiveness of CBT. For example, the study conducted by Kendall et al. (1997) used

the following instruments for pre/post comparisons: the Revised Children's Manifested Anxiety Scale, the Teacher Report Form, and a Child Behavior Checklist to measure behavioural change. In comparison Zinck and Littrell (2000) used interviews to define individual adolescent problems for the purpose of collaboratively setting behavioural goals. Evaluative measurements were conducted at program completion, and at one week and six week intervals post program. The measurement tools consisted of a follow up interview and an informal survey. School personnel were also interviewed to determine if they noticed any significant change in predetermined behaviours. Both studies were successful in supporting adolescents to reduce stress using a CBT approach.

Coping with Anxiety for Teens is an example of a group stress reduction program that employed a CBT approach (Kendall, Choudhury, Hudson, & Webb, 2001). It focused on four major cognitive components:

1. Recognizing anxiety feelings and somatic reactions to anxiety (feeling).

2. Clarifying cognition in anxiety- provoking situations (unrealistic or negative thoughts).

3. Developing a plan to cope with situations (stressor).

4. Evaluating the success of coping strategy (include in group- journaling/reflection)

According to Kendall et al. (1997), incorporating positive self-talk coaching and creating a new script into sessions increased the effectiveness of CBT. This finding is supported as two researchers noted, "verbal coping skills consisted of teaching a set of self-instructions that would assist them in coping with, and handling, their fears" (Ollendick & King, 1998, p. 161). Overall, group practice, combined with verbal self-instruction, demonstrated significant changes in target behaviours as measured by pre and post

assessments. Kendall et al. study showed a significant change in targeted behaviours such as feelings of anxiety and other internalized behaviours due to treatment. Statistical analysis revealed that benefits were retained at one year follow up.

Another group program for stress reduction was authored by Eisenberg, Fabes and Guthrie (1997). Like Kendall et al. (2001), they also focused on teaching teens how to cope/regulate their stress by one or more options (a) regulating one's emotion (such as counting to ten), (b) attempting to regulate the situation, (question if they are able to change the situation), and/or (c) attempting to regulate behaviour (deep breathing).

Other stress management programs use cognitive restructuring (CR), a form of CBT. The underlying principle of CR is that maladaptive emotions and behaviours are influenced by one's beliefs, attitudes and perceptions (Baker, 2001). A CR process is used to identify self-defeating thoughts, and interrupt and replace them with adaptive thinking and behaviours (Adams & Gullotta, 2005; Brandes & Malcolm, 1991). Choosing alternate thoughts will increase a sense of well-being rather than diminishing it. Mascott (2004) supports the notion that people who experience an internal locus of control are less stressed.

Researchers support the use of CBT with adolescents who are seeking stress reduction skills in a group counselling setting. However, Hiebert, Collins, and Cairns (1994) indicates adolescents prefer a more proactive approach. Hiebert and Collins (1995) identify the need for relevant, proactive, goal-setting, skill-based, and solution focused strategies when working with this population. The study conducted in a high school setting by Zinck and Littrell (2000) also noted adolescents were more successful in achieving their written goals using a positive solution focused approach.

Solution Focused Therapy

Solution focused therapy (SFT) employs a language of hope. Walter and Peller (1992) define SFT as "focusing on the positive, the solution, and the future facilitates change in the desired direction and, therefore, its focus is on solution-orientated talk rather than on problem-orientated talk" (p.63). SFT searches for solutions, rather than a reconstruction of the problem (Paylo, 2005). Lethem (2002) states, "it is a tenet of SFT that clients possess talents and resources for resolving their difficulties and that it is the task of therapy to help them to build on existing partially successful attempts to reach a solution" (p. 189). SFT provides opportunities for the client and the counsellor to focus less on the problem and more on solutions, thus providing a more balanced picture. Fernandes and Maree (2003) suggest, "many psychotherapists find, however, that focusing on failures and inadequacies may exacerbate rather than improve the way clients feel about themselves" (p. 502). These feelings are magnified during adolescence, leaving the individual feeling incapable, awkward and self-conscious. SFT establishes an environment where the client is able to perceive their lives differently, facilitating positive change.

SFT has found to be effective with adolescents in both group and individual counselling settings (Fernandes & Maree 2003; Lethem, 2002; Paylo, 2005; Zinck & Littrell, 2000). Focusing on solutions ensures the client will "not remain stuck in problem thinking" (Paylo, p. 456). Sessions are spent building relationships, sharing preferred futures, cheerleading and/or coaching successes. Paylo states "solution-based therapies contend that the person is never the problem; the problem is always the problem" (p. 457). New realities are co-created as concerns and wishes are put into a context of their relationships with others. It is important to remember "sometimes only the smallest of

changes is needed to set in motion solutions to the problem" (Lethem, p.189). SFT is built on the construct that one positive change will initiate a series of other positive changes. Positive, hopeful language is used as a vehicle for change, allowing the client and counsellor to co-construct and shift perceptions. Therapy does not need to be hard, it can be fun, increasing the adolescent's motivation and likelihood of movement towards his or her desired goals. SFT uses a non-pathological approach, where the individual identifies goals, and there is an emphasis on competencies rather than deficits, and strengths rather than weaknesses, all situated in a strong working alliance between the counsellor and the client.

Comparison of CBT and SFT

A comparison of CBT and SFT showed that both therapies were effective (Corcoran, 2006). Both therapies shared similar objectives, a focus on changes in cognition, and setting specific behavioural goals. The difference, however, lies in that SFT concentrates on what is already working for the client; his/her strengths, and resources, while CBT focuses on training the adolescent and their parents in how to address individual's skill deficits (Corcoran). CBT encourages an individual's stories to remain problem saturated, "not in a deliberate or malicious way, but simply through the cataloguing of incidents and behaviours of concern" (Myers, 2006, p.185). The positive approach of SFT resulted in a decrease in dropout rates, and individuals were more readily engaged (Corcoran).

The SFT strength based approach fits well with the framework of the *Empower* program as the emphasis of the program is moving beyond the exploration of a problem's cause and is concerned with how it can be solved (Hurn, 2006). Specifically, *Empower* is designed to provide an arena to allow each individual to examine his or her problem-

saturated stories, and rescript them into thick, rich, solution-focused realities as he or she

progresses through each *Empower* session.

Working Alliance

Rogers suggests it is the relationship between the counsellor and the individual

client, rather than the techniques used that is responsible for the effectiveness of the

counselling process (as cited in Horvath, 2000). The working alliance is not only a

prerequisite for counselling but also the main vehicle for fostering individual change

(Horvath). It is only when the client feels safe and listened to that she or he will trust the

counsellor allowing the counselling process to begin. Regardless of the interventions used

a strong working alliance is a prerequisite for all counselling therapies (Hiebert & Jerry,

2004). These valuable insights about the counselling process were considered in the

development of the *Empower* program.

<div align="center">*Essential Considerations in the Design of Manual*</div>

Findings from the literature review greatly influenced the design of the *Empower*

manual and its interventions. Adolescents are social and relational creatures therefore

group counselling was chosen as the key intervention as it capitalized on these qualities.

The literature review identified CBT and SFT as common foundations to adolescent

group stress reduction programs. The *Empower* program is grounded in relaxation

training (RT), CR and assertiveness training. Studies indicated using a positive approach

with this population increased success rate (Corcoran, 2006; Fernandes & Maree, 2003;

(Heibert, 1998), therefore SFT is the main underpinning of this program. The manual also

incorporates other successful interventions, as discussed in chapter III, such as role

playing, modeling, artistic expression, and journaling into individual sessions.

Recognizing the importance of building and maintaining a strong working alliance and being responsive to the adolescent's needs are constant focus of the facilitator in the *Empower* program. It is stressed in the manual that the facilitator's job is to validate and normalize participants' comments to promote feelings of safety, respect, and empathy, to continue to enhance and to promote a strong working alliance. Furthermore, there are ample opportunities in each session, for group members to discuss and share individual group member's thoughts and feelings.

This chapter presented many stress related realities adolescents face establishing a need for a stress reduction program such as *Empower*. The literature review discovered empirically sound group interventions to successfully use with an adolescent population, and the qualities of an effective adolescent counselling group. The next chapter offers an overview of the *Empower* manual and demonstrates how these elements were incorporated into the design of individual sessions and the overall *Empower* program.

Chapter IV: Empower Program Overview

The *Empower* program is designed to assist school counsellors in the implementation of an adolescent stress reduction program in school settings. This chapter outlines the purpose, goals, evaluations, programming considerations, theoretical approach, format, group membership recruitment and screening, group structure and organization, and scheduling considerations of the *Empower* program. Appendix A contains the psycho-educational group stress reduction program manual, *Empower*.

The *Empower* program consists of eight weekly sessions that are grounded in the empirically sound interventions discovered in the literature review. Each session offers a variety of activities that foster the growth of the working alliance between the counsellor and the participant and apply SFT, RT, CBT and/or assertiveness training therapeutic interventions. The manual includes a list of required materials, objectives, resources, activities, assessment tools and blackline masters for handouts and/or overheads.

Purpose

The purpose of this manual is to provide school counsellors with a guide to plan and facilitate an adolescent psycho-educational stress reduction group program in school settings. School counsellors normally work with adolescents who have not developed serious mental health issues. Empower is not designed for those with high anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, or oppositional defiance disorder. School counsellors often apply a proactive approach, such as group counselling (Geldard & Geldard, 2000). The aim of the *Empower* program is to enable adolescents to manage the stressors in their lives, as well as to assist them in moving towards achieving their individual goals. It is not the intent of *Empower* to be used in a lock-step approach, but as a resource to incorporate the strengths and skills of the group members and group leader.

Goals

The *Empower* stress reduction psycho-educational group counselling program has four main goals. Upon the completion of *Empower* the adolescent will,

1. Recognize the signs and symptoms of stressors when in stress provoking situations.

2. Understand the connection between thoughts, feelings, and actions, and perceived stress levels.

3. Demonstrate a variety of stress reduction strategies when experiencing stress.

4. Indicate the ability to shift from problem-saturated stories to stories of hope, strength and possibilities.

Evaluation procedures are an integral part of the *Empower* program and allow the group leader to monitor individual group member's progress toward the achievement of both individually determined and previously outlined program goals.

Evaluations

Informal evaluations are built into each session to monitor the effectiveness of the program and individual group member's feelings of satisfaction. These evaluation procedures are detailed next.

Satisfaction measures are informal evaluation to be completed at the end of each session by group members. Formal program satisfaction evaluations are completed during the last session. The feedback from both the informal and formal evaluations will be used to monitor group members' progress, to determine if program goals have been met and to improve the *Empower* program.

Stress self-assessment is a ten-point rating scale Stress Meter (as noted in the manual p. 31) and will be used to compare the adolescent's pre and post group stress levels to determine if program goals have been met. To achieve a lower post group Stress Meter rating, the group member will have learned and rehearsed stress reducing skills, during the *Empower* program, to reduce and manage his or her daily stressors in a more adaptive manner. A decrease in an individual's post group Stress Meter and the use of a variety of stress reducing skills will indicate an individual's success.

Goal obtainment will be measured through the achievement of collaboratively determined GETS (what the individual hopes to gain from participating in group) indicates program success. The program will be successful when a group member is able to recognize the relationship between thoughts, feelings and actions, and the role these elements play in the reduction of stress, and feels capable of using a variety of positive stress reduction skills, to obtain a decrease in overall stress levels, and a movement towards his or her desired hopes (goals).

Individual weekly progress feedback will be provided at the end of each weekly session by the group leader to each group member. This is accomplished through the weekly *Pat on the Back* activity (as outlined in the *Empower* manual at the end of each session).

Individual program evaluation will be completed at the end of each session. Group members are given an opportunity to complete a weekly session evaluation form (as outline in the *Empower* manual at the end of each session). The session evaluation form monitors group member's progress, the usefulness of each session, and if needs are being met. At the end of the program, group members are asked to complete a final program evaluation form (as provided in the manual p.91). This provides an opportunity

for individuals to reflect on his or her experience of the *Empower* program, determine what was helpful, and if individual and program goals were met. Group members are also asked for ways to improve the *Empower* program.

The *Story Board* activity (as outlined in the manual p. 87) is a closing activity used to visually represent each group members' journey in the *Empower* program, and to celebrate his or her accomplishments. This is achieved through self reflection and peer feedback.

Evaluation procedures are an important consideration for any group program however there are several other programming considerations which need to be addressed if a program is to be successful. These other programming considerations follow.

Programming Considerations

Activities are designed to move from low risk to high risk, to encourage group cohesion, and foster a safe and caring environment. Whenever possible, activities that are interactive are used to engage and hold the interest of this dynamic population. Group input is solicited to allow the group members to determine the direction and the progression of the *Empower* journey. There is a need to hear individual stories in order to understand where group members currently are, in relation to his or her goals, therefore; four programming considerations were taken into account when designing *Empower*.

The first consideration is that the client is the expert in his or her experience, and the counsellor is the expert in the counselling process (Hiebert, 2001). Tapping into both sets of expertise enhances the development of group cohesion and program success (Adams & Gullotta, 2005; Ward 2004) and fosters the growth of the working alliance.

