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## Fostering a Sense of Belonging in Students who are At-Risk for Suspension or Expulsion: A Small-Group Intervention for Middle School Students

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Fostering a Sense of Belonging in Students who are At-Risk for Suspension or Expulsion:  
A Small-Group Intervention for Middle School Students

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GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY  
In  
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## **Abstract**

Research shows that students who are at-risk for suspension or expulsion lack a sense of belonging at school. A sense of belonging is an essential contribution to success at school and in life, and therefore, students who lack belonging are unable to reach their full potential. Students who are suspended or expelled are also more likely to drop out of school and be incarcerated as adults. Despite this research, many schools still have zero-tolerance policies in place that result in suspension and expulsion of students. Instead of teaching students the skills they need to be successful, suspension deprives students of their education and makes them feel disconnected. Further, research shows that exclusionary discipline results in a significant discipline gap between White students and students of color.

Part of a school counselor's role is to implement small group counseling interventions. Small group counseling is effective in cultivating a sense of belonging in students by allowing them a safe place to talk about their experiences and learn new skills. Group interventions involve working with six-to-eight students to promote their academic, social/emotional, and/or career success. This project provides a small group intervention for school counselors to implement. It specifically targets a diverse, adolescent student population with the ultimate goal of reducing discipline referrals and increasing a sense of belonging at school. Although small group counseling does not necessarily replace exclusionary discipline, it can allow for an alternative solution and promote positive behavior outcomes.

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## **Chapter One: Project Proposal**

### **Problem Statement**

Students who exhibit negative behavior, such as being disruptive, violent, or breaking other school rules, often lack the feeling of belonging at school (Hemphill, et al., 2006). Historically, schools have suspended or expelled students for such behaviors, yet the effectiveness of suspension and expulsion, often as a result of zero-tolerance policies, is highly debated by researchers, parents, educators, and policy makers (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). Despite the growing research on the ineffectiveness of exclusionary discipline, many schools still have zero-tolerance policies in place that result in suspension and expulsion of students (Ashford, 2000; Martinez, 2009; McAndrews, 2001; Skiba, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). During the 2015-2016 school year, over 2.5 million students were suspended nationwide and over 14,000 were expelled (Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), 2016). What's particularly alarming is the negative impacts suspension and expulsion often have on students. Specifically, the research highlights that one of the largest impacts of exclusionary discipline is that it deprives students' need for a sense of belonging at school, especially in students of color (Hemphill, et al., 2006).

A sense of belonging is critical for students to be academically successful. Students who feel as though they belong at school tend to have higher academic achievement, increased motivation, and lower absenteeism (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). This research is supported by theorists such as Maslow (1943) and Glasser (1996), who argue all humans must have a sense of belonging in order to reach their full potential. Many students exhibiting at-risk behaviors are already lacking a relational need and when they are suspended, their lack of belonging often increases (Hemphill, et al., 2006). This serves as a barrier to their academic and social/emotional success.

## **Rationale**

Extensive research shows that a sense of belonging at school is linked to positive outcomes. Specifically, the research suggests that a sense of belonging can increase academic motivation, engagement, and achievement (Anderman, 2002; Buote, 2001; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2000). Further, a sense of belonging can promote other positive outcomes such as resilience, positive self-esteem, happiness, and life satisfaction (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Longaretti, 2020). In addition, there's a correlation between a lack of belonging at school and negative outcomes. These outcomes include negative feelings, negative thoughts, attempts to fit in, and negative behavior such as being distracted in class, lack of confidence, or disengagement (Longaretti, 2020). Perceived connectedness at school serves as a protection against major risk factors such as emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, violence, and substance abuse (Resnick, et al., 2008). These findings show that a sense of belonging plays a fundamental role in a student's success. Not only is connectedness significant to a students' academic achievement, but it also supports positive social emotional and behavioral outcomes (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Longaretti, 2020).

Due to the staggering amount of students being suspended and expelled from school, the need for belonging must be addressed. Many students exhibiting at-risk behaviors are not getting their need of belonging met at school (Beck & Malley, 1997). This reality is especially true for students of color (Skiba, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 2000) and students transitioning from primary school to secondary school (Longaretti, 2020; Walter, et al., 2008). Instead of cultivating a sense of belonging in students who have discipline problems, suspension excludes students from school, often contributing to their struggles (Beck, 1997; Walter, et al., 2008). The long-term impacts are especially troublesome. Students who have been suspended or expelled from school

dropout at significantly higher rates, making them more likely to enter the juvenile justice system (Balfanz, et al., 2014). High school dropouts make up eighty-two percent of the adults in the United States prison system (Rodriguez, 2017). Additionally, Bacher-Hicks, et al. (2019) found that students who attend a school with a high suspension rate are 15 to 20 percent more likely to be arrested and incarcerated as adults. Exclusionary discipline contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline, which is responsible for systemic problems in the United States (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017).

Despite the devastating consequences of strict disciplinary policies, many administrators still employ these policies, such as zero-tolerance policies to increase perceived school safety and to decrease behaviors, such as violence (Barton, et al., 1998; Morris & Wells, 2000). And unfortunately, trends in exclusionary discipline suggest that the use of suspension and expulsion will not be eliminated in the near future (CRDC, 2016). Therefore, it's imperative that an alternative intervention be put into place to foster a sense of belonging for students who show at-risk behaviors or who have been excluded from school. School counselors can be responsible for such interventions.

## **Background**

### **Zero-Tolerance Policies**

In the midst of the *War on Drugs* (1980s), American schools began implementing zero-tolerance policies in an effort to keep students safe. By the mid 1990s, more American schools began instituting zero-tolerance policies, due to an increase in school crime (Morton, 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported an increase in school crime including gang-related activities, illegal drugs, the presence of guns on campus, and violent crimes in schools. In response to this data, the Gun Free School Act was passed in 1994 (Rodríguez, 2017), requiring schools to implement zero-tolerance policies. Under such policies, any student who

brought a gun to school was issued a one-year expulsion (Rodríguez, 2017). Following this act, many states also required expulsion for behaviors such as drug possession, violence, disruption, and anti-social behavior (Morton, 2014).

As soon as zero-tolerance policies became a national discipline strategy, additional problems began to arise. And with that, scholars, legislatures, and educators argued that a “one-size fits all” approach often resulted in severe punishments for violations that were minor or unintentional (Rodríguez, 2017). For example, students were receiving harsh discipline for infractions such as bringing a knife in a lunch box to cut food, creating a gun out of paper, or bringing a fake weapon to school as part of a Halloween costume (Skiba, 2014). Zero-tolerance policies were implemented with the intentions to create a safe learning environment, but as more schools put these practices in place, they were found to be problematic. In an effort to combat this problem, some states passed anti-zero tolerance bills that encouraged administrators to take certain factors into consideration to fully understand the circumstance, before imposing such drastic discipline (Morton, 2014). In 2001, the American Bar Association, along with other legislatures, officially opposed zero-tolerance policies following the recommendation of the literature (Rodríguez, 2017). However, these efforts had little influence on the elimination of exclusionary discipline.

Today, the debate for zero-tolerance policies continues. Those who are in favor of zero-tolerance policies argue that suspensions will make the school safer, reduce disruption in classrooms, and decrease misbehavior (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). In contrast, those who are against zero-tolerance policies argue that suspensions and expulsions are often unfair, ineffective in decreasing misbehavior, and push students who need support out of school and into the criminal justice system (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). The biggest criticism is that zero-tolerance

policies are responsible for the discipline gap between White students and students of color. Black students are suspended at a significantly higher rate than White students (Skiba, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 2000), and therefore, are more likely to drop out of school (Balfanz, et al., 2014) and be incarcerated as adults (Bacher-Hicks, et al., 2019). Despite this data, schools are still using suspension and expulsion as a disciplinary method. In 2018, The Education Commission of the States reported that all fifty states require students to be expelled for possession of a firearm, at least forty states allow students to be suspended for violent or disruptive behaviors, at least thirty-six states allow students to be suspended or expelled for assault or physical harm, twenty-six states allow students to be suspended or expelled for drug use or possession, and at least twelve states allow students to be suspended for bullying (Rafa, 2019). Although many schools have eliminated or adapted their zero-tolerance policies, exclusionary discipline still remains a pressing issue.

### **Sense of Belonging**

In the 1940s, American psychologist, Abraham Maslow, developed a hierarchy of human needs. He created a pyramid to demonstrate these needs and indicated that needs lower down on the pyramid must be attended to before needs higher up on the pyramid can be met. Just above physiological needs and safety/security is love and belonging. Maslow (1943) argued that in order to reach self-actualization or progress at the optimal rate, love and belonging must be met. The need for belonging is supported by many other theorists, such as Vygotsky, Dewey, and Glasser, who also agree that feeling connected is a fundamental human need. In light of the increased research on belonging, their work began to influence education in America (Glasser, 1996; Hausfather, 1996; Osterman, 2000).

Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, believed that learning is a social process (Hausfather, 1996). According to Vygotsky, everyone has their own perspectives, interpretations, and understandings. Students learn by sharing their experiences with others and understanding or empathizing with the experiences of others (Hausfather, 1996). Dewey, who also viewed education as social, recognized the importance of interpersonal needs and argued that a school is a community that every teacher and student must feel a part of (Osterman, 2000). Further, William Glasser (1996) developed “choice theory”, which explains that everyone needs a sense of belonging. He argued that students who don’t have their need for belonging met, will behave in ways they believe will help meet this need (Glasser, 1996). The work of these researchers has influenced education by stressing the importance of connectedness and community at school.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to provide school counselors with a small-group intervention that promotes positive behavior in at-risk students by cultivating a sense of belonging. The American Psychological Association (2008) suggests implementing “preventative measures that can improve school climate and improve the sense of school community and belongingness” (p. 858), as an alternative to zero-tolerance policies. By implementing a preventative disciplinary approach, the ultimate goal is to decrease the number of suspensions. The intention is to help at-risk students feel connected at school, encourage them to take responsibility for their actions, and teach them strategies to manage their behaviors. The project includes a small group outline, all required documents, a pre/post-test for evaluation, and an activity journal for students.

For this project to be most impactful, it’s designed to be implemented in an Urban middle school setting that has a diverse student population. A school counselor’s role is to “specifically

address the needs of every student, particularly students of cultural diverse, low socio-economic status, and other underserved or underperforming populations” (ASCA, 2005, p. 77). The small group is designed to meet this standard by emphasizing cultural considerations and specifically address the discipline gap between White students and students of color (CRDC, 2016). Along with cultural considerations, this project also acknowledges the demanding need for sense of belonging in adolescents (Beck & Malley, 1998). Developmental factors for middle school students will drive the small group instruction and activities. Although this project can be modified to be impactful for other student populations, it will focus on the unique needs of minority students and middle school students.