Secondly, the *Empower* program seeks out an individual's strengths, and creates opportunities for involvement, success and skill development. This approach increases a client's self-efficacy and motivation (Geldard & Geldard, 2000; Maclenn, 1991).

Thirdly, interventions noted in the academic literature concerning adolescent stress management groups are used in the design of the *Empower* manual. As a result role-play, role modeling, relaxation training, assertiveness training, artistic expression, journaling, and cognitive restructuring are incorporated into the program (Adams & Gullotta, 2005; Corey & Corey, 2006; Mascott, 2004).

Finally, program design should emulate the four stages of group development: initial, transitional, working and final. During the initial stage creating a strong working alliance is vital therefore sessions include low risk activities to build trust and to create a safe and caring environment. As the group moves through the sessions and progresses through the transitional and working stages, it is important to address conflict early to increase self-disclosure (Corey & Corey, 2006). Corey and Corey state effective groups allot time to bring appropriate closure to the group.

Group development is similar to the adolescent's developmental journey; neither is a linear process; self-growth and maturity are creative processes. These elements are considered in the development of the *Empower* manual.

Theoretical Approach

Sessions in the *Empower* manual are grounded in a strength-based approach. The language used to pose questions is very important. Leaders are encouraged to approach the group with a sense of curiosity and wonderment to enable each individual to discover his or her inherent skills, successes and strengths. *Empower* provides two initial sessions to build group cohesion, and establish a safe and caring environment grounded in mutual

trust and respect. As the group progresses through the transitional and working stages, the remaining five sessions are collaboratively selected from the list of optional sessions based on the needs of the group members and expertise of the group leader. It is important to embed flexibility into the delivery of the group program, which is highlighted next.

To maximize the benefits of the *Empower* experience, both group members and group leader determine the order, and the skills needed. This allows for individual input to customize the remaining group sessions as the group progresses through the transitional and working stages, by determining the order and topics in the middle five sessions. Opportunities to learn and practise new skills are provided in each session. In the final session, session eight, *Empower* provides an outline to bring closure to the group process and to celebrate each individual's journey. Based on the literature review, it is the author's belief that *Empower* program is unique in structure and process.

Format of Group Sessions

Each session follows a similar format introduction, activity and closure phase. The introduction includes brief check-in activities to allow group members to dismiss outside distractions and review previous weekly tasks. This is followed by a warm up activity. The warm up activity is designed to engage the adolescent and sets the direction for the session. The bulk of the time is spent in the activity phase. Here connections to the previous sessions are made, new information and skills are presented, time is provided for individuals to personalize his or her experiences and practice new skills. During the closure phase, time is taken to wrap up the session, assign new weekly tasks and complete individual session evaluations. Assigned tasks are used to reinforce new skills and provide an opportunity to gather material that will be used in the next session.

At the conclusion of each session, the leader provides written positive feedback (i.e., Pat on the Back Wrap Up Activity located in the manual at the end of each session) of what she or he has noticed about each group member. Positive feedback can include mentioning strengths, noticing signs of moving towards desired goals, and/or comments to show appreciation. The leader records this positive feedback on a post-it note and places it in the individual's file folder so the adolescent can begin the next session with positive reinforcement.

Group Membership Recruitment and Screening

The targeted audience for *Empower* is grade eight and nine students. Optimally, six to eight adolescents will be selected to participate in the *Empower* psycho-educational stress reduction group. Three recruitment techniques are used:

1. Classroom visits are used to inform and promote the *Empower* program to all grade eight and nine students. During class visits, students are asked to complete a stress survey (Appendix B). The stress survey asks students to use a five point rating scale to indicate the intensity of stress they feel for predetermined categories. Students who rate themselves or who have been rated as a four or five (out of five) are then approached individually to see if he or she is interested in participating in *Empower*.

2. Information about the program is included in the school newsletter to inform and invite students, teachers and parents, to contact the school for further program information and referral process.

3. Students can self refer to participate in the program.

The initial screening process will exclude: candidates who are currently involved in counselling or have been identified with learning, emotional, or behavioural disabilities. All additional referrals are interviewed individually and complete a motivational survey (Appendix C). The motivational survey uses the six stages of change identified in the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska, 1985). Inclusion criteria for this group requires adolescents to be in either the contemplation, preparation or action stages as this is when individuals are considering change. Group membership and screening procedures are important considerations when developing a group program, however, other variables such as group structure and organization must also be considered.

Group Structure and Organization

Group structure and organization are the most challenging elements to consider when planning for a psycho-educational counselling group situated in a school setting. Many variables must be considered such as timetabling, the needs and concerns of the adolescents, and those of teachers, administrators and parents. If some teachers are reluctant to allow students to miss their class, the group leader may want to inform them of the many benefits of the *Empower* group experience. By scheduling effectively, the leader can avoid having a student miss too much of a certain subject. In order to gain the needed support to facilitate such a psycho-educational group, each stakeholder must understand the benefits of the program both for themselves and the adolescents. Through careful planning and the involvement of both teacher and student a mutually satisfying schedule can be found.

Scheduling Considerations

Ideally, the group will meet more than once a week to increase the opportunities to learn new skills and provide support. Session times should follow the timeslots of the school's timetable.

Sessions are approximately 60 to 75 minutes in length to maximize focus. Movement breaks are incorporated to keep energy levels high and increase each group member's ability to concentrate.

Many programming variables have been considered and addressed in the design of the *Empower* program. Program goals have been clearly stated and evaluation procedures have been established to monitor a group member's progress, and to determine if this group program is successful. The *Empower* program uses a strength-based approach that provides opportunities to build on individual strengths and expertise. Sessions are designed to encourage and emulate the four stages of group development through the use of interventions that are grounded in the findings of this project's literature review. *Empower* is unique because it provides both a solid structure, and opportunities to individualize the group experience based on group member's needs and leader's expertise. The program overview provides recruiting, screening, and scheduling recommendations, as well as group structure and organization considerations. Despite the care and attention devoted to the design of the *Empower* program, there are programming limitations and future research considerations to be addressed and these issues are outlined in chapter V.

Chapter V: Summary, Limitations, Conclusion and Future Research

Chapter V begins by synthesizing and summarizing material from previous chapters. Next, limitations are presented and conclusions are drawn. Suggestions for future research conclude this chapter.

Summary

Group counselling is a time and cost efficient means of counselling (Corey & Corey, 2006) and takes advantage of the social nature of the adolescent client (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). Successful programs include "…developmentally sensitive interventions and the necessity of broad-based contextualized supports" (Broderick and Blewitt, p.338). The school counsellor is in a unique position to provide effective psycho-educational counselling groups that capitalize on the strength of adolescents to reduce stress. The *Empower* is intended to be used by school counsellors not as a lock-step approach, but as a resource to implement a stress reduction program, facilitate weekly group sessions, and incorporate the strengths and skills of the group members and group leader. *Empower* provides opportunities for adolescents to learn stress management skills, experience success, and empower themselves.

Careful consideration and planning was taken in the design of the *Empower* program. *Empower* employs the underpinnings of a sound psycho-educational group: education, counselling and skill development. The information gleaned from the literature review greatly influenced the design of the *Empower* program to maximize its potential as a psycho-educational group program to foster stress reduction in adolescents. Session design is meaningful, engaging and provides mechanisms for input, feedback and evaluation. Opportunities are provided in each session for the adolescent to express his or

her thoughts and feelings, to build bonds of mutual trust and respect, and to nurture the development of a strong working alliance.

Interventions, supported by the literature are employed in *Empower* to ensure group counselling sessions offer effective strategies to actively engage and foster positive change in the adolescent clients. Interventions, common to other tried and true stress reduction programs, such as CR, CBT, SFT and RT are the foundation of this program. Opportunities to capitalize on artistic expression, positive self-talk, and choice further enhance the *Empower* program. Using SFT encourages a proactive approach, consequently increasing motivation and involvement. *Empower* possesses many strengths; however there are limitations that need to be highlighted.

Limitations

There are some limitations to be considered that could affect the generalization and usefulness of the program. Various stakeholders; school counsellors, parents and principals, were not consulted for the design of *Empower*. Kendall et al. (1997) suggested incorporating strategies that involve parents, peers, and school personnel in the process. This could be accomplished by conducting interviews and surveys to solicit input for program design from the previously mentioned populations. Several other possible future considerations to further enhance the *Empower* program are presented next.

Future Research

The emphasis of this project is to present an evidence-informed stress reduction program and its session plans. *Empower* has not been formally piloted, or put under empirical investigation. Therefore if this program is implemented, a review of the ethical policies and procedures will need to be undertaken to ensure the school, group members, and families are informed of the services being provided to the group members. In

addition, no formal screening tools, evaluations, or consent forms to participate in this group counselling program are presented. Although ample detail was provided in this project on the necessary issues to pay attention to, this program does not provide recommendations on supervision and specific training needs of facilitators. As a result, if this group is implemented, it is recommended this group be supervised.

The *Empower* program is designed to be used by school counsellors, in a school setting, during school hours. However, there is a possibility adolescents might feel less stigma in becoming a group member if the *Empower* program were offered outside of regular school hours, at an off campus location and facilitated by counsellors that were not affiliated with schools. Perhaps offering *Empower* programs in the evenings or as weekend workshops off campus warrant consideration as viable alternatives.

Most of the literature reviewed spoke in generalities about cultural considerations for group program implementations; however, cultural implications are an important factor to consider in the design of any group program. The manual is grounded in empirically sound interventions such as CBT, SFT, and RT. Using a greater variety of interventions may appeal to a more diverse population. Other therapies such as art therapy, dance therapy, humour therapy, and/or play therapy may have great appeal with culturally diverse adolescent populations and could, in time, be incorporated into the *Empower* program. However, before these interventions are incorporated into the *Empower* program future research is needed.

The culture of youth is a worldwide phenomenon (Angelino, 1991) and the reality is our public schools host an increasingly culturally diverse population. Adolescence is a developmental period, which is common to all youths in the industrialized world. Adolescents belonging to an ethnic minority group face multiple stressors confirming a

need for an adolescent group stress reduction program (Chen & Han, 2001). These individuals "not only have to cope with their normal developmentally changing beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviours but also have to make decisions with regard to these fitting within the present and future cultural context of their lives" (Geldard & Geldard, 2000, p.29). Counsellors must carefully respond to the specific cultural tasks and challenges that arise in each stage of group process (Chen & Han, 2001; Corey & Corey, 2006). Regardless of the adolescent's cultural background group counselling is a viable option (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). However, limited cultural variables have been considered in the development of this program.

With an increasingly culturally diverse population in our school system, it is imperative to plan inclusive programs to meet the needs of adolescent clients from a variety of culturally diverse groups. Future research is needed to develop culturally appropriate screening tools, interventions and evaluations. A possible screening strategy to use with students who are identified as being ESL (English as a second language) is to use a culturally sensitive pictorial stress survey.

To enhance the effectiveness of the *Empower* program future research is needed to address the diverse counselling needs of various ethnic groups. Perhaps future research findings could act as a supplement to the *Empower* manual, providing suggestions as to how the group counsellor could adapt the *Empower* surveys, evaluations and sessions when working with a particular cultural group. This approach would be similar to how the optional sessions are currently set up in the *Empower* manual. Future research will enrich and enhance the *Empower* program allowing it to be more effective.

Conclusion

It is easy to estimate almost every teen in Canada has felt some sort of stress, and many are stressed out. More and more school districts are beginning to consider how best to address teen stress and develop the resources and supports to do so. School counsellors serving adolescents will find value in what the *Empower* program has to offer. *Empower* is an evidence informed means to achieve positive changes by recognizing and tapping into the strengths that lie within each student. *Empower* supports students to understand "what stress is" and offers useful activities, tools and skill practice to reduce their stress. Providing opportunities to learn positive stress reduction skills will not only benefit individual adolescents to effectively manage stress but will continue to empower these students as they grow into adulthood.

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Appendix

Empower

A Psycho-educational Group Program to Foster Stress Reduction
in Adolescents

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About the Author

I have worked with adolescents for the last 21 years as a teacher, and more recently, as a counsellor for the Calgary Board of Education. I am passionate about working with students who typically struggle behaviourally, and or emotionally. The majority of my teaching years have been working with at risk/high needs students and their families. Most recently, I have had the opportunity to work with youth who have been incarcerated at the Calgary Young Offenders Centre. From each encounter I learned as much from my students/clients, as I have taught them. My years of practical experience led me on a quest of gaining further theoretical knowledge. This manual is a culmination of a 3-year journey to complete a Masters of Counselling degree.

Beliefs

It is my belief that many adolescents are suspicious of groups led by adults and it is my position that limited planning should take place in regard to adolescent programming without the voice of the youth being represented. My experience illustrates that adolescents are more likely to engage when they have a sense of co-designing the process rather than using an adult "as the expert" approach. I have had success using programs that seek out strengths in individuals and create opportunities for involvement. When this approach is used, youth who had previously sabotaged other learning, and or counselling experiences, became more involved and invested in the process. It has been my experience, and is also supported by research, that psycho-educational groups are effective means for stress management treatment for adolescents. Stress among adults is likely to have germinated during childhood and or adolescence, making it extremely important to begin the teaching of stress reduction concepts at an early age.

About the Program

  Empower is an eight-week psycho-educational stress reduction program intended to be used with an adolescent population. The target audience is adolescents aged 13 to 16, attending grades 8 or 9, who are experiencing ordinary stress, and not for adolescents who are suffering from severe anxiety or depression.

Program Rationale

  Empower is a group program, designed to provide school counsellors with the necessary techniques to engage adolescents, make the group counselling experience meaningful, and provide means to enlist feedback appropriately, thus enhancing the therapeutic alliance. This manual has been written with the assumption the group leaders will be either teachers or counsellors who have experience and knowledge in working with adolescents in a school setting. The implicit or explicit goal for any adolescent stress management programs is to reduce the stress experienced by the individual. *Empower* has four main goals, which are written as action statements;

- o To learn how to recognize stress symptoms.

- o To learn a variety of stress reduction strategies (3 to 5).

- o To understand the connection between thoughts, feelings, and actions when under stress.

- o To shift a participant's perceptions of a stress story (hopeless, problem-saturated story) to a story of strength and possibilities.

  The aim for *Empower* is to provide an arena to allow each individual to examine her or his problematic-saturated stories, and rescript them into thick, rich, solution-focused realities, as she or he progresses through each *Empower* session. The *Empower* Manual helps guide facilitators to work more efficiently and effectively in helping this clientele (Switzer, 2009).

Benefits of Using a Counselling Group

Peer groups are an important source of support for adolescents; therefore group interventions are often regarded as the counselling treatments of choice for teenagers (Bergin, 1999; Corey & Corey, 2006; Roosa, Wolchik & Sandler, 1997). At times, group interventions seem to have less negative stigma attached to them (Clarke, Coombs & Walton, 2003). Groups provide opportunities for adolescents to see themselves as their peers see them (Brandes & Malcolm, 1991). The group setting can act as the eyes to shed insight on self-defeating behaviours. Cormier and Nurmius state, "the mere act of self-observation can produce change" (2003, p. 589).

Two noted benefits to group counselling with adolescents are cost-effectiveness and time efficiency. Other benefits include; effectiveness of peer interactions, breaking down social barriers, reduction of isolation and fear, produces increased knowledge, increased skill development, and increased self-awareness (Bergin, 1999; Phillips & Phillips, 1992). Black and Rosenthal (2005) put it best, the "groups are like a stage upon which each individual enacts the dramas of his (her) life" (p. 113). Because adolescents are social creatures, social interventions such as group counselling can be very appealing to them. However, for group counselling to be successful, there are several programming considerations.

Programming Considerations

Five programming considerations were taken into account when designing the *Empower* Manual:

1. **A Proactive Approach:** Many school counsellors have the opportunity to work with adolescents who have not developed serious mental health issues and have many opportunities to use a proactive approach (Geldard

& Geldard, 2000). Solution Focused Therapy has proven to be effective with adolescents in both group and individual counselling settings (Lethem, 2002, Fernandes & Maree, 2003). This program seeks out strengths in the individual and creates opportunities for involvement, success and skill development, which in turn, increases client self-efficacy and motivation (Geldard & Geldard, 2000; Maclenn, 1991). A proactive and strength-based design is best used when working with an adolescent population (Bly, 2008). Focusing on solutions allows the client to "not remain stuck in problem thinking" (Paylo, 2005, p. 456). Using these methods the group members and the leader co-create new hopeful realities.

2. **Acknowledging Expertise:** The client is the expert in his or her experience and the counsellor is the expert in the counselling process (Heibert, 2001). Tapping into either expertise enhances the development of group cohesion and program success (Adams & Gullotta, 2005; Ward 2004).

3. **Leader's Orientation:** A counsellor's styles, beliefs, and strengths determine which interventions they will use. There are a range of interventions to choose from, as many have been shown to be effective in reducing stress. These include, but are not limited to: cognitive restructuring, modeling, progressive relaxation, assertiveness training, solution focused therapy, artistic expression, journaling and role play. Each is an effective interventions employed by adolescent stress management groups (Adams & Gullotta, 2005; Corey & Corey, 2006; Mascott, 2004) and are used in the *Empower* program.

4. **Group Structure:** Group structure should emulate the four stages of group development (Corey & Corey, 2006). During the initial stage (stage 1) sessions should include low risk activities to build trust, and to create a safe and caring environment. As the group moves through the sessions and progresses through the transitional (stage 2) and working stages (stage 3), it is important to address conflict early to increase self-disclosure. Also, more interactive activities need to be planned where group members are actively processing the content. Effective groups allot time to bring appropriate closure to the group (stage 4). Group development is similar to the adolescent's developmental journey in that neither is a linear process. It is a complex organic journey of learning and living well.

5. **Working Alliance:** For continued growth, there must be a strong working alliance.

Carl Rogers suggests it is the relationship rather than the techniques that are responsible for the effectiveness of counselling (as cited in Horvath & Symonds, 1991). The working alliance is not only a prerequisite for counselling, but also often the main vehicle of change (Horvath, 2000).

Counselling is an educational process. Hiebert (2001) identifies three conditions necessary to facilitate learning;

1. Interactions must be meaningful.

2. The learner must be engaged.

3. There must be a mechanism for providing feedback.

These elements have been considered in the design of the *Empower* program. For example group members are involved in the selection of topics to be explored, activities

are designed to keep group members actively engaged and individual feedback is provided at the end of each session.

Research Findings and Integration

Careful attention was paid to the selection of interventions considered for Empower, those selected received support from the academic literature as having validity when working with adolescents. Research supports psycho-educational groups as effective means for stress management treatment for adolescents (Bergin, 1999; Corey & Corey 2006; Zinck & Littrell, 2000). Facilitators should employ interactive techniques and use language that is easily understood by teens (Brandes,1991; Geldard & Geldard, 2000; Maclenn, 1991). However, it is critical that interventions are tailored to the unique developmental and individual needs of the adolescents who form a group.

Empower accommodates for group individualization by providing opportunities of content choice by both group members and the group leader. Finally, groups should be conducted in familiar surroundings to help teens feel at ease.

For more information on the research that supports *Empower*, the reader is encouraged to consult the author's literature review (Switzer, 2009). The literature review was focused on;

(a) Determining if group counselling is effect for adolescents who are experiencing stress.

(b) Discovering effective interventions to use with adolescents who are experiencing stress.

(c) Exploring effective group counselling program design considerations when working with an adolescent population.

Program Implementation Considerations

Implementation within a school

Group structure and organization are the most difficult variables to consider when planning for a psycho-educational counselling group situated in a school setting. Many variables must be considered such as timetabling, as well as the needs and concerns of various stakeholders including adolescents, teachers, administrators and parents. If possible, it is preferable to schedule a different class/period for each of the group sessions. This way the inconvenience of students missing class is shared amongst all teachers and they may feel their concerns and classes have been valued and honoured.

Selling the group to the school personnel

It is the group leader's responsibility to educate teachers and administrators about the importance of the *Empower* Stress Reduction Counselling Group. In order to gain the support to facilitate such a psycho-educational group, each stakeholder must understand the benefits of the program both for themselves and the adolescents. Through careful planning and the involvement of each stakeholder, solutions to potential issues will be readily found.

Group structure

The *Empower* group runs for eight sessions meeting with students once or twice a week. Meeting more than once a week will increase the opportunities to learn and practice skills, and provide the necessary support and coaching to maximize the success rate. It is recommended that Tuesdays, Wednesdays and/or Thursdays are used because most professional development days and holidays tend to fall on Mondays and Fridays.

It is recommended that sessions occur at around 10:00 am, allowing time for the adolescents who have trouble getting to school to be present and ensuring individuals are

awake. Session times should follow the time slots of the school's timetable. To keep energy levels high, and increase adolescent's ability to concentrate, it is vital to allow movement breaks in each session. Appropriate structure encourages group success; however suitable leadership qualities such as a genuine interest in this dynamic age group, strong communication skills, a sense of humour, and flexibility cannot be underestimated.

Unique Manual Format

Empower is unique to other stress reduction programs because it provides both structure and client choice. The first two sessions and the last session are typical to other programs because they are prescribed sessions. The unique aspect of *Empower* allows the middle five sessions to be determined by the needs and wants of the group members and the expertise of the group leader.

Empower provides a variety of stress reduction topics from which the group members can choose. Using the input provided from the group members, the group leader then determines the order and the amount of time spent on each chosen topic. This process allows the *Empower* program to be tailored to a specific group's interests and needs, as well as tapping into the leader's strengths. This approach is similar, to a successful educational approach known as generative curriculum (Kallick & Perrone, 1997). Since *Empower* is a psycho-educational group program, it is important not only to use empirically sound interventions but also educationally sound methods.

Informal evaluations are built into each session to monitor the effectiveness of the program and individual group member's level of satisfaction. Group members are also asked to complete a formal program evaluation during the last session. The valuable

feedback from both the informal and formal evaluations will be used to further enhance the *Empower* program.

Format of Sessions

The KISS principle (keep it simple and sensational) is used in the design of the each session. Sessions in the *Empower* manual are grounded in a strength-based approach. The leader empowers each individual to discover his or her inherent skills, successes and strengths, through genuine curiosity, and respect. Each session includes an outline, objectives, a list of required materials, activities and blackline masters for handouts and/or overheads. Each session is approximately 60 to 75 minutes (dependent on time availability) and is comprised of three components: education, counselling and skill development (Zinck & Littrell, 2000). The optional sessions are stand-alone sessions that can be presented in any order.

Each session will follow a similar format; check-in, activities and closure. Check-in is a time to say good-bye to outside distractions and bring a focus to the group. Weekly tasks are reviewed, followed by a warm-up activity. The warm-up activity engages the adolescents' interest, and sets the direction for the session. Check-in is followed by the activity phase where connections to the previous sessions are made, new information and skills are presented, time for individuals to personalize experiences is provided, and opportunities to practice new skills are given. At the end of each session time is set aside for closure. Closure is a time to wrap-up the session, assign new weekly tasks, and complete a session evaluation. Assigned tasks are used to reinforce new skills and provide material that will be used in the next session.

At the conclusion of each session, it is an expectation of the leader to provide written feedback (Pat on the Back Wrap-Up Activity). Feedback can be given but is not

limited to the following guidelines; strengths, signs of moving towards desired outcomes, or something appreciated about each individual. This feedback is then placed in the individual's file folder so the adolescent can begin the next session by reading the leader's positive feedback.

Opportunities to learn and practise new skills are provided in each session. Activities are designed to move from low risk to high risk to encourage group cohesion and foster a safe and caring environment. Whenever possible activities that are active are used to engage and hold the interest of this dynamic population.

Group Member Screening and Recruiting

Adolescents are very cognizant of how others perceive them; therefore it is important to present group counselling opportunities in a positive light. Combinations of recruitment techniques are employed from a variety of sources that comprise students, teachers and parents. Students who are not currently involved in any other forms of counselling or have not been identified with either a learning, emotional or behavioural disability, as defined by Alberta Learning, are potential candidates for *Empower*. It is essential to assess the adolescent's commitment to reduce stress in his/her life and determine whether the adolescent is in the pre-contemplation (have not considered change), contemplation (considering change), working (attempting change) or maintenance (upholding change with support) stage of changes as individuals tend to make changes only when they are in the contemplation, working or maintenance stage of change (Prochaska, 1995). An adolescent-friendly assessment tool is provided to screen potential group members (see Appendix A).

Pre-screening of potential group members is vital. Adolescence is generally recognized as one of the most difficult age groups to treat and not all adolescents are

good candidates for group treatment. Adolescents who are narcissistic, deficient in self-control, and /or exhibit minimal frustration tolerance, are not good candidates for group therapy (Mishne, 1986).

The recruiting/screening procedure is as follows:

1. The school counsellor schedules classroom and promotes the program.

2. A Stress Survey (see Appendix A) is distributed during the class visits to provide students the opportunity to rate and self-identify the various types of stressors they face. The adolescents are asked to use a rating scale, 1 to 5, to indicate the intensity of stress they feel for each predetermined category.

3. An informational piece about the program is presented in the school newsletter to inform parents about the *Empower* program and to solicit input.

4. The school counsellor will accept self, parent and teacher referrals. Students who rate themselves as a 4 or a 5 (out of 5) in the completed Stress Survey, or who have been identified by parents or teachers, are then approached individually to see if there is an interest in participating in an *Empower* group.

5. These candidates are then screened individually using the Change Motivational Survey (located in Appendix II of the manual). The six stages of change identified in the Transtheoretical Model of Change are used as the basis of the Change Motivational Survey (Prochaska, 1995). Adolescents must be in either the contemplation, preparation or action stages to become a group member because they are motivated and ready to change.

6. Participation in *Empower* is entirely voluntary.

It is recommended to select only six to eight adolescents to participate in the *Empower* Stress Reduction group for maximum success.

Organizational Tips for All Sessions:

- Use file folders, with group member names written on them, as a place marker on chairs. This provides group member's with a sense of feeling welcomed and belonging.

- "Quotation" marks are used to identify material that can be used as a script for leaders when presenting ideas.

- The code GM – is short for group member and

- The code GMs - is short for group members

- TPS – means Think, Pair and Share.