### **Objectives**

The overall objectives are (1) To promote a sense of belonging in adolescents who are at-risk by implementing a small-group intervention that gives students the opportunity to connect and relate to one another and (2) Decrease suspensions and expulsions by teaching small-group participants the following concepts through small-group instruction and activities:

1. An understanding of how their thoughts impact their behaviors
2. The ability to take responsibility for their actions
3. An understanding of how their behaviors impact others
4. The ability to satisfy their needs in a healthy way

The objectives will be driven by ASCA’s Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (2014), ASCA’s Professional Standards and Competencies (2019b), and ASCA’s ethical standards (2016). The following ASCA mindset and behavior standards will be addressed during small-group sessions:

### **Session One**

1. M 3. “Sense of belonging in the school environment”
2. B-SS 2. “Create positive and supportive relationships with other students”

### **Session Two**

1. M 1. “Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being”
2. M 2. “Self-confidence in ability to succeed
3. B-SS 9. “Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment.”

### **Session Three**

1. B-SMS 2. “Demonstrate self-discipline and self-control
2. B-SMS 7. “Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem”

### **Session Four**

1. B-SS 4. “Demonstrate empathy”
2. B-SMS 1. “Demonstrate ability to assume responsibility”

### **Session Five**

1. B-SMS 4. “Demonstrate ability to delay immediate gratification for long-term rewards
2. B-SS 9. “Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment”

### **Session Six**

1. M.1. “Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being”
2. B-LS 7. “Identify long- and short-term academic, career and social/emotional goals”

The following ASCA professional standards and competencies will be addressed, as they relate to the role of a school counselor (ASCA, 2019b):

1. B-PF 6. “Demonstrate understanding of the impact of cultural, social and environmental influences on student success and opportunities.”
2. B-SS 1. “Design and implement instruction aligned to ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success in large-group, small-group and individual settings.”

This project will address the following ethical standards (ASCA, 2016):

1. A. 7. a. “Facilitate short-term groups to address students’ academic, career, and/or social/emotional issues.
2. A. 10. a. “Strive to contribute to a safe, respectful, nondiscriminatory school environment in which all members of the school community demonstrate respect and civility.”

### **Definitions**

**ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors-** “Statements of ethical behavior necessary to maintain the highest standard of integrity, leadership, and professionalism” (ASCA, 2019, p.147).

**ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success-** “K-12 College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Every Student: Research-based statements of the knowledge, attitudes and skills students need to achieve academic success, college and career readiness and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2019, p. 147).

**ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies-** “Statements of the knowledge, skills and attitudes school counselors need to meet the profession’s rigorous demands” (ASCA, 2019, p.147).

**At-Risk behavior-** Any behavior a student exhibits that qualify them for suspension or expulsion, such as possession of weapons, violence, assault, disruptive behavior, bullying, and drug use (Rafa, 2019).

**Connectedness-** The relationship students have with their school and the degree to which they feel involved (Gowing & Jackson, 2016).

**Exclusionary Discipline-** Discipline methods that exclude students from the learning environment (Rafa, 2019).

**School-to-prison Pipeline-** The idea that exclusionary discipline pushes students out of school and into the criminal justice system (Rodriguez, 2017).

**Sense of Belonging-** Members of a community feel as though the group is important to them and they are important to the group. Students feel accepted, cared for, and important at school (Osterman, 2000).

**Small-Group Instruction-** “School counselors work with small groups of students to provide instruction and activities designed to improve student success” (ASCA, 2019, p. 79).

**Zero-Tolerance Policies-** Discipline policies that “require schools and districts to show no lenience for certain kinds of student misconduct, and usually mandate suspension, expulsions, and often mandate suspension, expulsion, and often the summoning of the local law enforcement for behaviors ranging from weapon and drug possession to fighting, smoking, and even tardiness” (Kafka, 2011, p. 2)

### **Scope and Limitations**

This project will focus on how implementing small-group interventions as part of a comprehensive school counseling program can increase a sense of belonging in students and encourage them to make positive behavioral changes. This project must be implemented by

certified school counselors who have acquired the knowledge and skills to lead such interventions. By providing specific skills that will be beneficial in conducting this small group and following recommendations from available research on small-group counseling, this project is designed to support school counselors throughout the implementation process.

This project specifically takes developmental and cultural considerations into account. These recommendations should be altered based on the demographics of the student population. Schools populations differ dramatically between Urban, Sub-Urban, and Rural settings as well as Elementary or Secondary settings. This project is specifically designed for the unique needs of middle school aged students in an urban or diverse school setting. Accommodations for students in an elementary or high-school setting, students in a rural or not-diverse sub-urban setting, students with special needs or disabilities, and English language learners, will not be addressed. Further research should be conducted before attempting to implement this small group with other student populations.

Small-group counseling isn't a perfect fit for every student (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). In order to benefit from small-group counseling, students must want to be a part of the group and be willing to participate (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). Therefore, this project is limited to the students it can reach. Developmental level of students could also be a limitation of the success of this small group (Baker & Gerler, 2004). According to Ivey (1998), students are at various levels of development. Thus, counselors need to evaluate students' developmental needs and recognize that not all students may benefit from or be receptive to a small group counseling intervention. Brigman & Goodman (2001) also explain the importance to use heterogenous grouping. This technique may be difficult when implementing this small group, because the intervention is

targeted toward at-risk students. Therefore, many of the students in the group may exhibit negative behaviors.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Students who are at-risk for suspension or expulsion are not getting their need of belonging met at school (Beck & Malley, 1997). Exclusionary discipline is associated with negative student outcomes, such as poor academic performance and dropping out of school (Balfanz, et al., 2014). These outcomes contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, resulting in at-risk students becoming incarcerated (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). However, many schools in the United States still use suspension and expulsion as a discipline approach (CRDC, 2016). In order to limit the number of students who are excluded from school, an intervention must be put in place to foster a sense of belonging in students who show at-risk behavior. By fostering a sense of belonging, schools can support students' social/emotional well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Longaretti, 2020) in order to decrease at-risk behaviors. This project highlights the importance of connectedness at school and outlines a small-group intervention that is relationship-focused and encourages students to make positive behavior choices.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore theoretical approaches and analyze available literature to determine the most effective approaches in a small group setting. There are many theories that explain why negative student behavior occurs and how students are motivated to change their behavior. Of those theories, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and Choice Theory will drive this small group intervention. In addition, Ivey's Stages of Development will be used to determine the readiness level of participants. Following the theoretical construct, the research portion of this chapter will focus on best practices for small group interventions. The structure of a small group, strategies to meet student needs, cultural considerations, and developmental considerations will all be included in this chapter.

## **Theory/Rationale**

### **Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy**

Rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) is a technique that was developed by Albert Ellis in the mid-1950s (Lau, 2016). Ellis, an American psychologist, developed an “ABC” model, explaining that a person’s actions are driven by their belief about a certain situation, rather than the situation itself (Bernard, et. al., 2019). These beliefs are often irrational and referred to as “faulty beliefs”. In order for a student to change their behaviors, Ellis argued, they must change their beliefs or thoughts about the situation (Bernard, et. al., 2019). This cognitive behavioral approach is often used with children or adolescents to promote positive behavior and has been successful in helping students who are aggressive (Raynor, 1992) and exhibit disruptive behavior (Zelie, et al., 1980). It is designed to teach young people how to “help themselves” by learning positive mental health concepts (Bernard, et. al., 2019). By using an REBT technique, students are encouraged to identify negative emotions and beliefs, learn strategies, and practice skills to improve their mindset (Bernard, et. al., 2019).

### **Choice Theory**

Choice theory, adopted by William Glasser (1998), has been used in educational settings to help motivate students to change their behaviors (Walter, et al., 2008). Choice theory is grounded in the idea that humans are responsible for their own behavior (Glasser, 1997). Contrary to stimulus-response theory, where students are controlled by rewards and/or punishments, choice theory teaches students to accept that they have control over their own behavior (Glasser, 1997). Similar to REBT, Glasser believed that people choose certain actions or thoughts that result in certain feelings. In order for students to change their behavior, they must take responsibility for their actions (Howatt, 2001). Rather than placing the blame on a

students' circumstance, choice theory suggests that students have the power within them to make quality changes (Howatt, 2001).

He also presents four basic needs: relationships, power, freedom, and fun (Glasser, 1997). Relationships, the first need that Glasser (1997) presents, is the need for love and belonging. Similar to choice theory, a person-centered approach (Rogers, 1986) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) also emphasize the need for belonging. Next, choice theory focuses on the need for power. This involves having a sense of worth, feeling competent, and/or achieving something. A need for freedom is also identified as a basic human need. The need for freedom can be met by having choices and feeling autonomous. Lastly, Glasser (1997) argues that humans have a need for fun, which includes enjoyment and pleasure. When applied to education, it's important for educators to understand and attend to these needs to promote positive behavior in students (Erwin, 2014). When these needs are met, Glasser argues that students no longer have the motivation to exhibit negative behavior (Walter, et al., 2008).

Another idea presented in choice theory is a "quality world". As human beings, our "quality world" is a specific picture of what it looks like to have all of our needs satisfied (Glasser, 1997). This includes pictures, ideas, or things that represent our basic needs (Walter, et al., 2008). For example, a middle school student may represent their need for belonging by picturing themselves with a large group of friends. Our quality worlds are created at birth and revised throughout our lives (Walter, et al., 2008). When there's a gap between students' "real world" and our "quality world", they are motivated to act in a way that they believe will meet those needs (Glasser, 1997). This could be in a positive way, such as a student working hard to get an "A" on their test, or in a negative way, such as a student yelling inappropriate gestures in

class to make their peers laugh. Either way, a student's attempt to reach their "quality world" is what drives their behaviors (Glasser, 1997).

### **Ivey's Stages of Development**

In order to benefit from small-group counseling, students must have awareness of their behaviors and be willing to participate (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). Ivey (1998) created levels of development, based from the work of Jean Piaget. His system "challenges counselors to match their counseling behaviors with client levels of intellectual development" (Baker & Gerler, 2004). The four stages consist of preoperational, concrete operations, self-directed formal operations, and mutual or dialectic. In the first stage, preoperational, the client lacks intentionality, is unaware of their behaviors, often have irrational thoughts, and lacks skills needed to change behaviors (Baker & Gerler, 2004). According to Brigman & Goodman (2001), students must want to participate in the group and have a desire to change their behaviors. Therefore, students who are in the preoperational stage, for example, would not likely benefit from small group counseling.

Students who are in the concrete operations, the next stage of Ivey's Levels of Development, possess some intentionality but are often unable to change their behaviors. They may possess skills but lack the ability to use their skills to solve their problem (Baker & Gerler, 2004). These students would be good candidates for small group counseling. Once students move into the self-directed formal operations stage, they are able to separate themselves from their actions or thoughts, but still needs assistance. The final stage, mutual or dialectic, is intentional about their behaviors, but still may require some assistance (Baker & Gerler, 2004). The mutual or dialectic level of development is the ultimate goal of intervention.

## Research/Evaluations

### Restorative Practice Model

Restorative practice (RP) has been a growing practice in education as an alternative to exclusionary discipline (Weinstein & Maynard, 2020). An RP model involves encouraging students to take responsibility for their actions and develop a sense of empathy for everyone who is involved in the situation (Weinstein & Maynard, 2020). In a qualitative study, exploring the impact of RP, students and teachers who were interviewed identified that their experience with RP resulted in greater harmony, increased empathy towards others, awareness and accountability of one's own behavior, increased respect, and reflective thinking (Kehoe, et al., 2018). RP has also been found to restore healthy relationships between peers (Weinstein & Maynard, 2020) and promote positive relationships between students and their teachers (Gregory, et al., 2016).