  1. **T**hink - quietly on their own and write down their own thoughts (brainstorm),
  2. **P**air – pair up and share their ideas with a partner
  3. **S**hare – come back as a large group and share their ideas with the large group.

- Activities that are explained on a separate sheet are identified in **bold** and are located at the end of the session.

- Activities that are described within the session are *italicized.*

Session # 1: Getting to Know Who's Who and What's What

THEME: **Building Group Cohesion and Setting Expectations**

Time: 60-75 minutes

Objectives:
Participants will
- become comfortable with group members and group setting
- get to know members of the group
- build group cohesion
- establish group norms and ground rules
- understand roles and expectations
- be involved in choosing session topics
- start to feel empowered and build self-efficacy
- explore where they are now and where they would like to be (wish for the future)

Materials:
- Chart paper
- Tape
- Markers
- Strips of paper
- Pencils
- Duo tangs with lined paper (to be used as journals)
- File folders (with each group member's first name written on it)
- Wishing stone (any rock can be used)
- Treats
- Post-it notes

Activities
- Room Set Up Ideas
- Rare Bird
- Grouping Activities and Sharing Starters
- Clap, Clip and Pop
- Possible Topics for Sessions poster
- Session Evaluation Sheet

Intro (10 - 15 min)

Refer to **Room Set Up** for suggestion to how the room can be set up prior to the groups arrival.

Rare Bird - This is a low risk *Getting to Know You* activity.

Activity (30 - 40 min)

Gives and Gets – allows the group to collaboratively establish group goals, ground rules, and expectations.

Use *TPS* to determine what each GM hopes to GET and GIVE.

Begin with GET and repeat the process for GIVE.

1. GET – "What do you hope to GET out of this 8 week Empower experience?" (Exampl: Being able to sleep the night before an exam)

2. GIVE– "What are you willing to GIVE to achieve your GETS?"

Once GMs have had an opportunity to record their own thoughts use a **Grouping Activity and Sharing Starters** to pair up GMs. Provide 3-5 minutes for GMs to learn their partners name and share their ideas. After the allotted time GMs will introduce their partner and share one thing they heard their partner say they would like to GET from the *Empower* group experience. Leader will record GETS (goals) and GIVES (ground rules and expectations).

*As a leader you are also a GM and therefore are able to contribute to both the GET and GIVE lists. Ensure that confidentiality is included on the GIVE list.

Thumb Vote – is used to see if GMs will agree to the collaboratively established group GIVES (expectations).

- Thumb up – can live with the rules for the 8 sessions.
- Thumb sideways – need more discussion.
- Thumb down – cannot live with the rules for the 8 sessions.
- Once all GMs have indicated they can live with the rules have them sign the poster.

*Depending on time and the energy level of the group this might be a good time to do another Getting to Know You/ movement break activity such as **Clap, Click and Pop**.

Possible Topics for Optional Sessions Overview – Make an overhead or a poster of **Possible Sessions Topics**. Provide a brief description for each session. Have each GM record the title of the top three session topics they would find most helpful on a piece of paper and place it in their folder.

"Your input will be used to determine the topics for the remaining sessions."

Closure (15 - 20 min)

Wishing Stone - The leader demonstrates the Wishing Stone activity.

"Hold the stone in your hand and feel the texture, temperature and the weight. Explain that, this a magical stone and it can grant you a wish. Using the language from the GET and GIVE posters provide some examples of what you would **WANT TO LEAVE BEHIND** and of where you **HOPE TO BE**. (Happy/ sad, stressed/relaxed, worried/confident). Empower is the bridge to move from where you are now, to where you hope to be."

Weekly Task – "A weekly task is assigned at the end of each session to reinforce new skills and/or provide material that will be used in the next session. This week's task is…"

- To notice the times when there is evidence that the stone worked its magic and stress was less evident/strong and more controllable/manageable. What were you doing? What were you thinking? (each GM personalizes his or her situation)

Session Evaluations – **Session Evaluations** are completed at the end of each session and then placed into GMs folders. "Once you have completed your evaluation place it into your file folder and now you can personalize your file folders."

- Have colourful felts in the middle of the floor. GMs are to write the words/pictures they would use to describe where they are now on the front of their folder and words/pictures of where they want to be on the back of their folder.
- Remind GMs of the location and times for the next *Empower* group session.
- Once tasks are completed GMs are to place folders in the middle of the floor and are invited to take a treat as they leave.

Pat on the Back – This is a wrap up activity to be completed weekly by the group leader once GMs have left. The group leader writes a positive post-it note with a specific statement about something they appreciated or noticed about each individual group member. Post-it notes are to be left on the inside of each GM's individual folder for them to discover the following week.

Room Set Up Suggestions

It is important to make the room welcoming for the adolescent clientele. Be creative and have some fun. Some suggestions follow:

- Set up chairs in a circle.

- Place a mat in the centre of the circle with materials that you will use in the session. This gives individuals something to look at and might spark some curiosity as to what is going to happen in the session.

- Play music or natural sounds softly in the background.

- Place a simple questionnaire (name, favourite TV show, pet peeve, favourite food etc) on the chairs for individuals to fill in, providing group members something to do while others are arriving.

- Greet group members at the door.

- Place an interesting item in the center of the mat, providing group members something to look at.

Rare Bird

We are all unique in our experiences, qualities, likes and dislikes. So each one of us is a rare bird. In this activity, each individual shares one of the following topics, and group members try to determine which one of the rare birds (i.e. group member) it describes. Some suggested topics are;

Surprising fact
Interesting jobs
If I could be a super hero I would be…because…
Favourite foods
Interesting experiences
Special awards
Special skills
Special interests
*Be creative and develop your own ☺

- Pass out slips of paper.
- Each member writes his or her name on the slip and an answer to one predetermined topic suggestions.
- Folded slips are then passed to the leader (make sure you do one as well)
- Without giving away the identity, slips are read aloud and group members guess who the rare bird is.
- After a couple of guesses, the rare bird is asked to identify him or herself.

Carol Apaki (1991)

Grouping Activities and Sharing Starters

Asking group members to choose a partner can be high-risk activity. Memories of being picked last in physical education class come rushing back for some when asked to perform this task. Wanting to fit in and belong is of high priority for this age group therefore it is recommended to use a pair method to avoid these feelings. Using pairing/grouping methods allows group members to get to know others in a less threatening way, thus increasing individual comfort levels, and building group cohesion.

Cards can be used in a number of ways to group/pair group members. You will need to prep the amount of cards needed, prior to group, according to how you want to group the members. Once the cards are sorted, group members draw a card and pair up according to;

- numbers
- colours
- suits

Paired or Associated Words can be used to group members together. The following are some examples

- Use words that go together – snow/board, volley/ball, Mickey/mouse, Easter/bunny
- Use a phrase and then group according to similar word. When you have a group of eight you could use a four word phrase such as "I determine my dreams.

Be creative and use words that are meaningful to your group and or your session

Pictures – Pre-cut pictures to the number of pieces to match the size of group you want to obtain. Individuals move around to find missing piece of picture to partner up.

Puzzle pieces – Individuals find matching puzzle pieces and partner up.

Matching colors –You can use coloured strips of paper, popsicle sticks or old game pieces. Be creative in what you use to match up colors.

Appointment clocks – Make an appointment sheet. Have group members fill in a time slot (session number) when they will be the other's partner.

Sharing Starters - Ideas to determine who starts to share in dyads or in the group. The person who

- is the youngest/oldest is to begin by sharing their homework assignments
- is the tallest/shortest is to begin
- born closest to (choose a month and date)
- has the most pets/siblings/lived in different places
- is wearing the most jewellery/articles of clothing/colors

Be creative and move from low risk items to more personal/high risk suggestions as the group develops cohesion.

Clap, Click, and Pop

1. This activity is used to learn more about each group member, build group cohesion and recognise similarities among group members.

2. Categories and actions are called out. All of those who fit the category are to stand up do the action and then sit down.

3. Be creative and try to involve as many people as you can. Some ideas you can adapt to the style and age of the group:

Everyone who

- Has a brother *stand up and snap your fingers*

- Likes dogs more than cats *stand and clap your hands*

- Likes cats more than dogs *stand and give a thumbs up*

- Plays a musical instrument *stand and take a bow*

- Dislikes liver *stand and make a face*

C. Apaki (1991)

Possible Session Topics

Make a poster of the following topics;

- Relaxation Breathing – In With the Good Air and Out With the Bad Air

- Relaxation Technique – Body Noodle

- Examining the relationship between thoughts, feelings and actions (CBT) – Feed or Shrink

- Shifting Focus – Mental Trip

- Positive Self-talk – Changing the Tune

- Identifying Blocks – Block Buster

- Assertiveness Training

*Other topics - take suggestions from group members

As a leader you determine if more than one session is needed for each topic, the order of presentation of selected topic and if other sessions are required based on suggestions provided by group members.

Session Evaluation Sheet

+--+
| **<u>Empower Session Evaluation</u>** |
+--+

+--+
| Session #:_____ Topic:_____ Date:_____ |
| |
| Overall how useful was this session for you? **Not-------------Some------------Very** |
| |
| <u>Based on your experience in today's group, please complete the following statements;</u> |
| |
| What I liked best is: |
| |
| What I found most useful is: |
| |
| I hope: |
| |
| I need: |
| |
| The person I related best to is: |
| |
| Other comments (feel free to continue writing on the back) ☺ |
| |
+--+

Dawn McBride (2006).

Session # 2: Let the Journey Begin

Time: 60-75 minutes

Objectives:
Participants will
- become familiar with group routines such as check in and weekly tasks.
- build group cohesion.
- recognize and build on existing personal strengths.
- decide on the remaining session topics.

Materials:
- Chart paper
- Tape
- Markers
- GET and GIVE chart
- File folders
- Journals
- Pencils
- Treats
- Post-it notes

Activities
- Grouping Activities
- Getting the Scoop
- Now and Wish Scale Sheet
- Session Evaluation Sheet

Intro (15-20 min)

"Each session will follow a similar routine. Today you will experience the three components; Check-In, Activity and Closure. Each session will start with a Check-In. Check-In is a time to review weekly assigned tasks and participate in a warm-up activity."

Check-In

- **Getting the Scoop** – This is a fun activity to capture GMs' interest, review names and learn something new about GMs.

- *Review GET and GIVE poster.* "Are there any changes, additions and or deletions?"

- *Weekly Task Review* - "In the beginning we will use a *TPS* approach to review weekly tasks. At the start of each session you will be given some time to *THINK* and record your thoughts and experiences about your weekly assigned tasks. Next you will *PAIR* up into dyads to first share your findings. To grow as a productive group and increase our comfort level it is important to work with many different people. Finally your dyads will report back and *SHARE* to the larger group."

Leader will use GRT to assign groups, GMs roles/responsibilities and determine the amount of time given to complete tasks.

- **G** – use a Grouping Activity

- **R** – explain roles. "Take turns sharing journal entry for weekly task. Pay close attention to how your experiences were similar and/or different? What did GMs do or think to manage/control/shrink _____."

- **T** – establish how much time groups are allotted. "You will have _____ minutes to complete your assigned task."

The information that is shared is useful information for the upcoming Activity phase of the session.

"After we have completed the Check-In then we are ready to move into the Activity phase. Here connections to previous sessions are made, new information is presented and opportunities for you to practice new skills are given. Today's session is called LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN. We are going to spend some time to examine your feelings of where you are now and where you want to be. Allow *Empower* to be the bridge to allow you to move from where you are now to where you want to be.

Activity (30-40 min)

- Introduce the **Now and Wish Scale Sheet**. Allow group members to assign a name to their scales. Demonstrate how to personalize examples for several of the numbers on the scale. Provide time to complete examples for each scale.

- Finally as a group have them discuss where they are now on each of their scales. What would it take to move down on _____ (now) and up on _____(hope/wish). Encourages GMs to share how they have successfully handled similar situations.

- Before you move into group discussion take time to explain your role as a leader and their role as group members. "We are all experts and have strengths to share with each other. How is group different from your classroom experiences?"

Session Choice Review – It is time to review GM's top three session choices and see if they would like to make any changes to list you have determined from their choices they had left in their folders at the end of last session. Let them know you will be using this information as input to determine the order and topics in the remaining 4 to 5 sessions.

"There is a limited amount of time therefore it is important to make the most of each session to ensure you GET what you want from your *Empower* experience."

Closure (15-20 min)

"At the end of each session there is time set aside for closure. This is a time to wrap up the session, assign a new weekly task and complete a session evaluation"

Weekly Task – To enrich the story or picture of when you score 7 or higher on your wish/hope scale (where you want to be), this week think about how do you know you when you are _____? What do you notice about your body when you were 7 or higher? What are you doing or thinking? GMs are encouraged to use their journal to record thoughts and experiences nightly. This will be shared at next weeks *Empower* group session during the Check-In.

Final Word – This activity provides leader with feedback

- Stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder.
- Have each member think of one word to describe today's session
- Leader can demo the activity – step into the circle, say your word (fun) and then step out.

Session Evaluation – GMs complete the **Session Evaluation Sheet** and then return file folder to the middle of the circle. GMs can take a treat when they leave.

Pat on the Back – This is a wrap up activity to be completed weekly by the group leader once GMs have left. The group leader writes a positive post-it-note with a specific statement about something they appreciated or noticed about each individual group member. Post-it notes are to be left on the inside of each GM's individual folder for them to discover the following week.

The leader must also review the GM's top three session choices to determine the direction of the remaining weekly sessions.

Getting the Scoop

1. Each group member is requested to think of a question he/she would feel comfortable asking and answering themselves. For example,
   - What is your favourite colour?
   - How old are you?
   - Favourite food?
   - Someone you admire?

2. Once each individual has thought of a question he/she are to write it on the board so no one else can use the same question.

3. Now group members are to become roving reporters and move around the room asking their question and recording names and responses.

4. Once they have interviewed everyone they are to return to their seats.

5. The group leader then asks, "Who has the scoop on (each group members' name one at a time)?" Reporters report their findings.

6. Debrief - Make connections with the session topic and individual group members. What was surprising? Interesting?

Grouping Activities and Sharing Starters

Asking group members to choose a partner can be high-risk activity. Memories of being picked last in physical education class come rushing back for some when asked to perform this task. Wanting to fit in and belong is of high priority for this age group therefore it is recommended to use a pair method to avoid these feelings. Using pairing/grouping methods allows group members to get to know others in a less threatening way, thus increasing individual comfort levels, and building group cohesion.

Cards can be used in a number of ways to group/pair group members. Prior to the group you will need to prepare the amount of cards needed, prior to group, according to how you want to group the members. Once the cards are sorted, group members draw a card and pairs up according to;
- numbers
- colours
- suits

Paired and Associated Words can be used to group members. The following are some examples
- Use words that go together – snow/board, volley/ball, Mickey/mouse, Easter/bunny
- Use a phrase and then group according to similar word. When you have a group of eight you could use a four word phrase such as "I determine my dreams.

Be creative and use words that are meaningful to your group and or your session

Pictures – Pre-cut pictures to the number of pieces to match the size of group you want to obtain. Individuals move around to find missing piece of picture to partner up.

Puzzle pieces – Individuals find matching puzzle pieces and partner up.

Matching colours –You can use coloured strips of paper, popsicle sticks or old game pieces. Be creative in what you use to match up colors.

Appointment clocks – Make an appointment sheet. Have group members fill in a time slot (session number) when they will be the other's partner.

Sharing Starters - Ideas to determine who starts to share in dyads or in the group. The person who
- is the youngest/oldest is to begin by sharing their homework assignments
- is the tallest/shortest is to begin
- born closest to (choose a month and date)
- has the most pets/siblings/lived in different places
- is wearing the most jewellery/articles of clothing/colors

Be creative and move from low risk items to more personal/high risk suggestions as the group develops cohesion.

Now and Wish Scales

Photocopy two of these scales for each group member. Use one for now and one for where they wish/hope to be. Label the top of the scale with a word to describe how they are feeling now (stressed) and one word where they wish to be (relaxed). As the numbers on the scale increase so does the intensity of each feeling. Beside each number write an example of what it means to be at that point on the scale.

	10	
	9	
	8	
	7	
	6	
	5	
	4	
	3	
	2	
	1	

Session Evaluation Sheet

<u>Empower Session Evaluation</u>

Session #:_____ Topic:_____ Date:_____

Overall how useful was this session for you?   **Not-------------Some------------Very**

<u>Based on your experience in today's group, please complete the following statements;</u>

What I liked best is:

What I found most useful is:

I hope:

I need:

The person I related best to is:

Other comments (feel free to continue writing on the back) ☺

Tailoring Sessions 3 and 5

The next five sessions are designed to be tailored to meet the varied needs of the GMs, honouring both the leader's expertise and the unique needs of the GMs. Using the input provided by the GMs and the leader's knowledge the order of the topics and the amount of time spent on each topic are determined.

Musts for Session 3

Regardless of which optional session comes next, the following information is to be included in session three.

1. Using the information from GM's top three topic choices that were written in their journals and group leaders expertise determine the topics and presentation order for the next 5 sessions.

2. Present the order of topics using a visual chart.

3. GMs determine the speed at which they move through the sessions. This is merely a topic outline and not set in stone.

4. Thank group members for their contributions.

Musts for Session 5

Regardless of which optional session is used for session five the following activity is to be included.

"We have completed more than half of the sessions. It is time to review the GIVE AND GET CHART to ensure we are meeting the group wants and needs".

- Review Give and Get chart to

    1. determine if group is moving in the desired direction.

    2. check off what has been accomplished.

    3. acknowledge what still needs to be accomplished.

    4. make any necessary changes.

- By session five GMs should feel comfortable enough to participate in a large group weekly task review rather than in dyads.

Session A (optional): In With the Good Air Out With the Bad Air

THEME: **Stress Awareness and Relaxation**

Time: 60-75 minutes

Objectives:

Participants will
- Learn facts about stress
- Build group cohesion
- Identify signs of stress
- Learn relaxation breathing technique
- Become more comfortable

Materials:
- Chart paper, tape and markers
- Overhead projector
- 10 pencils
- Poster with an overview of the eight sessions – revised from group input
- Post-it notes

Activities:
- Stress Chat
- Stress Sign and Symptoms handout
- Breathing Exercise
- Relaxation Response – Flow
- Pulse
- Session Evaluation Sheet

Intro (10 -15 min)

Check-In

Use a TPS to discuss last week's assigned task, either as a large group or in dyads. From the discussion the leader looks for opportunities to connect previous learning, bridge into new session themes and make learning meaningful.

Activity (35 - 45 min)

"Today's session is called *In With the Good Air Out With the Bad Air*. The focus for this session is to learn about stress and how to relax. First let us define stress and how we react to it. We will conclude with learning a relaxation breathing technique."

Stress Chat – make an overhead or a poster to lead group discussion

Stress Sign and Symptoms handout - this activity will provide a movement break.

- GMs are asked to read over the handout, check off the signs and symptoms they have experienced and to add any others signs or symptoms that are not listed. When GMs are finished, they are to turn their handouts over.

- The leader then reads aloud the signs and symptoms, and instructs individuals to raise their hand when the sign or symptom they have experienced is read. The leader then thanks individuals, and reads the next item on the list.

- Debrief as a group, making connections between GMs comments to normalize stress experiences.

Relaxation Activity

The leader will need to determine which **Breathing Exercise** that is best suited for the group.

"It is impossible to be relaxed and stressed at the same time. When we are stressed things **speed up** therefore we can decrease our stress by relaxing and **slowing things down**."

- Introduce and establish a framework for why we should learn how to relax and breathe. Use the overhead to introduce the **Relaxation Response – Flow**.

- Have GMs do a body scan and assign themselves a number as to where they are currently on a relaxed scale. The higher the number the greater the feeling of relaxation. Repeat this process at the end of the relaxation breathing activity.

- **Pulse Taking -** Have GMs take their pulse before and after relaxation breathing activity.

- Debrief experience. "What did you notice? Compare pulse and breathing rates before and after activity? How/when could they use this activity in their daily lives?"

Closure (10 - 15min)

Homework
- Practice breathing activity daily.
- Take their heart rate before and after the breathing activity.
- Scale their level of stress before and after the breathing activity.
- Record thoughts and feelings in their journals.

Complete the **Session Evaluation Sheet**.

Pat on the Back - This is a wrap up activity to be completed weekly by the group leader once GMs have left. The group leader writes a positive post-it-note with a specific statement about something they appreciated or noticed about each individual group member. Post-it-notes are to be left on the inside of each GM's individual folder for them to discover the following week.

Stress Chat

Did you know…

- Stress is a part of everyday life.
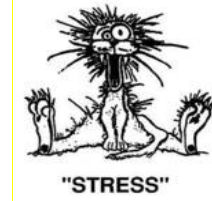
"STRESS"

- Good stress is know as **eustress** – "It can cause adrenaline to flow and actually improve the functioning of our bodies and minds" *(Humphrey p. 68, 2004)*

- Bad stress is known as **distress** – Can cause health issues and "our brains to shut down in the middle of a test" (*Humphrey p. 68, 2004*)

- Stress can be triggered by our own thoughts.

- Stress can either be fantastic or fatal, or somewhere in between.

- Some stress is good; it sharpens our focus.

Your brain and body secrete hormones when responding to something it perceives as dangerous to trigger a *Fight, Flight or Freeze* response.

- Stress reaction occurs because of interactions with people or events.

- Peak performance stress level is in the middle; neither too high nor too low (Davis, Eshelman, McKay, 2000).

- There are physical, mental, and emotional signs and symptoms of stress.

S. C. Keister, C. Apacki, C. Bergen, C. Kaye & L. Barr (2001).

Signs and Symptoms Checklist

Stress affects an individual's cognitive (thinking ability), physical, emotional and behavioural functioning in many ways. Put a * beside any of the signs and symptoms you have experienced. Add any others signs or symptoms at the end of the sheet.

Cognitive Symptoms	Physical Indicators	Emotional Indicators
- Forgetful - Unable to concentrate - Disorganized - Preoccupied - Lack of attention to details - Blurred vision - Blocking - Negative self-talk - Decreased coordination - Slowed thinking	- Increased heart rate - Elevated blood pressure - Increased breathing rate - Tightness of chest, neck, jaw and back - Shallow breathing - Insomnia - Fatigue - Upset stomach - Diarrheal - Constipation - Chronic pain - Urinary tract problems - Get sick easily	- Depression - Withdrawal - Anxiety - Low self-esteem - Loss of interest - Restless - Nightmares - Impatient - Worrying - Obsessive thinking - Crying - Helplessness - Isolation from others
Behavioural Symptoms		Others
- Impatient - Compulsive behaviour - Anger - Overeating, smoking substance abuse - Loss of appetite - Aggressive - Prone to accidents		

C. Mascott (2004).

Relaxation Breathing

You are going to guide group members through a series of breathing exercises to help them relax. Have individuals identify their relaxation level before and after the relaxation breathing exercise. Have group members record level of relaxation in their journals. This information can be used for discussion after the activity.

Have individuals sit comfortably in a chair or lie on a mat on the floor. Each step described below builds on the previous set of skills.

1. Establish breathing pattern – "Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth".

2. Body breathing
   a. Place hand on stomach. Feel your stomach inflate as you inhale and squeeze in when you exhale.
   b. Next place hand on your ribcage. Feel your ribcage expand as you inhale and contract as you exhale.
   c. Finally place your hands on your shoulders. Feel your shoulders rise as you inhale and drop/relax when you exhale.

3. Breathing rhythm - "4 counts to inhale, hold and 4 counts exhale".

4. Breathing cycle – continue to count for each complete breathing rhythm. (1…2…)

5. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

C. Mascott (2004).

Relaxation Response - Flow

It is impossible to be stressed, worried, angry and relaxed at the same time. When an individual is completely immersed in an activity, body, mind and soul, they are said to have a "flow" experience. The skill of relaxation breathing provides individuals the opportunity to experience a state of well-being, flow. It is important to learn and practice this skill when the individual is in a calm state so he or she is able to use this skill when the need arises.

Relaxation Response

When the brain is stimulated to relax, there is a decrease in

- Breathing rate

- Blood pressure

- Heart rate

- Body metabolism

C. Mascott (2004).

Pulse Taking

There are two methods that can be used, radial or carotid. Either method is effective, so allow for individual preference. For either method, it is important that the index and middle finger are used to take the pulse. The thumb should not be used for it has a pulse of its own.

Radial Pulse – is taken on the left wrist.

- It can be found on the thumb side
- Place the wrist of the left hand in the palm of the right hand
- Let the fingers naturally curl around, pressing the index and middle finger in a line on the wrist directly below the base of the thumb.

Carotid Pulse – is taken at the neck.

- Be sure to use the same hand as the side of the neck the pulse is taken at. Avoid reaching across the neck as this is the international sign for choking.
- Place the index and middle finger just below the jaw line along the windpipe and along the throat.

Take the pulse for 10 seconds and multiply by 6. This can be done before and after any relaxation activity to help determine the effectiveness of the exercise.

C. Mascott (2004).

Session Evaluation Sheet

<u>Empower Session Evaluation</u>

Session #:_____ Topic:_____ Date:_____

Overall how useful was this session for you?   **Not-------------Some------------Very**

<u>Based on your experience in today's group, please complete the following statements;</u>

What I liked best is:

What I found most useful is:

I hope:

I need:

The person I related best to is:

Other comments (feel free to continue writing on the back) ☺

Dawn McBride (2006).

Session B (optional): Body Noodle – Just Relax!

Time: 60-75 minutes

Objectives:
Participants will
- Learn a relaxation technique
- Recognize the difference between tension and relaxation
- Develop group cohesion
- Utilize strengths to develop self-efficacy

Materials:
- 10 pencils
- Overhead projector
- 10 mats
- Soft lighting
- Soft instrumental music
- CD Player
- White board or chart paper
- Post-it notes

Activities:
- A Room Full of Rain
- Music Relaxation script
- Progressive Relaxation script
- Session Evaluation Sheet

Intro (15-20 min)

Check-In

Use a TPS to discuss last week's assigned task, either as a large group or in dyads. From the discussion the leader looks for opportunities to connect previous learning, bridge into new session themes and make learning meaningful.