**Responsibility.** School counselors can use an RP approach to help students communicate to one another by asking the following questions: “What happened?”, “Why did this happen?”, “Who was impacted?”, “How might the people who were impacted feel?”, “How can the harm be repaired?”, and “What can be done next time to avoid this from happening again?” (Weinstein & Maynard, 2020). The idea is that when misbehavior occurs, it results in damaged relationships (Kehoe, et al., 2018). RP attempts to restore those relationships through responsibility and empathy (Weinstein & Maynard, 2020). Supporting RP, Lubianka, et al. (2020) argue that students who are able to take responsibility for their actions tend to cope better with various challenges. Research indicates that teaching students the difference between what is in their control and not in their control allows students to understand that they are ultimately responsible for their behaviors (Lubianka, et al., 2020). Therefore, when students can take responsibility for the things they are in control of, they can overcome some of their challenges.

**Empathy.** In their book, *Hacking School Discipline: 9 Ways to Create a Culture of Empathy & Responsibility Using Restorative Justice*, Maynard and Weinstein (2020) explain that developing empathy is key to helping students take responsibility for their actions. Agreeing with Maynard and Weinstein, Litvak-Miller (1997) found that empathetic concern was found to be the best predictor of prosocial behavior in middle-aged children. School counselors can promote empathy by using RP language, which involves “using statements about how someone was impacted by the other person’s behavior with the aim of eliciting feelings” (Kehoe, et. al., 2017 p. 192) and encourages students to empathize with others (Weinstein & Maynard, 2020). An example of this language would be “I feel frustrated when you call me by the wrong name because it makes me feel like I’m not important”. This style of language can be promoted to increase the students’ empathy towards one another, encouraging them to take responsibility for the people impacted by their behaviors. By using RP in small group counseling, school counselors are providing a preventative method that helps students learn skills to improve their behaviors.

### **Small Group Counseling**

Part of the role of a school counselor is to implement tier two interventions (American School Counselor Association, 2019a). Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a framework that categorizes interventions into three tiers. Universal or schoolwide interventions are considered tier one interventions. Tier two interventions are put in place for students who need more support than a tier one intervention can provide. Students who often display a poor response to universal interventions can further benefit from tier two or tier three support (Eagle, et al., 2015). School counselors often implement tier two interventions in the form of small group counseling (ASCA, 2019a). To do so, students that need additional support are identified and

may be screened for a small-group intervention. Very few students, may require a tier three support, which consists of individual counseling or a referral to outside resources (ASCA, 2019a).

Small group counseling is a tier two interventions that gives students the opportunity to learn skills and attitudes with assistance of the school counselor and other peers who are experiencing similar challenges. It involves “a number of students working on shared tasks and developing supportive relationships in a group setting...” (ASCA, 2019a, p.35). Compared to classroom instruction, small group counseling consists of a smaller counselor-to-student ratio, which allows for more discussion between members in the group (Erford, 2019). Topics addressed during small group sessions are related to social/emotional, academic, or career development (Erford, 2019). Most common topics for small groups include social skills, learning skills, self-control/anger management, divorce, loss, and school adjustment (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). The goal of small group counseling is to teach students skills that help them overcome barriers to achievement or success (ASCA, 2019a.). In a group setting, school counselors assist students in identifying problems and causes, consider solutions, and learn skills that can help them make decisions and take appropriate action (ASCA, 2019a). ASCA explains that group counseling is “planned, goal-focused, evidence based and short-termed in nature” (ASCA, 2019a, p.35).

ASCA recognizes group counseling as a vital direct service to students and according to ASCA standards, it should be available to all students in a K-12 setting (ASCA, 2020). In the *ASCA Position Statements* (2020), ASCA explains that group counseling has many positive benefits on students’ academic, social/emotional, and career success. A school counselor’s role is to provide group counseling in a school setting, in order to promote positive student outcomes

(ASCA, 2020). One of the most prominent benefits of small group counseling is an increased sense of belonging at school (Brigman & Goodman, 2001) ASCA states that:

Group counseling can help reduce social isolation and negative emotions, as well as increase positive peer relationships and a sense of belonging. In group counseling, affect, cognition and behavior are emphasized. The group creates a climate of trust, caring, understanding and support that enables students to share their concerns with peers and the school counselor. (ASCA, 2020)

Supporting ASCA's statements, Gray and Rubel (2018) conducted a study to observe adolescents' perceptions of group counseling. Researchers found that students who participated in group counseling felt close to the group and made lasting connections with group members (Gray & Rubel, 2018). Further, group members found they had a lot in common and were able to openly share their thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences (Gray & Rubel, 2018). By providing students with a safe place to talk to peers who are going through similar struggles, small group counseling serves as a way to meet students' relational need at school (Brigman & Goodman, 2001).

In addition to increasing connectedness at school, small group counseling also has been found to increase positive behavior outcomes. Brigman and Goodman (2001) explain that small group counseling gives students the opportunity to learn about themselves and others, encourages them to make positive changes, and gives them the ability to try out new ideas or strategies in a safe place. Briesch DuBois, et al. (2017) conducted a study to measure the impact of group counseling on middle school students' self-management skills. They found students who participated in the group counseling intervention showed an improvement in positive behavior (Briesch DuBois et al., 2017). Also supporting the benefits of group counseling,

Campbell and Brigman (2005) produced similar results. In their research, they indicated that students participating in group counseling show gains in social performance (Campbell & Brigman, 2005). In order to promote positive behavior, small group counseling has been shown to be an effective approach.

### **Structure of Small Group**

Many professionals have outlined the structure of small group counseling. Although each format differs slightly, they all show commonalities. Tuckman (1965) identified four stages: the forming stage, the storming stage, the norming stage, and the performing stage. Maples (1998) agreed, but also argued that a fifth stage, the adjourning stage, should be added. During the forming stage, group members learn about opportunities and challenges and set goals to accomplish tasks. Group members are often self-focused and may not be comfortable opening up to or sharing with the group (Tuckerman, 1965). When the group moves into the storming stage, members gain each other's trust and voice their opinions. At this point, the group tends to show disagreement and conflict (Tuckerman, 1965). Once group members work through their conflict, they move into the norming stage, which often results in more intimacy. When students are in this stage, they will respect each other's opinions and make an effort to move forward (Tuckerman, 1965). Lastly, the group will move into the performing state, where they begin achieving their goals. Students often feel more competent and autonomous by this stage and are practicing the skills they have learned in their everyday life (Tuckerman, 1965). Lastly, Maples (1998) describes the adjourning stage as providing students with closure. During this stage, members reflect on their experiences in the group setting and discuss how the group will impact their future decisions (Maples, 1998).

Brigman and Goodman (2001) also outlined similar stages that consist of orientation, productivity, and consolidation. The orientation stage, similar to Tuckerman's forming stage, involves students getting to know each other and establishing trust. In this stage, the counselor provides more structured activities and helps students identify goals (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). Next, the productivity stage involves acting on goals outside of the counseling setting. Students increase their self-awareness, trust, and empathy (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). Brigman and Goodman (2001) also recognize a closure stage, like Maples (1998), that involves a feeling of community, summarizing the sessions, and translating learning to the outside world. In their book, *Group Counseling for School Counselors: A Practical Guide*, they also provided insight on the process before group sessions begin and after they end, as well as effective techniques school counselors can use (Brigman & Goodman, 2001).

**Pre-Group.** Before group sessions start, you must identify group members to participate. According to Webb and Myrick (2003), school counselors should work with 5-6 and no more than 7-8 students to allow for more participation from each member. Next, a pre-group screening is essential to the group's success (Brigman & Goodman, 2001) and is also required in the code of ethics by ASCA (2016). Students should have a strong understanding of the purpose and expectations of the group, be certain they can be helped, and be willing to participate voluntarily (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). Further, students should be at least in the "concrete operations stage of Ivey's stages of development, where they have a sense of intentionality and a desire to change their behaviors (Baker & Gerler, 2004). Falco (2011) also explains the ethical guideline of receiving parental consent to participate, although Brigman and Goodman (2001) insist that it may not be necessary when working with older students.

**During Group.** Although the stages of group development differ, the beginning stage consistently emphasizes the importance of building rapport and discussing group expectations. In the beginning stages, students are getting to know each other, setting goals, and becoming comfortable sharing with the group (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). Often, bonds of similarity begin to form (Tuckman, 1965). During this stage, the counselor can use skills such as connecting and empathetic responding. The skill connecting can be used to help students recognize their similarities. For example, if Student A says “I like sports”, the counselor could say “It sounds like you and Student B like many of the same things”. The counselor can also ask questions, such as, “Who else has had a similar experience”, to encourage students to understand that others share their ideas and/or experiences. Empathetic responding involves encouraging group members to talk about their feelings. The counselor uses feeling reflections, such as “It sounds like you’re excited to visit your grandmother this weekend”. By doing so in the beginning stages, it sets the tone and helps students feel safe to respond (Brigman & Goodman, 2001).

Once students feel comfortable with the group setting and understand the expectations, they move toward the stages of “storming” and “norming” (Tuckman, 1965) and “productivity” (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). During these stages, dissimilarity appears and members tend to show increased conflict (Tuckman, 1965). Brigman and Goodman (2001) suggests using modeling and coaching during these stages. Modeling and coaching involves teaching students a concept, providing examples, and giving them an opportunity to practice skills (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). One activity that is commonly used is “pair and share”. For pair and share, students share ideas with a partner and the report what they discussed to the whole group (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). To help students through conflict, the counselor should also provide supportive and corrective feedback and can use role-play activities (Brigman &

Goodman, 2001). By the end of these stages, students are able to find “togetherness” and begin working toward their goals (Brigman & Goodman, 2001; Tuckman, 1965). Finally, students emerge into the “performing stage” where they feel open with the group and self-awareness emerges (Tuckman, 1965). Members often feel a strong sense of belonging and responsibility for the group (Tuckerman, 1965).

Lastly, the final stage of “consolidation” (Brigman & Goodman) and “adjourning” (Maples, 1998) emerge, where the group is summarized and students reflect on their goals. This stage normally takes place during the last group session. During this session, students can be given activities that allow them to consider what goals they set, how they have changed from the beginning of the group, and what goals they want to set for themselves moving forward (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). During this session, group members often make comments, such as, “I wish this group wasn’t ending” and may have a difficult time parting from their group members (Brigman & Goodman, 2001).

**Post-Group.** To evaluate the group, Brigman and Goodman (2001) suggest having students fill out a group evaluation that allows the counselor to assess the success of the group. After group sessions are finished, counselors should also follow up with group members periodically and assess whether or not students need additional support (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). Students who need additional support may be referred to tier three services, consisting of individual counseling or and outside referral (ASCA, 2020). Sending a parent letter is also an important step that helps increase parental involvement in their student’s education (Falco, 2011).