Review

Connect previous learning to new information. Revisit the Stress Awareness chart for other physical signs or symptoms the GM has experienced such as jaw clenching, tight shoulders or teeth clenching. Review the connection of being relaxed and moving towards where they want to be.

A Roomful of Rain – the purpose of this activity is to pique the interest of GMs, provide a movement break, and set the tone for the focus of this session.

- Debrief – "How does this activity relate to relaxation?"

Activity (30-40 min)

Visualization

"Close your eyes and think of a time you were stressed. Now think of a time you were able to relax. What were you doing? What were you saying to yourself? When you have thought of such an experience, you may open your eyes."

- Debrief as a group. Use GMs' experiences to lead into this week's relaxation activity.

Relaxation Activity

- Two relaxation activities have been provided. Using GMs interest and strengths as a guide the leader will choose to use either the **Music Relaxation Techniques** or **Progressive Relaxation**

- Have GMs verbally indicate where they are before and after the relaxation activity on their relaxation scale. If the group has completed the relaxation breathing session it is good to rehearse the breathing pattern (in for 4 and out for 8) before you begin the progressive relaxation activity.

- The provided script can either be read aloud or pre-recorded.

Closure (10-15 min)

Brainstorm as a group, the times when progressive relaxation could be used daily. Record ideas on the whiteboard or chart paper. (See if a GM will volunteer to be the recorder)

Weekly Task

Have GMs record in their journals where and when they will practice using progressive relaxation.

1. GMs are to record breathing or heart rates before and after relaxation activity in their journal.

Complete **Session Evaluation Sheet**.

Pat on the Back **-** This is a wrap up activity to be completed weekly by the group leader once GMs have left. The group leader writes a positive post-it-note with a specific statement about something they appreciated or noticed about each individual group member. Post-it-notes are to be left on the inside of each GM's individual folder for them to discover the following week.

A Room Full of Rain

1. Dim the lights and have the group sit in a circle on the ground. Begin the activity by stating "It looks like rain there is a rainstorm brewing".

2. Inform group members they are to copy your actions one at a time as the motion is passed from group member to group member in a clockwise manner around the circle.

3. Leader rubs their hands together.

4. Once the action has passed around the circle the leader then begins to snap his or her fingers.

5. Once the action has passed around the circle the leader then the leader slaps his or her thighs.

6. Once the action has passed around the circle the leader then the leader stamps his or her feet.

7. As the rainstorm passes reverse the actions.

Variations
- Rub a person's back instead of their own hands.
- Gently tap a person's back instead of snapping fingers.
- Gently slap a person's back instead of their own thighs.

C. Apaki (1991)

Music Relaxation Techniques

Just as loud, fast music affects breath and attention, soft slow music calms and relaxes. For best results use music which is familiar to your group members. Instrumental, nature sounds or songs with a positive outlook work best. Prior to the music relaxation activity, begin with a quick stretch and breathing exercise, in order to enhance results.

Be sure to pause 10 to 15 seconds when (…) appear and 30 to 45 seconds between natural breaks. The leader then leads the group with the following script;

Listen to the music… Allow the music to engulf you… Gently inhale and exhale… Inhale and exhale…

Think of yourself as a sponge and absorb the music through your pores deep inside your body…

Breathe deeply to the beat of the music… Inhale to the beat…Exhale to the beat…

The music is healing and warms your body…Allow the music to wash over you like a wave…

As you begin you are going to feel tension in your face and jaw. Relax your face and jaw. Feel the music gently caress your face and jaw…

Take a deep breath in, hold it, and exhale as you release the tension in your face and jaw… With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…You are feeling more comfortable and relaxed as you continue with this exercise.

Allow the music to travel to your neck and shoulders… You are going to feel tension in your neck and shoulders. Relax your neck and shoulders. Feel the music gently caress your neck and shoulders.

Take a deep breath in, hold it, and exhale as you release the tension in your neck and shoulders… With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…You are feeling more comfortable and relaxed as you continue with this exercise.

Allow the music to travel to your arms… You are going to feel tension in arms. Relax your arms. Feel the music gently caress your arms.

Take a deep breath in, hold it, and exhale as you release the tension in arms… With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…You are feeling more comfortable and relaxed as you continue with this exercise.

Allow the music to travel to your hands… You are going to feel tension in your hands. Relax your neck and shoulders. Feel the music gently caress your hands.

Take a deep breath in, hold it, and exhale as you release the tension in your hands… With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…You are feeling more comfortable and relaxed as you continue with this exercise.

Allow the music to travel to your chest and abdomen… You are going to feel tension in your chest and abdomen. Relax your chest and abdomen. Feel the music gently caress your chest and abdomen.

Take a deep breath in, hold it, and exhale as you release the tension in your chest and abdomen… With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…You are feeling more comfortable and relaxed as you continue with this exercise.

Allow the music to travel to your thighs… You are going to feel tension in your thighs. Relax your thighs Feel the music gently caress your thighs.

Take a deep breath in, hold it, and exhale as you release the tension in your thighs… With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…You are feeling more comfortable and relaxed as you continue with this exercise.

Allow the music to travel to your calves… You are going to feel tension in your calves. Relax your calves. Feel the music gently caress your calves.

Take a deep breath in, hold it, and exhale as you release the tension in calves… With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…You are feeling more comfortable and relaxed as you continue with this exercise.

Allow the music to travel to your feet… You are going to feel tension in your feet. Relax your feet. Feel the music gently caress your feet.

Take a deep breath in, hold it, and exhale as you release the tension in your feet… With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…You are feeling more comfortable and relaxed as you continue with this exercise.

Allow the music to surround your body as you feel more and more relaxed… inhale…exhale…your body feels heavy as you sink into the mat/chair…inhale…exhale…

Focus on the music…Allow the music to wash over you, like a wave…inhale…exhale…

Allow your self to be completely immersed in the music…Let go of your thoughts…If a thought enters your head say hello and then let it go…You are at peace…You are completely relaxed…All is well…
(Turn off the music) Take a couple of minutes to relax without the music. When you are ready open your eyes.

C. Mascott (2004).

Progressive Relaxation

Individuals can either sit comfortably in a chair or lie on a mat on the floor. Dim the lights and decrease outside stimulus. If you decide to use music, either instrumental or nature sounds work best. Progressive relaxation allows individuals to physically experience the difference between tension and relaxation. Be sure to pause 10 to 15 seconds when (…) appear and 30 to 45 seconds between natural breaks.

The leader then leads the group with the following script;
As we begin you are going to experience tension in different parts of your body. As the tension is released, it is going to be replaced with a warm relaxed sensation.

Let us start with face… Tense your faces tightly for 10 seconds… Hold the tension in your face…Be aware of the tension

Now relax and release the tension into the ground…. slowly allow your face to completely relax…As you relax feel a warm sensation rush over your face…Inhale…Exhale…With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed.

With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…Inhale…Exhale…You feel more comfortable and warm as you continue with this exercise.

Now lets move down to your shoulders and arms… Tense your shoulders and arms tightly for 10 seconds… Hold the tension as you tense your shoulders and arms…Be aware of the tension

Now relax as you release the tension into the ground…. slowly allow your shoulders and arms to droop and relax…As you relax feel a warmth sensation rush you're your shoulders and arms…Inhale…Exhale…With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed.

With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…Inhale…Exhale…You feel more comfortable and warm as you continue with this exercise

Now let us move down to your hands. Squeeze your hands tight for 10 seconds… Hold the tension as you clench your fists…Be aware of the tension.

Now open your hands slowly…Allow your hands to relax as you release the tension into the ground…As you relax feel a warm sensation rush through your hands…Inhale…Exhale…With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed.

With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…Inhale…Exhale…You feel more comfortable and warm as you continue with this exercise.

Now let to your chest and abdomen… Feel the tension in your chest and abdomen for 10 seconds… Hold the tension …Be aware of the tension.

Now slowly release the tension in your chest and abdomen…Allow your chest and abdomen to relax and release the tension into the ground…As you relax feel a warm sensation rush through your chest and abdomen…Inhale…Exhale…With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed.

With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…Inhale…Exhale…You feel more comfortable and warm as you continue with this exercise.

Now let us move down to your buttocks. Squeeze your buttocks tight for 10 seconds… Hold the tension as you clench your buttocks…Be aware of the tension.

Now slowly relax your buttocks…Allow your buttock to relax as you release the tension to the ground…As you relax feel a warm sensation rush through your buttocks…Inhale…Exhale…With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed.

With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…Inhale…Exhale…You feel more comfortable and warm as you continue with this exercise.

Now let us move down to your thighs. Tighten your thighs for 10 seconds… Hold the tension as you tighten your thighs…Be aware of the tension.

Now relax your thighs slowly…Allow thighs to relax as you release the tension into the ground…As you relax feel a warmth sensation threw them…Inhale…Exhale…With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed.

With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…Inhale…Exhale…You feel more comfortable and warm as you continue with this exercise.

Now let us move down to your calves. Tighten your calves for 10 seconds… Hold the tension as you tighten your calves…Be aware of the tension.

Now relax your calves slowly…Allow your calves to relax and release the tension into the ground…As you relax feel a warm sensation rush through your calves…Inhale…Exhale…With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed.

With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed…Inhale…Exhale…You feel more comfortable and warm as you continue with this exercise.

Now let us move down to your feet. Squeeze your feet tight for 10 seconds… Hold the tension as you curl your toes…Be aware of the tension.
Now slowly uncurl your feet…Allow your feet to relax as you release the tension into the ground…As you relax feel a warm sensation rush over them…Inhale…Exhale…With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed.

You are relaxed…Inhale…Exhale…You will continue to feel relaxed throughout the day…Inhale…Exhale…On the count of ten slowly open your eyes.

Session Evaluation Sheet

Empower Session Evaluation

Session #:_____ Topic:_____ Date:_____

Overall how useful was this session for you?   **Not-------------Some------------Very**

<u>Based on your experience in today's group, please complete the following statements;</u>

What I liked best is:

What I found most useful is:

I hope:

I need:

The person I related best to is:

Other comments (feel free to continue writing on the back) ☺

Dawn McBride (2006).

Session C (optional): Feed or Shrink

Time: 60-75 minutes

Objective:
Participants will
- Increase their awareness of the effect thoughts have on feeling and actions

Materials:
- Markers
- Balloons
- Strips of paper
- Pencils
- Post-it notes
- Talisman tokens (something GMs can keep to remind them of the hero within them)

Activities:
- Session Evaluation Sheet

Intro (15-20 min)

Check-In

Use a TPS to discuss last week's assigned task, either as a large group or in dyads. From the discussion the leader looks for opportunities to connect previous learning, bridge into new session themes and make learning meaningful.

Super Hero

- Have GMs verbally share some of their superheroes. Record to provide a visual prompt for the next activity.

- Revisit their journey of where they are now and where they want to be. Come up with a word that describes what feeling they want to leave behind and what feeling they want to move towards. What is preventing them from moving forward towards their goals? It is important to use individual's language for the remainder of the activities.

- Have strips of paper and pencils in the middle of the circle. On a slip of paper each group member will complete "If I were a superhero I would be_____ so I could_____."

- Debrief as a group in a way that connects to the theme or how the super powers would move GMs closer to their individual goals.

Activity (30-40 min)

Feed or Shrink

- Ask each GM to write on a balloon what feelings are acting as blocks, preventing them from moving towards their goals. These are the blocks that must be left behind.

- "Close your eyes and think of time when you have feed this feeling. What were you thinking or doing? Open your eyes when you are done."

- Record ideas to provide group a visual representation of blockers that are preventing them from moving towards their goals.

- "Think of a time you were able to stop or shrink these feelings. What were you doing or thinking?" Record ideas to provide a visual that they can use later in the session**.**

- Have GMs blow up their balloons but leave them untied.

- Taking turns each group member will share the word they want to leave behind. Each group member will share how he or she has been able to shrink similar feelings in the past and or provide helpful suggestions for other GMs (previous skills learned in other sessions). Each GM takes a turn sharing the blocker they have written on their balloon. The GM is to let out a little air from their balloon for each helpful suggestion that is shared by other GMs until the balloon is flat. The amount of air that is released at one time can be proportionate to how effective the GM thinks the helpful suggestion is.

Closure (10-15 min)

Debrief - "How will group members know when they have arrived at _____" (one word that describes where they want to be).

Talisman Tokens **-** Have each group member think of a skill they can use to shrink the blocker that is hindering them from moving towards reaching their goal. As each GM shares one of these skills allow them to take a talisman to remind them of the superhero in them.

Weekly Task - be watchful of signs that they are moving towards where they want to be and when they were able to shrink what they want to leave behind.

Complete **Session Evaluation Sheet**.

Pat on the Back - This is a wrap-up activity to be completed weekly by the group leader once GMs have left. The group leader writes a positive post-it note with a specific statement about something they appreciated or noticed about each individual group member. Post-it notes are to be left on the inside of each GM's individual folder for them to discover the following week.

Session Evaluation Sheet

Empower Session Evaluation

Session #:_____ Topic:_____ Date:_____

Overall how useful was this session for you?   **Not-------------Some------------Very**

Based on your experience in today's group, please complete the following statements;

What I liked best is:

What I found most useful is:

I hope:

I need:

The person I related best to is:

Other comments (feel free to continue writing on the back) ☺

Dawn McBride (2006).