## **Small Group Counseling Techniques/Skills**

**Creating Positive Relationships.** The success of group counseling is contingent on the quality of relationships built in the group (Burlingame, et al., 2011). In their meta-analysis, Burlingame et al. (2011) found a positive correlation between cohesion and effectiveness of group therapy. They concluded that without positive, trusting relationships, group counseling is often ineffective (Burlingame, et al., 2011) In order to build successful relationships, Holliman & Foster (2016) argue that authenticity is key. This argument is supported by Truax (1961) and Gazda (1996), who both highlighted genuineness as an important component to counseling relationships.

In group counseling, counselors can promote authenticity by sharing personal experiences, creating a nesting environment, and showing empathy (Holliman & Foster, 2016). Self-disclosure, a counseling technique where the counselor shares personal experiences, helps develop deep, meaningful relationships and has a strong emotional impact (Miller et al., 2004). Further, counselors can practice “nest building”, where they help students in the group feel safe and comfortable. Nest building includes creating a comfortable atmosphere, maintaining a friendly and open presentation, and engaging materials, such as fidgets. Holliman and Foster (2016) state “The goal is to create an environment that is developmentally inviting, accepting, and honors a congruent relationship” (p. 67). In addition, counselors can promote empathy by carefully crafting their responses to students. Word choice helps communicate authenticity and understanding (Holliman & Foster, 2016). For example, using the word “tired” and “drained” could have two different meanings to adolescent students. By applying these skills, counselors can promote genuineness to students, resulting in strong relationship building (Holliman & Foster, 2016) and effective group counseling (Burlingame, et al., 2011).

**Building Autonomy.** Another way to improve group effectiveness is by fostering a sense of autonomy in group members. Giving students more control helps to provide a highly engaging and collaborative environment for students to learn and grow (Milner, et al., 2019). “Research shows direct connections between student autonomy and increases in students' self-esteem, connectedness to learning, academic success, personal growth, enjoyment of school, positive emotions in the classroom, conceptual understandings, internal motivation for learning, and success later in life” (Bastoni, 2018, p.19). Maichan (2011) measured the success of students who participated in a group, where the counselor used techniques to enhance autonomy. The results showed a significant increase in both academic and social outcomes in the students who participated in the group (Maichan, 2011). During group sessions, the counselor can ask questions to promote autonomy, such as, “If you take your parents and teachers expectations out of the equation, what goals would you set for yourself?” (North, 2017). In addition, Mallinger (1998) discusses how using a collaborative model can empower students to take responsibility for their own learning and take an active role in the learning process. The research suggests that collaborative learning also increases student motivation and decreases student misbehavior (Mallinger, 1998).

**Providing Choice.** Another method that has shown to increase small group effectiveness is providing students with choice. Research shows that providing students with choice can increase their autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Patall, et al., 2008). Patall et al. (2008) found that when providing students with two to four choices in activities, they were more willing to engage, put forth more effort, and showed stronger performance. Another study implied that when educators prompt questions such as, “would you like to work in groups or individually?” or “would you like to do Activity A or Activity B?”, students are more motivated (Reeve et al,

2003). Walter et. al. (2008) designed a counseling group based on choice. A student commented, “What I liked about this group was that we got the choice about what to do. There wasn’t anyone trying to control us every minute” (Walter, et. al., 2008). The outcome was successful because students had a say in what activities they participated in. It also gave students the opportunity to make behavioral choices that led to positive educational outcomes (Walter, et al., 2008).

**Cultivating Fun.** When students are enjoying a lesson, they are more likely to be engaged. In a 2016 study, Froiland and Worrell examined the relationships between intrinsic motivation, learning goals, behavior engagement, and academic performance using structural equation models. They found that intrinsic motivation was positively correlated with behavior engagement. This study confirms the findings of past studies, including a study conducted in 2006, concluding that intrinsic motivation is positively associated with engagement (Walker, Greene, & Mansell). Meaning, when students are enjoying what they are learning they are more motivated to change their behaviors.

To promote engagement in students, studies suggest taking an active approach to learning. An experimental research design was conducted to determine the effects of activity-based teaching on student motivation and academic achievement (Anwer, 2019). In this study, the experiment group was given an activity-based lesson, while the control group was taught in a traditional way of instruction. The literature reveals that there was a significant difference between the two types of learning. The students in the experiment group were both more motivated to learn and had higher academic achievement. Activity-based learning encourages students to interact with the content. When constructed properly, it triggers emotions and creates real-life connections (Medina, 2014). Further, Medina (2014) suggests engaging students in fun lessons by using physical movement and media, such as music.

## **Cultural Considerations**

According to the *ASCA Ethical Standards* (ASCA, 2016), a school counselor is ethical responsible to develop awareness, knowledge, and skills on how to meet the needs of underrepresented students. Many urban schools today lack culturally relevant pedagogy (Bemak, et al., 2004), leading students of color to perform significantly lower than white students (Skiba, 2000). By putting interventions in place that are culturally relevant and specifically target minority students, school counselors aid in the progress of all students (Portman, 2009). School counselors are also responsible for providing counseling and instruction that is sensitive to students' culture (Dahir & Stone, 2012). Through the school counseling core curriculum, students can be empowered to embrace diversity, build community, and learn tolerance (ASCA, 2020).

Bemak and Chung (2005) emphasize the significance of culturally relevant group counseling in schools. Racial consciousness and identity play a role in the functioning and dynamics of the small group (Johnson, et al., 1995). Many students have unconscious racist attitudes, so when working with a group of diverse students, a goal is to help overcome stereotypes and learn more about each other's culture (Johnson et al., 1995). Another goal is to develop sensitivity, understanding, and trust (Johnson et al., 1995). In an early study, Berg and Wright-Buckley (1988) found that trust is more difficult to establish in culturally diverse groups. Therefore, the counselor should place an emphasis on relationship-building and open communication. In order to do so, school counselors must understand their own racial identity and the cultural worldviews of members in the group (Bemak & Chung, 2005).

Research has shown a variety of strategies to be successful when working with minority students in group settings. Gipson, et. al., (2019) implemented a small group intervention for

African American boys who acquired a higher rate of discipline referrals. The data collected indicated that the small group was effective in decreasing the amount of discipline referrals African American students received. The small group was focused on creating trusting relationships, positive interactions between students and adults, and intentionally creating group activities to be culturally responsive. The results of this study show the importance of intentionally planning interventions to meet the needs of students who are diverse. Another consideration is grouping. Davis (1979) found that if a single member of a minority group participates in small group counseling, they are less likely to show positive results. To ensure that all group members are comfortable sharing, it's necessary that the group composition is intentional. It's also important for the counselor to explore prejudices and openly discuss attitudes held by members (Johnson et al., 1995).

### **Developmental Considerations**

It's important to recognize the developmental stage of the students who are participating in this small group. Middle school students are in a unique transition from childhood to young adolescence. According to a study conducted by Beck and Malley (1998), middle school students are especially at-risk for lack of connectedness at school. Specifically, many adolescents are still developing their self-concept and struggle with the pressure to conform to groups. When working with middle school students, a counselor's primary focus should be belonging, acceptance of peers, and autonomy (McNeely et al., 2002). Due to the emphasis of relationships in small group counseling, adolescents have shown to benefit from participating in groups more than any other age group (Paisley & Milsom, 2007). Middle school students are also more likely to show improved behavior outcomes when the concern comes from a peer, rather than an adult (Dalbech, 1981)

## Summary

To decrease at-risk behaviors and build a sense of belonging in students who exhibit challenging behaviors, school counselors can implement small group counseling interventions. Albert Ellis argues that students exhibit negative behavior because of irrational thoughts they have about a certain situation (Lau, 2016). According to this theory, students can change their behaviors by altering their thoughts. Likewise, Glasser (1997), argued that students have the ability to change their own behaviors. By learning strategies to meet their four basic needs (belonging, power, freedom, and fun), students can move closer to their goal of a “quality world”. Once their “real world” aligns with their “quality world”, they will not have the motivation to exhibit challenging behaviors (Walter, et al., 2008).). Therefore, teaching students how to alter their thoughts and meet their needs in a healthy way, can have positive impacts on behavior outcomes (Howatt, 2001).

In order for students to benefit from small group counseling, they must be aware of their actions (Baker & Gerler, 2004). Students must also understand the nature of the group and be willing to participate (Baker & Gerler, 2004). Once group sessions begin, students must build a level of trust with the group in order to reach a productive phase (Burlingame, et al., 2001). Trust is gained by getting to know each other and a feeling of safety within the group. Counselors can show authenticity and use the skill “connecting” to encourage relationships among the group (Baker & Gerler, 2004). Once group members have built a relationship with each other and the counselor, they begin to self-disclose, practice skills, and work towards goals. During group sessions, counselors can use techniques to increase student autonomy, provide students with choices, and create engaging, fun sessions. Once the small group comes to an end, students have

the opportunity to reflect on their progress. Counselors should follow up with group members and evaluate the success of the group.

It's important for counselors to understand the specific and unique needs of the student population they are working with (ASCA, 2020). Small group interventions should be culturally relevant and specifically target students who are underrepresented (Portman, 2009). In group counseling, identity plays a huge role in the dynamics of the group (Johnson, et al., 1995). By developing sensitivity, understanding, and trust, as well as breaking down stereotypes, groups can be most effective (Johnson, et al., 1995). In culturally diverse groups, counselors should focus on emphasizing trust and using culturally relevant scenarios and examples (Gipson, et al., 2019). Along with cultural considerations, counselors must be aware of the developmental level of the students they are working with (ASCA, 2020). Middle school students have unique challenges such as struggling to fit in and conforming to certain friend groups. Counselors should primarily focus on sense of belonging, acceptance, and autonomy when working with adolescents (McNeely, et al., 2002).

### **Conclusions**

Small group counseling has shown to be effective in cultivating a sense of belonging in youth. Working in groups allows youth to relate to one another and learn from each other's experiences (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). This is especially true for students of color and adolescent students (Gipson, et al., 2019; Paisley & Milsom, 2007). A school counselor's role is to implement interventions to support student success (ASCA, 2020). Tier two interventions, such as small group counseling, can promote positive student outcomes. In order for a small group to be successful, sessions must be intentionally structured and planned (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). During each session, students enter a new phase of growth and connectedness.

Research has highlighted specific strategies that counselors can use to promote student success. Of those techniques, this project will focus on creating positive relationships, building autonomy, providing choice, and cultivating fun. Not only is this project targeted to meet students' basic needs, but it also focuses on teaching students strategies to help them take responsibility for their actions and change their behaviors. Research on cultural sensitivity is also taken into consideration, allowing educators to implement best practice when working with a diverse group of students. Lastly, the unique needs of middle school students are emphasized.