Session D (optional): Mental Trip

Time: 60-75 minutes

Objectives:
Participants will

- Understand the connection between thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Practice shifting focus from negative to positive thinking.

Materials:
- An assortment of pictures of different locations (old calendars)
- Paper
- Pencil crayons
- Post-it notes

Activities:
- Floating Down a Stream script
- Session Evaluation Sheet

Intro (10-15 min)

Check-In

Discuss last week's assigned task. Discuss as a large group or use GRT to form dyads and do a TPS. Leader finds opportunities to connect previous learning, bridge into new session themes, and make learning meaningful.

Introduce the concept of the connection between thoughts, feelings and actions. Review previous sessions that have been completed, and sort sessions into these three categories. "Today's focus is the influence that our thoughts have on our feelings, and actions, and shifting our perceptions and focus, from the negative to the positive."

Activity (30-40 min)

Mental Trip - "Sometimes we have the power to change our situation, and other times we can only remove ourselves or change how we look at things."

- Have GM partake in a visualization activity. Instruct GMs to think of time they felt most at _____(what GMs want to achieve).

- Go around the circle and have each GM share their word.

- GMs are to close their eyes and visualize where they were. "What did it look like? Smell like? What could they hear? What were they feeling? Taste?"

- GMs are to open their eyes when they have a clear picture.

Making it a Reality

- GMs are given a choice to draw or choose a picture that fits to their mental picture.

- Using their 5 senses write descriptive words to breath life into their picture.

Floating Down a Stream Script – each GM is to individualize their destination to the picture they have created as the leader reads the script provided.

Closure (15-20 min)

Debrief and Process
- Call upon GM to describe their mental trip experience. "What did you notice?"

- Call upon group members to describe what they noticed about individual GMs when they were sharing their pictures and mental trip experiences. "What does this say about you?"

- Discuss where would it be most helpful to post these pictures?

Weekly Task
- To notice their self-talk when they are feeling the most (+)_____.

- To notice their self-talk when they are feeling the most (-) _____.

Complete **Session Evaluation Sheet**.

Pat on the Back - This is a wrap-up activity to be completed weekly by the group leader once GMs have left. The group leader writes a positive post-it note with a specific statement about something they appreciated or noticed about each individual group member. Post-it notes are to be left on the inside of each GM's individual folder for them to discover the following week.

Floating Down a Stream Script

Sometimes you are unable to remove yourself from a situation. This is an opportune time to take a mental trip to a relaxing place. **Be sure to pause 10 to 15 seconds when (…) appear and 30 to 45 seconds between natural breaks.**

You are floating down a stream…The air is warm as the sun shines down upon you…You are relaxed and comfortable…You hear the water lapping up against your boat as you continue your float down the stream to a beautiful place… A comfortable private place, far from people, noise and activity.

You continue your journey down the stream passing under the umbrella of trees above you…You are aware of the natural beauty that surrounds you…You are aware of the birds singing their sweet songs…

Slowly the streams moves you closer to your special place…You are relaxed…You breathe deeply…Inhale…Exhale…

You are floating closer to your special place…It becomes clearer…Inhale…Exhale

You have arrive on its shore…Slowly you step into your special place and notice your surroundings…

What do you see?..Reach out and touch some of the things you see…What textures do you feel?.. What sounds do you hear?…Get to know you special place and explore it freely

Now find a comfortable place to rest…In this special place you have the power to make your wishes come true…What one wish above all else would you like to happen?…

Imagine your wish coming true…What would you be doing?..What are you saying?.. How do others respond to you?.. What are they doing or saying?..Act out your wish the way you want it to happen.

It is time to leave your special place…You can return whenever you want to…Take a look around before you leave.

Now imagine floating down the stream once again… You feel comfortable…safe…relaxed…Allow the water to carry you downstream bringing with you your wishes back to the place you began. Slowly open your eyes.

Session Evaluation Sheet

<div style="border:1px solid black">

<u>Empower Session Evaluation</u>

</div>

Session #:_____ Topic:_____ Date:_____

Overall how useful was this session for you?   **Not-------------Some------------Very**

<u>Based on your experience in today's group, please complete the following statements;</u>

What I liked best is:

What I found most useful is:

I hope:

I need:

The person I related best to is:

Other comments (feel free to continue writing on the back) ☺

Dawn McBride (2006).

Session E (optional): Self-talk: Changing the Tune

THEME: **Positive Self-talk**

Time: 60-75 minutes

Objectives:
Participants will
- Understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviours
- Practice identifying and changing maladaptive to adaptive thinking patterns
- Understand the power of adaptive and constructive thinking in relation to stress management
- Use strengths to build empowerment

Materials*:*
- 10 pencils
- Overhead
- White board or chart paper
- Stress balls
- Post-it notes

Activities:
- Thoughts Emotions and Action Cycle overhead or poster
- Maladaptive Thinking Patterns
- Pits to Peaks handout
- Session Evaluation Sheet

Intro (10-15 min)

Check-In

Use a TPS to discuss last week's assigned task, either as a large group or in dyads. From the discussion the leader looks for opportunities to connect previous learning, bridge into new session themes and make learning meaningful.

The tallest partner is to begin sharing his or her weekly task first. Partners then alternate giving examples and listening.

Activity (35-45 min)

Leader is to read this quote:

"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" Shakespeare
"What do you think this quote means?"

Thoughts Emotions and Action Cycle

- Display the quote from the Thoughts, Emotions and Action Cycle overhead.

"Today we are going to explore the power of our thoughts. In previous sessions we have spoken about how are bodies respond to stress. Today we will explore how our perceptions affect our stress levels. Sometimes we do not have the power to change the situation but we always have the power to change how we look at and respond to it." Ask for group examples to illustrate this point.

"How does the quote relate to the Thoughts, Emotions and Action Cycle? What part is the thought? What emotion would go along with this situation? What part is the action?"

- Display the Thoughts, Emotions and Action Cycle

"Stress and/or anxiety is a maladaptive response to irrational or unrealistic fears. The ultimate goal is to perceive their world from a less threatening template. To reduce stress an individual must target all three areas." (Adams & Gullota, 2005, p. 135)

Classifying Negative Self-Talk

- Using the overhead describe the three maladaptive thinking patterns.
  - **Maladaptive Thinking Patterns**

- Have students provide examples from their homework assignment for each maladaptive thinking pattern.

- Using the example provided by the GMs go through the Thoughts, Emotion and Action Cycle.

Pits and Peaks activity

"As your examples have shown negative thoughts lead to negative emotions and negative actions. It is time to *Change the Tune* and practice positive self-talk."

Hand out **Pits to Peaks handout**

- GMs are to use personal examples to complete handout

- GMs are asked to share one pit and one peak

Or

As each group member shares one example of nagging negative self-talk GMs provide ways to change the tape to positive self-talk. Individuals commit to one they will use next time.

Closure (5-10 min)

Weekly Task

- GMs are to notice the times they changed their Tune (+) and how it affected their emotions and actions.

- Pass out stress balls. The task is to visualize as GMs squeezes the ball_____ shrinks _____ thus allowing _____ to grow.

Complete **Session Evaluation Sheet**.

Pat on the Back - This is a wrap-up activity to be completed weekly by the group leader once GMs have left. The group leader writes a positive post-it note with a specific statement about something they appreciated or noticed about each individual group member. Post-it notes are to be left on the inside of each GM's individual folder for them to discover the following week.

Thoughts, Emotions, and Action Cycle

'If I believe in me I will succeed' ☺

Peaks

Thought

Action

Emotion
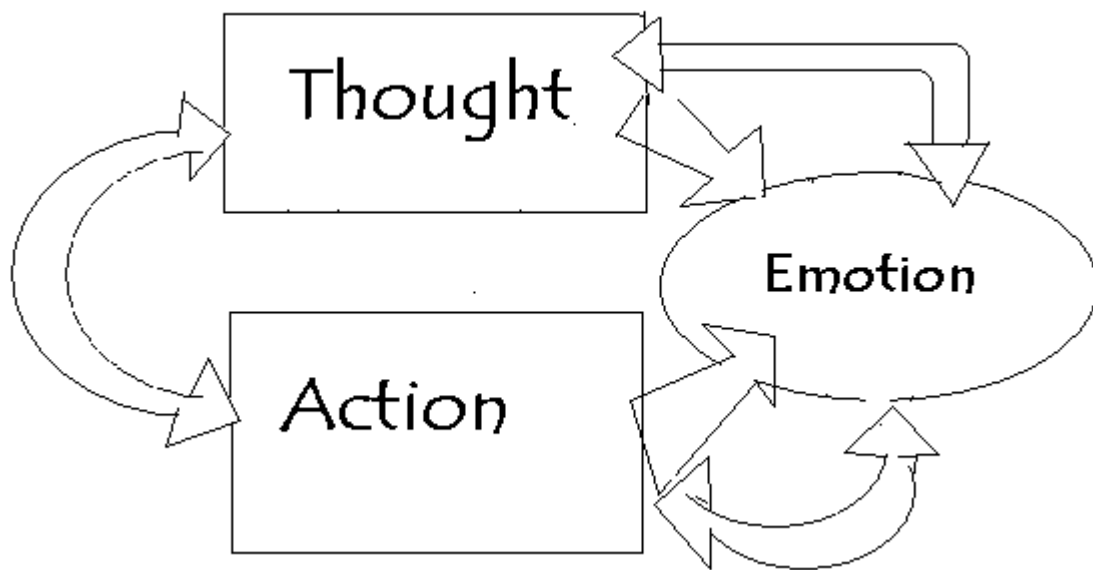
Pits

<u>Maladaptive Thinking Patterns</u>

1. **Imperatives** (Demands) – should of, must be, have to

2. **Arbitrary inferences** (Fairytales) – negative meaning without evidence

3. **Overgeneralizations** – everyone, always

Pits and Peaks Weekly Task

Think of a situation HERE in school that would push your buttons. Now work through your **thoughts** – **feelings** - **actions** using the Pits and Peaks strategy

Describe the situation

Pits negative thoughts (self-talk) – feeding your _____ (e.g. stress)

Thoughts

1.
2.
3.

Feelings of _____ increase (Feeding)

Actions

Peaks positive thoughts (self- talk) – shrinking your _____

Thoughts

1.
2.
3.

Feelings of_____ decrease (Shrinks)

Actions

Think of a situation at home that would push your buttons. Now work through your **thoughts** – **feelings** - **actions** using the Pits and Peaks strategy

Describe the situation

Pits negative thoughts (self-talk) – feeding your _____.

Thoughts

1.
2.
3.

Feelings of _____ increase (Feeding)

Actions

Peaks positive thoughts (self- talk) – shrinking your _____

Thoughts

1.
2.
3.

Feelings of _____decreasing (Shrinking)

Actions

Session Evaluation Sheet

<div style="border: 1px solid black; text-align: center;">

<u>**Empower Session Evaluation**</u>

</div>

Session #:_____ Topic:_____ Date:_____

Overall how useful was this session for you? **Not-------------Some------------Very**

<u>Based on your experience in today's group, please complete the following statements;</u>

What I liked best is:

What I found most useful is:

I hope:

I need:

The person I related best to is:

Other comments (feel free to continue writing on the back) ☺

Session F (optional): Blocker Buster

Time: 60-75 minutes

Objectives:
Participants will
- Understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviours
- Practice identifying and changing maladaptive to adaptive thinking patterns
- Understand the power of adaptive and constructive thinking in relation to stress management
- Use strengths to build self-efficacy

Materials:
- Overhead projector
- White board or chart paper
- Post-it notes

Activities:
- Thoughts Emotions and Action Cycle overhead or poster
- Session Evaluation Sheet

Intro (10-15 min)

Check-In

Use a TPS to discuss last week's assigned task, either as a large group or in dyads. From the discussion the leader looks for opportunities to connect previous learning, bridge into new session themes and make learning meaningful.

Activity (30-45 min)

Thoughts Emotions and Action Cycle

- Display the Thoughts, Emotions and Action Cycle

"Stress and/or anxiety are a maladaptive response to irrational or unrealistic fears. The ultimate goal is to perceive your world from a less threatening template. To reduce stress an individual must target all three areas." (Adams & Gullota, 2005, p. 135)

If you have not done Session E prior to this session then you might want to go into greater detail for the Thoughts, Emotion and Action Cycle. Refer to Session E for more information.

Friend or Foe interview

- GMs are to identify blockers (negative self-talk) that anchor them to where they are now and prevent them from moving towards where they want to be.

- Each GM chooses one blocker from the list and allows the remaining GMs to interview them.

- This provides opportunities to learn from other group member's new positive self-talk and provides opportunities to practice.

- Debrief activity as a group

Closure (5-10 min)

Weekly Task - GMs are to notice times they were able to change their tune from negative to positive and how it affected their emotions and actions.

- Before GMs leave they are to share with the group the most meaningful block buster they experienced today.

Complete **Session Evaluation Sheet**.

Pat on the Back - This is a wrap-up activity to be completed weekly by the group leader once GMs have left. The group leader writes a positive post-it note with a specific statement about something they appreciated or noticed about each individual group member. Post-it notes are to be left on the inside of each GM's individual folder for them to discover the following week.