## **Chapter Three: Project Description**

### **Introduction**

Suspension and expulsion have devastating consequences on at-risk students (Balfanz, et al., 2014; Bacher-Hicks, et al., 2019). Students who are excluded from school lack a sense of belonging (Hemphill, et al., 2006). For years, researchers have argued against zero-tolerance policies (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). The effort, however, has not brought much change (CRDC, 2016). Many schools still employ suspension and expulsion as a discipline mechanism, causing an increased number of young people to drop out of school and be pushed into the criminal justice system (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). In order to combat this issue, an intervention must be put into place to reduce the amount of students who are suspended or expelled from school and foster a sense of belonging in students who display at-risk behaviors. Small group interventions can help students learn coping strategies and try out new skills in a safe place. Small group interventions also give students the opportunity to relate to other students who are working through similar challenges, ultimately making them feel more connected to their peers at school (Gray & Rubel, 2018; ASCA, 2020).

The purpose of this project is to provide school counselors with a small group intervention plan that will target at-risk students. The small group will consist of six sessions, each forty minutes in length. Throughout the small group intervention plan, students will learn the basic concepts of rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) and choice theory. Counselors will encourage students to practice new skills that allow them to manage their thoughts and emotions, in order to change their behaviors. Each small group session is also designed to meet students' needs for relationships, power, freedom, and fun. By meeting students' needs during sessions, they will be more engaged and more motivated to learn and practice new

concepts/skills (Glasser, 1997; Medina, 2014). The ultimate goal of the intervention is to reduce the number of students who are suspended or expelled from school by providing at-risk students with strategies to alter their behaviors. When implemented successfully, students will also self-identify an increase in their sense of belonging at school.

This project includes a ready-to-use guide to a small group intervention. First, the structure of this small group intervention is carefully laid out to ensure project success. This project includes guidelines for the process that takes place before the small group intervention, including how to determine what students should participate. Each small group session will be outlined, including mindsets and behaviors to address, objectives, materials, and activities. Follow-up guidelines for after the group has ended will also be included. Second, an evaluation process is explained to determine the success of implementation. The evaluation process includes a pre/post-test, as well as comparing discipline data. Next, project conclusions are included. This section explains the role existing literature plays in small group counseling and the value this project adds to educational outcomes as a whole. Lastly, this project explains how this project should be implemented, by whom, what student population it is designed for, and how it will be shared.

## **Components**

### **Pre-Group**

In order for small group counseling to be effective, it's important to screen students to determine whether or not they are a good fit (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). To begin this process, counselors should send out a referral form (Appendix A) to school staff. Once the referrals are received, discipline data should be assessed to determine which students have the highest need. Once students are identified, the screening process should begin (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). The counselor will explain the small group to each identified student and

highlight the topics and objectives covered. The student should fill out the Behavior Management Pre-Group Screening form (Appendix B). This form is designed to determine whether or not small-group counseling will benefit the student. The student will express their interest and willingness to participate in the group, display understanding of confidentiality, and agree to dedicate their time to the group. Parent/Guardian permission is also required before small group sessions can begin (ASCA, 2017). The Parent/Guardian permission form (Appendix C) should be sent out to parents and returned to the counselor. Lastly, a Student-Teacher agreement (Appendix D) should be signed by both the students and their teachers, agreeing that the student can attend small group sessions, but is responsible for making up any missing schoolwork.

### **Group Sessions**

**Overview.** The group overview (Appendix E) outlines the group counseling process. The group objectives are listed, as well as the attitudes, skills, and knowledge students will develop throughout group sessions. The number of group members and the session times may vary, depending on where this project is implemented. However, no more than 7-8 students should be participating in the group (Webb & Myrick, 2003). The information listed shows an example of how the small group should be organized. Next, the outline lists the data that counselors should collect before, during, and after group sessions, as well as follow-up instructions. Lastly, the small group process is explained in easy to follow, step-by-step instructions. Each session has a specific topic that the school counselor will address. The topics are listed under the “during group” section of the group overview outline (Appendix E). Each of the sessions are outlined in Appendix F.

**Session One.** The first session of small group counseling consists of building relationships and growing trust amongst group members (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). When students arrive to the group session, they will be offered a choice of seating options (chair, bean bag, yoga ball, floor). The session will begin by introducing group members and taking the pre-assessment (Appendix G). Pre-assessments determine the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that students currently possess (Kaffenberger & Young, 2019). The counselor will lead the students in the “Stand Up If” activity (Appendix H), that will allow students to break down stereotypes, get to know one another, and engage members by using movement (Medina, 2014). Next, the counselor will lead a group discussion to talk about expectations and challenges. Group “norms” will be added to a poster board that can be referenced in future sessions. Most importantly, confidentiality will be addressed (ASCA, 2016). Students will receive a small group journal (Appendix K-S) and will fill out the “Goal Setting Worksheet” (Appendix K), to identify goals. Lastly, the session will end with processing questions, listed on the outline (Appendix F).

**Session Two.** The goal of the second session is to introduce students to the “ABC model”. Students will practice identifying negative thoughts/beliefs and grow an understanding on how their thoughts/beliefs impact their behaviors. The session will begin by checking in on students with “fist to five”, where the counselor will ask students how things are going with grades, home, peers, teachers, out-of-school activities, etc. (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). As advised by Brigman and Goodman (2001), the counselor will then preview objectives for the session, listed in the session two outline (Appendix F). Once the objectives are previewed, the counselor will cultivate the students’ choice, by asking the group if they would rather learn the “ABC model” from the counselor (using a whiteboard) or by watching a video. To practice the concepts, student will be broken into “pair and share” groups, where they will think of a scene

from a movie and identify the antecedent, thought/belief, and the consequence of the behavior. This allows students choice by allowing them to choose the scenario (Patall, et, al., 2008), uses media to engage students (Medina, 2014), and helps to build relationships by talking about similar interests (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). Students will then complete the ““ABC” Worksheet” in their journals to identify some of their own thoughts/beliefs and connect them to their behaviors (Appendix L). The counselor will then summarize the session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001) and assign homework by having students fill out the “Thought Log” in their journals (Appendix M) and identify some of the thoughts/beliefs they identify throughout the week. Lastly, the group will discuss the processing questions listed on the outline (Appendix F).

**Session Three.** During session three, students will learn strategies to neutralize their negative thoughts/beliefs identified in session two. After checking in and previewing objectives (Brigman & Goodman, 2001), the counselor will encourage students to share a thought with the group they identified over the group. By session three, students should be entering the “norming stage”, where it becomes easier to open up and share ideas with one another (Tuckerman, 1965). Students will then brainstorm strategies to help neutralize thoughts/beliefs, while the counselor reiterates healthy ideas and adds new ideas to the discussion. After the discussion, students will practice by identifying negative thoughts/beliefs in different songs and talking about how they can change them to positive thoughts/beliefs. This activity uses media to engage students (Medina, 2014) and can also allow cultural consideration, by drawing attention to the type of music students in the group listen to and by allowing appropriate song requests (Bemak & Chung, 2005). After the activity, students will fill out the worksheet titled “Neutralizing Negative Thoughts” (Appendix N). The counselor will then lead a group discussion, asking students how their behaviors at school may have been different by altering their thoughts/beliefs.

To conclude the session, the counselor will summarize and encourage group members to practice strategies that were discussed during the session.

**Session Four.** Developing empathy helps students take responsibility for their behaviors (Maynard & Weinstein, 2020). During session four, the counselor will begin the session by using restorative practice language. The check-in will consist of asking students to share how they are feeling and why. Afterward, the counselor will preview the session and lead a group discussion, encouraging members to share strategies they were able to use throughout the week to neutralize negative thoughts/beliefs. The students will then be introduced to an empathy statement and will take turns sharing empathy statements. To practice, students will get into partners and read scenarios (Appendix I). They will then discuss the questions with their partners that model a restorative practice framework. After they are finished, each pair will have an opportunity to share with the whole group. For the second activity, students will practice understanding “locus of control”. They will again, work in groups of two. The counselor will give each game a deck of cards and allow them to play any game that they wish. When finished, the students will come back as a group and discuss what things were in their control and what things were not. Lastly, the counselor will assign homework (Appendix O) and summarize the session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001).

**Session Five.** Session five is designed to help students identify ways that they can meet their needs in a healthy way. After checking in and previewing objectives for the session, students will be introduced the Glasser’s four needs (belonging, power, freedom, and fun). Students will be led in a group discussion, sharing what each of those words mean to them. Next, students will fill out their “Needs Worksheet” in their journal, to match a student’s behavior to the need that isn’t being met (Appendix P). Students can choose if they would like to work on it

by themselves, with a partner, or as a whole group. When finished, the group will go over the answers. By session five, students should be in the “productivity” stage, where they are ready to take concepts and integrate them into their lives (Tuckman, 1965). They are also becoming more aware of their behaviors and ready to make lasting changes (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). To practice, students will break into groups to discuss some of the negative behaviors they have exhibited, what need they were trying to meet, and alternative ways they could meet that need. The counselor will follow with a group discussion, where healthy alternatives can be offered. Lastly, homework will be assigned (Appendix Q), and the session will be summarized (Brigman & Goodman, 2001).

**Session Six.** The last session, also known as the “adjourning” stage, gives students the opportunity to reflect on the concepts learned in the group and provides students with closure. The counselor will begin by allowing students five minutes to talk amongst each other, remind members that it is their last session, and preview objectives for the session. Next, students will have time to review their journal and fill out the reflection page in their journal (Appendix R) and identify things they learned, questions they have, and a “WOW” moment. Students will then have a group discussion about their responses and process the group experience with questions provided in the outline (Appendix F). Next, students will fill out the last page in their journal (Appendix R) to identify long and short-term goals for themselves. Students will then complete the post-test (Appendix G) and the group evaluation (Appendix T). Students will also receive a Google Form, allowing them to request additional support. To conclude, the counselor will thank group members for participating and will remind them that they will check in with them within two weeks (Brigman & Goodman, 2001).

## **After-Group**

After the group has concluded, the counselor should send a follow up letter home to parents/caregivers. The letter (Appendix U) should thank the guardians for allowing their student to participate in the small group, list the topics that were discussed, and encourage them to continue working with their child on the skills at home (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). Involving parents gives them the opportunity to model and reinforce strategies learned during group sessions and therefore, can influence developmental and educational outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). It's also important to check-in with students after the group has concluded to talk about changes they have made in their lives and celebrate successes (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). Students who need additional support can receive individual counseling or be referred to an outside agency (ASCA, 2017). The counselor should also analyze the pre/post-test, group evaluation forms, and additional data.

## **Project Evaluation**

Data collection and evaluation are essential components of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2019a). The success of this small group intervention will be determined by collecting process, perception, and outcome data. The process data, consisting of the number of students who participated, as well as their grade level, is included on the Group Counseling Overview (Appendix E). The process data may be adjusted, however, note that small group counseling is most beneficial with a group of six-to-eight students (Brigman & Goodman, 2001), and this particular intervention is intended for middle school aged students. Additionally, demographic information of students should be documented to determine the impact on the discipline gap between White students and students of color.

Along with process data, perception data will also be evaluated. Students will complete a Pre-Test (Appendix G) during the first small group session and a Post-Test (Appendix G) at the end of the last session. The Pre-test and Post-test are Google Forms that consist of the exact same questions. They measure students' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about the topics discussed throughout small group sessions. At the conclusion of counseling sessions, the Pre and Post-tests will be compared to determine student growth. During the last session, students will also fill out the Group Evaluation form (Appendix T), that allows them to reflect on their experience. This group evaluation form may be used to alter small group sessions for future implementation. Lastly, the counselor should document the follow-up meeting with each student, describing the extent to which students are practicing the skills they have learned. Perception data can be presented using a data form template (Appendix V), which can be especially useful for program advocacy (Kaffenberger & Young, 2019).

Outcome data should also be collected to show behavior improvements in students. The outcome data evaluation process consists of comparing students' past discipline referrals, discipline referrals while participating in the small group, and discipline referrals after the sessions conclude. A sense of belonging is correlated to academic achievement (Goodenow & Grady, 1993), and therefore, grades and standardized test scores should also be evaluated. A decrease in behavior referrals and an increase in achievement suggests that students who participated in the small group benefited from the intervention by showing positive results. Further, the discipline and achievement gap between White students and students of color should be evaluated, to determine the significance of the project on minorities. While perception data is also significant, outcome data shows evidence of improvement on a larger scale, creating a

stronger argument for the use of group counseling interventions, such as this one (Kaffenberger & Young, 2019).

### **Project Conclusions**

The United States education system has made leaps toward an equal opportunity for students to thrive, however, considerable inequalities are still present (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). The unfortunate reality is that students who exhibit at-risk behavior are being pushed out of school and into the criminal justice system (Maynard & Weinstein, 2020). Instead of receiving quality education, in which every child has a right to (Hammarberg, 1998), too many students are suffering the consequences that suspension and expulsion offer. When students are excluded from school, they are not taught attitudes and skills that are essential for success and therefore, continue to exhibit negative behavior patterns. Not only do at-risk students lack skills, but they also lack belonging (Hemphill, et al., 2006), an essential contribution to success at school and in life (Anderman, 2002; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Buote, 2001; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Longaretti, 2020; Osterman, 2000).

In comparison, the benefits of small group counseling, when implemented intentionally, are substantial. Students who participate can relate to other students who experience similar challenges and can practice skills in a safe environment (Gray & Rubel, 2018; Brigman & Goodman, 2001), allowing them the opportunity to feel connected, autonomous, and cared for (Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Walter, et. al., 2008). Although small group counseling does not necessarily replace exclusionary discipline, it can allow for an alternative solution and promote positive behavior outcomes (Briesch DuBois et al., 2017). It's important to recognize that implementing a single small group intervention is not the sole answer to transforming discipline in education. Instead, this project offers educators a step in the right direction.

Additionally, the role of a school counselor has transformed dramatically in the last decade (ASCA, 2019a). This project adds value to the school counseling profession by providing school counselors with an evidence-based small group intervention that could contribute to systemic change. Educational research shows the critical need for alternative solutions. Programs, such as small group counseling, have been shown to positively impact students' well-being (Gray & Rubel, 2018). The specific research evaluated throughout this project demonstrates the need for small group counseling and the framework in which small group counseling is most beneficial to students. Therefore, this implementation is expected to show positive outcomes for participants. By collecting and presenting data from the implementation of this small group intervention, school counselors can advocate for their role and encourage administrators to change the way they view the profession.

This intervention has the potential to positively impact students who are in need of support, however, it's important to recognize that there are many students whose needs cannot be satisfied by this specific intervention. The student population and demographics must be carefully taken into consideration before attempting implementation. Along with demographic considerations, developmental level, as well as willingness to participate are significant factors to consider. Due to the nature of small group counseling, this project is significantly limited to a specific population of students, and therefore, does not address the needs of students who are not eligible to participate. Therefore, other interventions should be put into place to create a positive and supportive environment for all students. The question of how to support other students and what interventions are appropriate requires additional research.

## **Plans for Implementation**

This project is intended to be implemented by school counselors who serve a diverse, adolescent student population. To begin the process, the counselor will encourage teachers or other school staff to refer students to participate in the small group intervention and evaluate discipline data to identify at-risk students. Students need to be screened for the intervention and student agreements must also be signed to determine the level to which students are committed to participate. Once students are identified that can benefit from the group, parent letters and permission forms must be signed prior to beginning group sessions. Small group sessions may then begin, lasting six weeks. Upon the conclusion of sessions, the project should be evaluated as discussed above.

The data form example included (Appendix V) is a template that shows how data from this intervention can be presented to administrators, school's staff, parents, and other stakeholders. This includes a display of student growth, significant conclusions, and recommendations for further intervention. This form, along with other significant data from a school counseling program, can be used to advocate for change in the profession. This includes advocacy for the implementation of ASCA standard practices, such as smaller student-to-counselor ratios and counselors being assigned appropriate duties, as opposed to inappropriate duties such as scheduling, cafeteria supervision, and substitute teaching.

This project will be shared by presenting it to other students in the school counseling program and with practicing school counselors at professional development events, such as the Michigan School Counseling Association Conference and the American School Counseling Association Conference. School counselors often wear many hats in their role and are limited the amount of planning time that creating evidence-based interventions require. The intention is to

provide school counselors with a researched framework that they can implement into their program, without sacrificing a significant amount of time. As this project is implemented by other school counselors, they are encouraged to share their collected data to determine if the success of this project is replicated and to identify the students who are most impacted by the intervention.

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**Appendix A**  
**Referral Form**



**Appendix B**  
**Pre-Group Screening**

# Behavior Management Pre-Group Screening

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The goal of this group is to help students learn strategies to take responsibility for and manage their behaviors.

## Topics covered:

- Identifying negative thoughts/beliefs
- Neutralizing negative thoughts/beliefs
- Understanding locus of control
- Developing empathy
- Satisfying needs in an appropriate way

## Meetings:

The meetings will be held during seminar period for 40 minutes each, on the following dates:

- January 18<sup>th</sup>
- January 25<sup>th</sup>
- February 1<sup>st</sup>
- February 8<sup>th</sup>
- February 15<sup>th</sup>
- February 22<sup>nd</sup>

Please answer the following questions:

Do you feel as though this small group will benefit you? YES / NO

Do you understand that regular attendance is expected for this small group? YES / NO

Do you understand that everything said in this small group will remain confidential? YES / NO

Do you understand that participation in this small group is completely voluntary? YES / NO

On a scale of 1(low interest)-10(high-interest), how interested are you in joining this group?

\_\_\_\_\_

Please state why you'd like to join this group:

---

---

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Created by Shayna Brooks

**Appendix C**

**Parent/Guardian Permission Form**

## Parent/Guardian Permission Form

Dear parents/caregivers,

You are receiving this letter because your student has either referred themselves or a school staff member has referred them to participate in the Behavior Management small group.

Developmentally, middle school students are in a unique transition from childhood to young adolescence. They are especially at-risk for lacking a sense of belonging at school and struggle with pressure to conform to certain groups.

This small group is designed to help your student relate to other students in the school and learn skills to manage their behaviors in a healthy way.

The following topics will be discussed during small group sessions:

- Week 1 (DATE): Introduction
- Week 2 (DATE): Identifying negative thoughts/beliefs
- Week 3 (DATE): Neutralizing negative thoughts/beliefs
- Week 4 (DATE): Taking responsibility and Developing Empathy
- Week 5 (DATE): Satisfying needs in an appropriate way
- Week 6 (DATE): Wrap-Up

This group will consist of 6 sessions and will meet once a week, for 30 minutes each during lunch. Participation in this group is completely voluntary and everything discussed is confidential. Parental permission is required for students to participate. **If you would like your student to participate in this group, please sign and return this form.**

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

COUNSELOR NAME  
School Counselor  
XXX-XXXX (Contact information)

\_\_\_\_\_ **YES**, I give permission for \_\_\_\_\_ **CHILD'S NAME** \_\_\_\_\_ to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_ **NO**, I do not give permission \_\_\_\_\_ **CHILD'S NAME** \_\_\_\_\_ to participate

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Created by Shayna Brooks

## **Appendix D**

### **Student-Teacher Agreement**

## Student-Teacher Agreement

\_\_\_\_\_ has my permission to be in the small group, which meets for 6 weeks on Monday during seminar period beginning \_\_\_\_\_. I understand that this student will be absent from my class on the days the small group takes place.

---

(Teacher's signature)

-----

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I understand that it's my responsibility to get any work completed that I miss during small group counseling

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I understand that it's my responsibility to ask my teacher for the work that I miss during small group counseling

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I understand that if I miss small group sessions, it's my responsibility to inform COUNSELOR'S NAME.

---

(Student's signature)

\*Please return to school counselor once page has been signed.

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## **Appendix E**

### **Small Group Overview**

## Group Counseling Overview

### Details

#### **Group Topic:**

Managing Behavior

#### **Group Objectives:**

- 1) Students will learn how their thoughts impact their behavior
- 2) Students will be able to take responsibility for their actions
- 3) Students will understand how their behaviors impact others
- 4) Students will learn and be able to satisfy their needs in an appropriate way

#### **Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge to be developed:**

Attitudes

- Confidence in their ability to change the outcomes of their behavior
- Belief that their behavior impacts others

Skills

- Identifying and Altering negative thoughts/beliefs
- Taking responsibility for behavior
- Developing Empathy for others
- Identifying needs and using strategies to satisfy them

Knowledge

- Develop an understanding for the “ABC” model (Bernard, et. al., 2019)
- Identify Glasser’s 4 basic needs (Glasser, 1996)

#### **Grade Levels:**

Middle school students, 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade

#### **Number of Group Members:**

6-8 students

#### **Session Times:**

6, 40 minute sessions

Sessions will meet weekly, every Monday during INSERT CLASS PERIOD  
INSERT DATES

#### **Data to be Collected:**

Process

- Number of students
- Number of sessions
- Length of session

Perception

- Pre/post-test: to determine changes in students’ attitudes, skills, and knowledge
- Follow-up questionnaire

#### Outcome

- Disorderly or disruptive behavior data will be compared from the first semester to the second semester (when group is in session)
- Grades will be compared from the first semester to the second semester (when group is in session)
- Standardized test scores will be compared from the first semester to the second semester (when group is in session)

#### Follow-up

- A brief questionnaire will be sent out to all group members
- Students will have the opportunity to request additional, individual meetings
- Counselor will complete a “check-in” with group members 2 weeks after the sessions end

### **Process**

#### **Before Group:**

- 1) Identify students who are eligible for the group (those with 2 or more referrals)
- 2) Request student referrals from teachers (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- 3) Complete pre-group interviews with potential group members (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
  - a. Go over group outline
  - b. Discuss goals and expectations
  - c. Explain parent forms & group agreement forms
- 4) Send out parent permission forms (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- 5) Send out release form agreements to seminar teachers (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- 6) Collect all forms prior to beginning group

#### **During Group:**

Session 1: Introduction

Pre-assessment

Session 2: Identifying negative thoughts/beliefs

Session 3: Neutralizing negative thoughts/beliefs

Session 4: Taking responsibility & developing empathy

Session 5: Satisfying needs in an appropriate way

Session 6: Wrap-up

Group Evaluation

Post-assessment

#### **After Group:**

- 1) Review data collected from the pre/post-tests and group evaluations
- 2) Letter to parents
  - a. Summarize group
  - b. Encourage continued practice with skills
  - c. Share a few positive results from your data evaluation
- 3) Send out Google Form to group members, allowing them to request additional support
- 4) Brief check-in with students to follow-up

- a. Access what additional support they may need (additional interventions, referral to additional counseling)
- 5) Create a data form, presenting the results
- 6) Share data form with administrators and teachers at the staff meeting, explaining the results of the small group.