Thoughts, Emotions, and Action Cycle

'If I believe in me I will succeed' ☺

Peaks
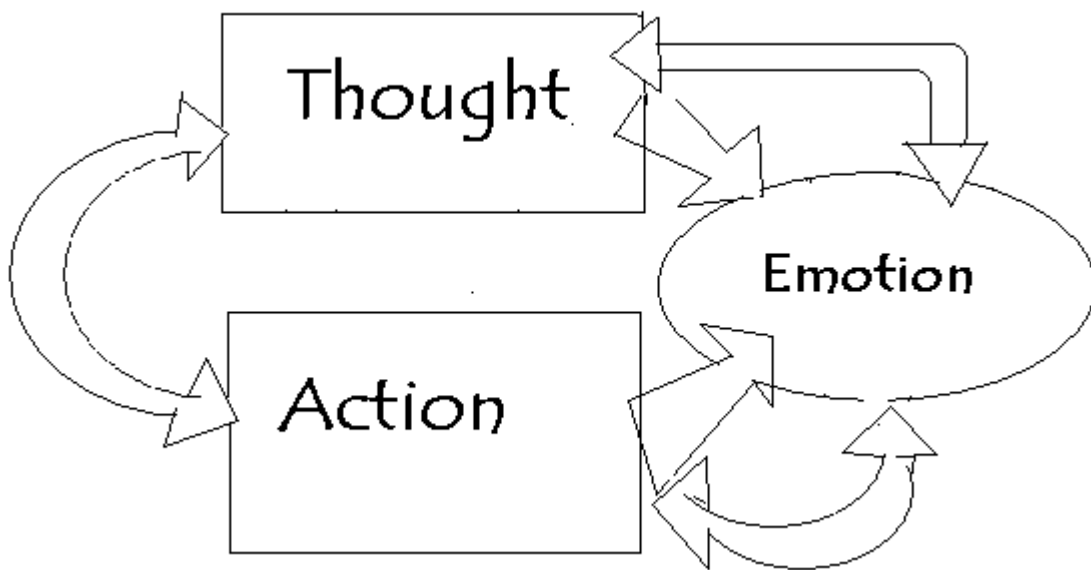
Pits

Session Evaluation Sheet

<u>Empower Session Evaluation</u>

Session #:_____ Topic:_____ Date:_____

Overall how useful was this session for you? **Not-------------Some------------Very**

<u>Based on your experience in today's group, please complete the following statements;</u>

What I liked best is:

What I found most useful is:

I hope:

I need:

The person I related best to is:

Other comments (feel free to continue writing on the back) ☺

Dawn McBride (2006).

Session G (optional): Assertiveness Training

THEME: **Positive Affirmations**

Time: 60-75 minutes

If you are planning on doing this session GMs will need to bring in a personal item that represents _____. (This was established in session 2. Where they want to be). Alternative, leader provides a talisman if GMs are unable to bring in a personal item.

Objectives:
Participants will
- Make assertive, constructive statements
- Identify passive and assertive statements and note the difference

Materials:
- 10 pencils
- White board or chart paper – markers
- 81/2 x11 blank paper
- Pencil crayons
- Post-it notes

Activities:
- Assertive Tips Chart
- Session Evaluation Sheet

Intro (10-15 min)

Check-In

Discuss last week's assigned task. Discuss as a large group or use GRT to form dyads and do a TPS. Leader finds opportunities to connect previous learning, bridge into new session themes, and make learning meaningful.

Activity (30-40 min)

Assertive Statements

- Use **Assertive Tips overhead** to lead discussion.

- GMs are given several post-it notes and asked to record examples of positive self-talk. GMs can refer to their homework for ideas.

- GMs are to place their positive self-talk examples on either the Passive or Assertive poster.

- GMs need to choose one passive statement from either the Passive poster or their homework assignment and rewrite it into an assertive positive self talk statement. The assertive statement should relate to what they could say when they are studying or writing a test.

- GM stands up when they are done.

- When everyone is standing each GM takes a turns, looks at the leader, shares one assertive statement and then sits down. These statements are to be used as a personal affirmation statement.

Positive Affirmation Posters – This is used to build self-efficacy. GMs have a choice in doing one of the following activities.

- Choose one assertive self-talk statement and create a poster.

- Make a top 5 assertive self- talk poster.

- Brainstorm visible locations to post positive affirmation posters.

Closure (15-20 min)

Weekly Task

1. Leader writes the sample Personal Contract on the whiteboard.

2. GMs copy down Personal Contract into their journals and fill in the blanks.

3. GMs read their Personal Contract to the group as they leave.

Personal Contract

My personal affirmation is:

I will post my personal affirmation in this location:

I am committed to reading or saying my personal affirmation_____ times a day.

Date: Signature

Complete **Session Evaluation Sheet**.

Pat on the Back - This is a wrap-up activity to be completed weekly by the group leader once GMs have left. The group leader writes a positive post-it note with a specific statement about something they appreciated or noticed about each individual group member. Post-it notes are to be left on the inside of each GM's individual folder for them to discover the following week.

Assertive Tips

Assertive language has a TURBO CHARGE affect on positive thoughts, emotions and actions

Passive	*Assertive*
You	I
I want	I do
I think	I know
I hope	I am capable
I wish	I will
I might	I can

Aggressive

It is not only the language you use but also the tone you use to speak with that makes a statement aggressive. Both passive and assertive language can be spoken in an aggressive manner.

Session Evaluation Sheet

<u>Empower Session Evaluation</u>

Session #:_____ Topic:_____ Date:_____

Overall how useful was this session for you? **Not-------------Some------------Very**

<u>Based on your experience in today's group, please complete the following statements;</u>

What I liked best is:

What I found most useful is:

I hope:

I need:

The person I related best to is:

Other comments (feel free to continue writing on the back) ☺

Dawn McBride (2006).

Session # 8: Empower Graduation

> THEME: **Closure and Celebration**

Time: 60-75 minutes

Objectives:

Participants will

- Celebrate their successes and new skills
- Empower group members
- Support each other
- Evaluate Empower program

Materials:

- Pencils and felts
- CD player
- GET and GIVE posters
- Post-it notes

Activities:

- Story Board
- Unwritten song lyrics
- Graduation Certificate
- Empower Final Evaluation

Intro (15 min)

Check-In

- Review weekly Task and GET/GIVE chart.

- Turn down the lights and instruct GMs to take a few relaxing breaths, sink into their chairs, close their eyes and listen to the words of the song **Unwritten (A22).** "What meanings do the words bring to you? How are the words related to bringing closure to the group?"

Activity (30 min)

Story Board **-** Leaders pass out a blank 11"x17" paper folded in half to each GM. Use the sample **Story Board** template (see manual p. 90) and give the following instructions.

1. On the front cover have GMs write,

    "This is a story of _____ (Individual's wish)".

    Provide an example and continued to personalize the activity as the leader explains the rest of the activity. Using a completed storyboard as a visual might be helpful. Have GMs sign the front cover. Each GM must reflect on his or her personal journey and what he or she had wanted to achieve. (Wish) On the bottom left write THEN   /10 and on the bottom right write NOW   /10. Using the 1 to 10 scale GMs decide where they were at the start of the program (THEN) and where they feel they are at the end of the program (NOW). This is similar to the scale in session 2. (For example - This is the story of CONFIDENCE. THEN 2/10 and NOW 7/10).

2. On the inside top, left corner write WHO I AM… Underneath have GMs write words, and or draw pictures to describe who they are now and who they are becoming. On the bottom of this page write THE SKILLS I HAVE LEARNED…

3. On the next inside page write HOW OTHERS SEE ME…This is where the other GM's post-it notes will eventually be placed. (Pat on the back activity to follow).

4. On the back page write WHAT I HAVE LEFT BEHIND_____ and then scale this feeling accordingly THEN   /10 and NOW   /10.

Pat on the Back

1. GMs are to write something they appreciate or something positive they have noticed about each group member on a post-it note.

2. Depending on your group maturity, cohesion and comfort level, the leader can determine how to distribute the post-it notes.

   a. Notes can be passed into the leader.

   b. GM names are posted around the room so GMs can move around and post individual GM notes under each name.

   c. GMs can mill around and PAT each other on the back and post the notes on individual GM's back.

3. Once all post-it notes have been distributed, individual GMs are to collect their post-it notes and put them on the inside right of their Story Board under the heading HOW OTHERS SEE ME.

Closing (20 min)

"We have grown tremendously as a group. Time has come to celebrate, recognize each others' growth, and bring closure to our Empower Group."

Complete **Empower Final Evaluation** before moving onto the Graduation Ceremony.

Graduation Ceremony (10 min)- activities will vary according to what group decides to do. It is always a nice idea to provide a graduation certificate. Here is a suggestion of a graduation ceremony

1. Leader collects Story Boards and adds a **Graduation Certificate** to each GM's Story Board.

2. Group makes a circle and as each individual's name is called the GM steps into the middle of the graduation circle to meet the leader.

3. The leader shares individual GMs Story Boards using the following script.

"This is (GM name) of _____. She is a person of (Share something from the inside left cover). Who has learned (bottom inside left cover). Others have noticed/appreciated (inside right post-it notes) about her."

4. Shake hands and congratulate GMs on her/his successful completion of the Empower program. Encourage a round of applause.

Variations – The above example is a low risk activity. Depending on the group's cohesion, maturity and comfort level you may want to move to a higher risk activity such as:

- Each GM randomly picks a Story Board, rehearses the above script and presents to each other inside the graduation circle.

- Have the each individual read their own Story Board to the group.

- Be creative and involve GMs in the design of their graduation ceremony in a previous session.

Final Thoughts

- Provide some time for GMs to decide how they would like to support one and other.
- Remind GMs of the supports available to them, including the supports they are to each other.
- If possible, offer your services to check in with GMs to see how they are progressing. (Determine check-ins on an individual basis).

Story Board

Front Cover

This is the story of_____.
(wish)

Then   /10   Now   /10

Left Inside   Right Inside

Who I am…   How others see me…

The skills I have learned…

Back Cover

What I left behind…

Then   /10   Now   /10

"Unwritten" song lyrics by Natasha Bedingfield

I am unwritten, can't read my mind, I'm undefined
I'm just beginning, the pen's in my hand, ending unplanned

Staring at the blank page before you
Open up the dirty window
Let the sun illuminate the words that you could not find

Reaching for something in the distance
So close you can almost taste it
Release your inhibitions
Feel the rain on your skin
No one else can feel it for you
Only you can let it in
No one else, no one else
Can speak the words on your lips
Drench yourself in words unspoken
Live your life with arms wide open
Today is where your book begins
The rest is still unwritten

Oh, oh, oh

I break tradition, sometimes my tries, are outside the lines
We've been conditioned to not make mistakes, but I can't live that way

Staring at the blank page before you
Open up the dirty window
Let the sun illuminate the words that you could not find

Reaching for something in the distance
So close you can almost taste it
Release your inhibitions
Feel the rain on your skin
No one else can feel it for you
Only you can let it in
No one else, no one else
Can speak the words on your lips
Drench yourself in words unspoken
Live your life with arms wide open
Today is where your book begins

Feel the rain on your skin
No one else can feel it for you
Only you can let it in
No one else, no one else

Can speak the words on your lips
Drench yourself in words unspoken
Live your life with arms wide open
Today is where your book begins
The rest is still unwritten

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Open up the dirty window
Let the sun illuminate the words that you could not find

Reaching for something in the distance
So close you can almost taste it
Release your inhibitions
Feel the rain on your skin
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No one else, no one else
Can speak the words on your lips
Drench yourself in words unspoken
Live your life with arms wide open
Today is where your book begins
The rest is still unwritten
The rest is still unwritten
The rest is still unwritten

Oh, yeah, yeah

http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/Unwritten-lyrics-Natasha-Bedingfield/BAA63A981217E30148256F050007953B

Graduation Certificate

This is to certify that

Name

has completed

an **Empower** program

At
Name of facility

Facilitator_____   Date Completed_____

Empower Final Evaluation

---

1. Good bye_____ 2. Hello_____

1. Before Empower I was a ___/10 for _____ and now I am a ____/10.
2. Before Empower I was a ____/10 for _____and now I am a ____/10.

What I am going to remember the most ...

Things I found most useful/helpful...

Ways to improve Empower...

Final comments ☺

My overall rating of Empower 8 week program is ___/10.

Appendix I
Stress Survey

Name: Date:

Using a scale of 1 to 5 rate your stress level for the following situations. The greater the number the greater the stress level you are currently encountering. Circle the number that represents your stress level.

1– very little **2**- at times **3**- moderate **4**– more than I would like **5**– more than I can handle at times

School

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Family

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Friends

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Other relationships

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Job

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Extra curricular activities

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Other

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Appendix II
Change Motivational Survey

Please check the one that best applies to your current situation ☺

My current STRESS level is...

____ **Fine**, and I don't intend to learn new skills to manage my stress in the next six months

____ **Ok**, but I intend to learn some new skills to manage my stress in the next six months

____ **Borderline**, and I intend to learn new stress management skills in the next month.

____ **Overwhelming** at times and I would like to learn new stress management skills as soon as possible

____ I **can control** my stress levels and I am able to teach others effective stress management skills.

Stress is like...

Name: **Date:**