**Appendix F**  
**Session Outlines**

## Session One

### Objectives

- Students will introduce themselves to the group
- Students will take the pre-assessment
- Students will identify goals

### Mindsets & Behaviors

- M 3. “Sense of belonging in the school environment”
- B-SS 2. “Create positive and supportive relationships with other students”

### Materials

- Flexible seating options
- School Chromebooks
- Pens/Pencils
- Poster Board
- Markers
- Clipboards
- Journals for each student

### Outline

- When students enter, they will have a choice of seating options (chair, bean bag, yoga ball, floor) and will be instructed to sit in a circle
- The small group structure will be laid out
  - Dates/times
  - Topics
  - Objectives
- Have students introduce themselves to the group and identify one thing they hope to get from small group
- Do “Stand Up If” activity
  - Cultivate student choice, by letting the group agree on what they should do if the statement applies to them (ex. Stand up, clap twice, snap fingers, raise hand, etc.)
- Ask students to think about things that might make it challenging to participate in small group.
- Encourage students to share some group expectations that would help them overcome those challenges, and write them on a poster board
- Give students the opportunity to share other expectations they have, making sure confidentiality is addressed (add these to poster board as well)
- Give students their Small Group Journal and have them fill out P. 1 (Appendix F, Journal 1) to identify their goals
  - When identifying goals, cultivate student’s freedom by encouraging students to think about what *they* want for themselves, instead of what adults want for them
- Allow students the opportunity to share out their journal responses and ask any additional questions they have about small group. Counselor will involve everyone by using techniques from Brigman & Goodman (2001).

**Processing**

- How do you feel about participating in a small group?
- What is a goal you'd like to achieve by the end of this small group?
- What are some perceived challenges/barriers you have?
- In order for this group to be effective, I must \_\_\_\_\_.

## Session Two

### Objectives:

- 1) Students will be introduced to the “ABC” model
- 2) Students will identify negative thoughts
- 3) Student will identify negative beliefs
- 4) Students will understand how their thoughts/beliefs impact their behavior

### Mindsets & Behaviors:

- M 1. “Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being”
- M 2. “Self-confidence in ability to succeed”
- B-SS 9. “Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment.”

### Materials:

- Journals
- White Board/Markers
- Device to play video on
- Clipboards
- Paper
- Pens/Pencils

### Outline:

- Check in on students with “Fist to five” (ask students 1-5 how things are going with grades, home, peers, teachers, out-of-school activities, etc.) (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- Review last session
- Preview objectives for session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- Teach the ABC model to the group
  - Students will agree on whether they would like the counselor to teach the concept using a white board, or if they would like the counselor to play a [video](#)
  - Provide students with many examples
  - Give students the opportunity to ask questions
- Break students into “Pair and Share” groups (2 students per group)
- Have students work with their partner to think of a movie scene from a movie they have both watched. They will identify the antecedent of the event, the thought/belief of the character, and the consequence of the behavior (ex. A- Hagrid tells Harry he’s a wizard, B-Harry believes in he’s a good wizard, C-Harry feels confident and defeats Voldemort)
  - This activity allows students choice by letting them choose the scenario they work with
  - This activity also helps to build relationships, by talking about similar interests
- After ten minutes, students will then come back and share their work with the entire group
- Students will then complete P. 2 in their journals to identify some of their own thoughts/beliefs and connect them to their behaviors (Appendix F)

- After completing their journals, counselor will allow time for students to share their thoughts/feelings with the group
- Summarize the group session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- Assign Homework- have students use their journals to write down thoughts/beliefs they identify throughout the week at school (Appendix F, Journal page 3)

**Processing:**

- What is something you learned during this lesson?
- What did you like/dislike about the group activity?
- In what ways can you apply what you've learned to your life?

## Session Three

### Objectives:

- 1) Students will share the thoughts/beliefs they identified
- 2) Students will make connections between their thoughts/beliefs and their behaviors
- 3) Students will learn strategies to neutralize their negative thoughts/beliefs

### Mindsets & Behaviors:

- B-SMS 2. “Demonstrate self-discipline and self-control
- B-SMS 7. “Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem”

### Materials:

- Device to play music
- Journal
- Pens/Pencils
- Clipboards

### Outline:

- Check-in with students by having them tell the group either something exciting that happened or something they are looking forward to
- Preview last session
- Preview objectives for session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- Encourage group members to share a thought with the group that they identified over the week
- Ask group to brainstorm strategies to neutralize negative beliefs
  - Reiterate healthy ideas and add other ideas
- Play clips from different songs that have negative beliefs (ex. Happier by Marshmallow)
  - Students will identify a negative belief/thought
  - Student will brainstorm how they can change the negative thought to a positive one (Ex. “Negative thought- “You’ll be happier without me”, Positive thought- “I have many great things to offer”).
  - Consider the students in your group and what type of music they might listen to.
- Have students fill out the worksheet titled “Neutralizing Negative Thoughts” in journal (Appendix F, Journal p. 4)
- Have students discuss how their behaviors at school may have been different by changing their thoughts/beliefs (ex. “If I didn’t believe that my teacher didn’t like me, I may have put more effort into studying”)
- Summarize the group session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- Encourage students to try a strategy this week to change one of their thoughts/beliefs

### Processing:

- What have you learned about yourself?
- What have you learned about others in the group?
- Out of the strategies discussed, which will you try this week?

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## Session Four

### Objectives:

- 1) Students will understand how their behaviors impact others
- 2) Students will learn to take responsibility for their actions
- 3) Students will develop empathy

### Mindsets & Behaviors:

- B-SS 4. “Demonstrate empathy”
- B-SMS 1. “Demonstrate ability to assume responsibility”

### Materials:

- Journals
- Pens/Pencils
- Clipboards
- Scenario ½ Sheets
- Cards

### Outline:

- Check-in with students by having them complete the sentence: “I’m feeling \_\_\_\_\_ today because \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Preview last session
- Have a group discussion allowing students to share strategies that they were able to use to neutralize a negative thought/belief (5 minutes)
- Preview objectives for session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- Counselor will teach students what an “empathy statement” is and give examples. Students will take turns going around the circle saying an empathy statement using the following framework:
  - “I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_”
  - Counselor will use the skill “connecting” to help students feel understood (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- Break students into partners (3 groups of 2) and give each group two scenarios to choose from to work with
  - The scenarios will be fun, easy to read, and relevant to the cultures represented by group members
  - Students will read the scenario and talk with their partner about the following questions:
    - Who is impacted in the scenario?
    - How do you think the people who are affected feel?
    - How can the person who is responsible repair the harm?
  - Students will come back to the group and share their scenario and responses. Counselor will allow other students in the group to offer input.
- Students will, again, be broken into groups of two
  - Students will be given 8 minutes to play any card game of their choosing
  - When finished, students will come back into the group and discuss the following questions:
    - During the game, what things could you control?

- During the game, what things could you not control?
- Assign Homework- Students will fill out the “locus of control” worksheet in their journal throughout the week, documenting things they can/can’t control (Appendix F, Journal p. 5)
- Summarize the group session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)

**Processing:**

- What was it like to hear your peers talk about how they feel?
- What did you learn about how your behaviors impact others?
- How can taking responsibility for your actions help change the outcome?
- What’s something you can do (that’s in your control) to make a change?

## Session Five

### Objectives:

- 1) Students will learn Glasser's 4 needs
- 2) Students will explore the motivations of their behavior
- 3) Students will understand ways they can meet their needs in a healthy way

### Mindsets & Behaviors:

- B-SMS 4. "Demonstrate ability to delay immediate gratification for long-term rewards
- B-SS 9. "Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment"

### Materials:

- Journals
- Pens/Pencils
- Clipboards

### Outline:

- Check-in with students by having them share one person that impacted them this week
- Have students share out what they filled out in their journal by asking
  - What things were in your control this week?
  - What things weren't in your control this week?
- Preview objectives for session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- Introduce students to Glasser's 4 needs (belonging, power, freedom, and fun)
  - Have a group discussion, asking the students what each of those words mean to them
- Have students fill out the "Needs Worksheet" in their book, to match a student's behavior to the need that wasn't being met (Appendix C, Journal p. 6)
  - Students will choose if they would like to fill it out on their own, work with a partner, or do it with the entire group
- When finished, the group will come back together and go over the answers. The counselors will ask students why they chose the answers they did
- Students will break into partners and discuss the following questions:
  - Talk about a negative behavior you've exhibited?
  - What need do you think you were trying to meet?
  - What's another way you could've met that need?
- When finished, the group will come back together and share out
  - The counselor will encourage group members to help offer each other alternative, healthy ways to meet their needs
- Assign homework-throughout the week, students will identify times where their needs aren't being met, and write down strategies they used to meet their needs in their journal (Appendix C, Journal p. 7)
- Summarize the group session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)

### Processing:

- How can learning about your needs help you?

- What need do you think drives your behaviors most? Why?
- In what ways can you best satisfy that needs?

## Session Six

### Objectives:

- 1) Students will identify what concepts were most helpful
- 2) Students will explore how they can continue to apply what they've learned
- 3) Students will process their small group experiences

### Mindsets & Behaviors:

- M 1. "Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being"
- B-LS 7. "Identify long- and short-term academic, career and social/emotional goals"

### Materials:

- Journals
- Pens/Pencils
- Clipboards

### Outline:

- Check-in with group members by allowing them 5 minutes to chat about how their week is going
- Students will have the opportunity to talk about their homework from last session
- Counselor will remind the group that this is their last session
- Preview objectives for session (Brigman & Goodman, 2001)
- Have students review their journals and identify...(Appendix F, Journal p. 9)
  - 3 things they learned
  - 2 questions they still have
  - 1 "Wow" moment
- Have a group discussion to talk about their responses and address any questions
- Process the group experience with the following processing questions (Brigman & Goodman, 2001):
  - What are some of the most important things you learned?
  - How can you continue to practice what you've learned?
  - What challenges might come up? How can you overcome those?
  - What is one way you have changed during this group?
  - How do you feel about the group ending?
- Have students fill out the last page in their journal to identify two short term goals and one long term goal (Appendix F, Journal p. 9)
  - The counselor will give examples to help students understand the difference
- Students will complete post-test
- Students will complete the group evaluation
- Send students a Google Form, giving the opportunity to request additional services
- Thank group members for participating and remind them that you will check-in with them within 2 weeks

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## **Appendix G**

### **Pre/Post Test Copy of Google Form**

## Pre/Post Test Copy of Google Form

### Pre/Post Small Group

Please take your time to go through this brief questionnaire. Your responses to these questions will not be graded. Answer each question based on your own opinion or experience.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. I am confident that I have the ability to change my own behaviors

No, not at all.      1      2      3      4      5      Yes, very confident.  
                       

2. I believe that my behaviors impact everyone in the classroom

No, not at all      1      2      3      4      5      Yes, Very much so  
                       

3. I can Identify negative thoughts/beliefs

No, not at all.      1      2      3      4      5      Yes, very well.  
                       

4. I can take responsibility for my behaviors

No, not at all.      1      2      3      4      5      Yes, very well.  
                       

5. I can meet my needs in a healthy way

No, not at all.      1      2      3      4      5      Yes, very well.  
                       

6. I know how to identify negative/irrational thoughts.

No, not at all.      1      2      3      4      5      Yes, very well.  
                       

SUBMIT

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## **Appendix H**

### **“Stand Up If” Activity**

# “Stand Up If...” Activity

**Instructions (Read Aloud):** I am going to read some statements. If the statement applies to you, you will stand up. If it does not, you will either stay seated or sit back down.

Stand Up If...

1. You like to go to Starbucks
2. You play Minecraft
3. You have more than two siblings
4. You like spicy foods
5. You play a sport
6. You sleep with socks on
7. You’ve traveled outside the country
8. You listen to rap music
9. You enjoy scary movies
10. You like pickles
11. Your favorite subject is math
12. You like to go to the mall
13. Your favorite season is summer
14. You’re a “night owl”
15. You’re a picky eater

## Processing Questions:

What did you notice about this activity?

Was there anything that surprised you? Why?

What did you learn from your peers?

**Appendix I**  
**Scenario Cards Activity**

## Scenario Cards Activity

**Instructions:** Break students into pairs and give each group a scenario card. Have them read through the scenario and discuss the questions with their partner.

Markus was frustrated with a math problem. When the teacher asked the class if everyone was completed, he got even more frustrated. He threw his pencil, and it hit another person in class. He was then sent to the office.

Jayla was upset with her friend, Allison. To get back at her, Jayla decided to spread a rumor that wasn't true. Some students who heard the rumor chose to stop being friends with Allison. Allison found out it was Jayla who started the rumor, so she approached her after school and called her offensive names in the hallway.

Kyler wanted to feel accepted by his friends. At lunch, he started laughing at another student, named Cam. All of his friends started joining in and making comments such as, "Ew, look at Cam!". Cam yelled "Shut up and leave me alone!". Everyone in the cafeteria heard him.

In English class, the students were being loud and not following the teacher's directions. Suddenly, a student in the back of the class yells a racial slur. The class then becomes even more chaotic and students begin to argue. The principal and behavior interventionist were called into the class to help address the situation.

### Restorative Questions:

What happened?

Why did this happen?

Who was impacted?

How might the people who were impacted feel?

How can the harm be repaired?

What can be done next time to avoid this from happening again?

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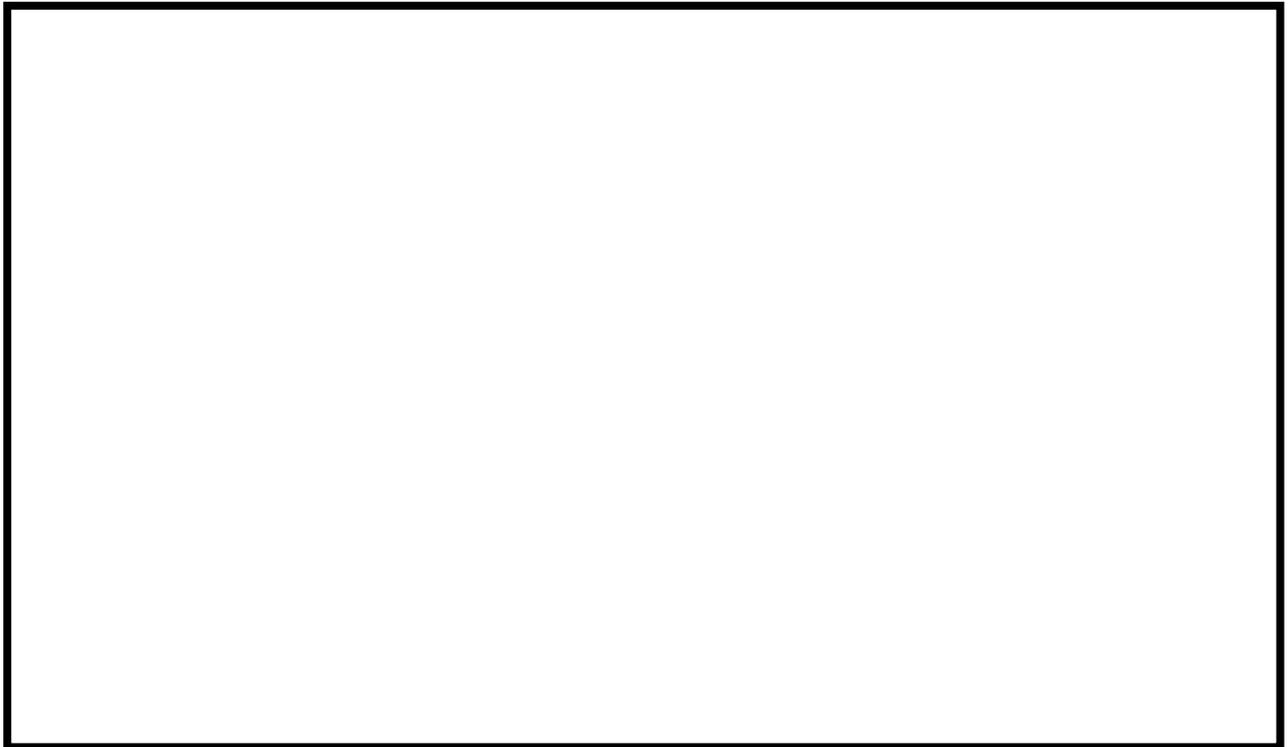
**Appendix J**

**Small Group Journal Cover**

# SMALL GROUP JOURNAL

Name:

---



Draw a picture of something that makes you feel happy!

**Appendix K**  
**Goal Setting Worksheet**

## Goal Setting Worksheet

Why did you choose to join this small group?

What goals do you have for yourself? (Please list 3 specific goals)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What challenges/barriers might get in the way of reaching your goals?

How might you overcome that challenge?

What's something you're excited about for this small group?

**Appendix L**  
**“ABC” Chart Worksheet**

## “ABC” Chart Worksheet

**Instructions:** Think of some events that have happened at school. Practice using the “ABC” chart by identifying the antecedent, belief, and behavior. Consider how the thought/belief you identify impacts the behavior. The first row shows an example.

Antecedent	Thought/Belief	Behavior
My teacher asked me to complete my math assignment	“I’m bad at math”	I refused to do my assignment

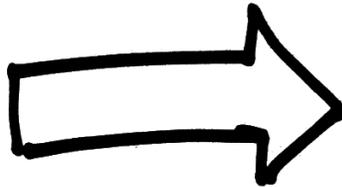
## **Appendix M**

### **Thought Log**

# Thought Log

**Instructions:** This week, try to be conscious of your thoughts. Use this log to list some thoughts you have throughout the week. Remember, identifying your thoughts can help you change your behaviors!

**TRIGGER**



**AUTOMATIC  
THOUGHT**


**Appendix N**

**Neutralizing Negative Thoughts Worksheet**

## Neutralizing Negative Thoughts

**Instructions:** Use the thoughts that you identified last week and reword them to make them positive and rational.




## **Appendix O**

### **Locus of Control Worksheet**

## Locus of Control Worksheet

**Instructions:** This week, pay attention to the things that are in your control and the things that are out of your control. Jot them down in the circles below (please provide at least 6 things in each circle):

The diagram consists of two concentric circles. The inner circle is light gray and contains a white rectangular box with the text "In My Control:". The outer ring is a darker gray and contains a white rectangular box with the text "Out of My Control:". The boxes are positioned at the top of their respective circles.

**Appendix P**

**“What do I need?” Worksheet**

## “What do I need?” Worksheet

**Instructions:** Read the scenarios below and identify what need (Belonging, Power, Freedom, or Fun) you think the person in the scenario is lacking. Make sure to explain your answers.

1. Denetta is being made fun of at school. She has had a difficult time making friends.

**Need:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Explain:**

2. Amy is bored in class. She makes a paper airplane and throws it across the room.

**Need:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Explain:**

3. Jamar’s parents want him to do all of his homework. Jamar doesn’t want to listen to his parents, so he doesn’t do his homework.

**Need:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Explain:**

4. Shawn wants to make his friends laugh, so he yells out something inappropriate in class.

**Need:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Explain:**

5. Jesse doesn’t want to listen to her teacher because she’s tired of adults telling her what to do. When her teacher tells her she can’t go to her locker, she leaves the room and does it anyway.

**Need:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Explain:**

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## **Appendix Q**

### **Satisfying my Needs Worksheet**

## Satisfying My Needs Worksheet

Instructions: Use the chart to identify needs that you have throughout the week. Brainstorm a strategy that you can use to satisfy that need in a productive way. The first row provides an example.

What happened?	Need	Strategy
My friend got upset with me and called me a mean name	Belonging	I decided to give my friend some space and then talked with her about why she was upset.

**Appendix R**  
**Small Group Reflection**

## Small Group Reflection

What are three things that you learned?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What are two questions you still have?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

What is one “WOW” moment you had?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

## Goals

**Short-Term Goals:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

**Long-Term Goal:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix S**

**End of Journal**

**CONGRATS!**  
**You have completed your  
small group!**

**Appendix T**  
**Group Evaluation**

# Group Evaluation

1. On a rate of 1 to 10, 1 being not helpful at all and 10 being very helpful, how helpful do you feel this group has been?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

2. What has been most helpful about this group?

---

---

3. What are some changes you plan to make in your life after this group?

---

---

4. What are some things that could improve this group?

---

---

5. Would you recommend this group to others? YES / NO

6. Explain:

---

---

7. Any additional comments (optional):

---

---

---

**Appendix U**  
**Group Follow-Up**

## Group Follow-Up

Dear parents/caregivers,

Your students has now completed all of the sessions of the Behavior Management small group. Thank you for allowing your son/daughter to participate in this group.

The following topics were discussed during small group sessions:

- Week 1 (DATE): Introduction
- Week 2 (DATE): Identifying negative thoughts/beliefs
- Week 3 (DATE): Neutralizing negative thoughts/beliefs
- Week 4 (DATE): Taking responsibility and Developing Empathy
- Week 5 (DATE): Satisfying needs in an appropriate way
- Week 6 (DATE): Wrap-Up

Your student has practiced various strategies and skills for managing their behavior in a healthy way. A small group journal was sent home, consisting of the worksheets completed throughout the small group. I encourage you to continue practicing these skills with your child. These strategies are valuable skills that can make a significant impact when practiced consistently.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me. I appreciate your partnership in helping your student manage their behaviors to reduce disruption in class and.

Sincerely,

COUNSELOR NAME  
School Counselor  
XXX-XXXX (Contact information)

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**Appendix V**  
**Data Form Example**

# Behavior Management Group Data Report Example

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

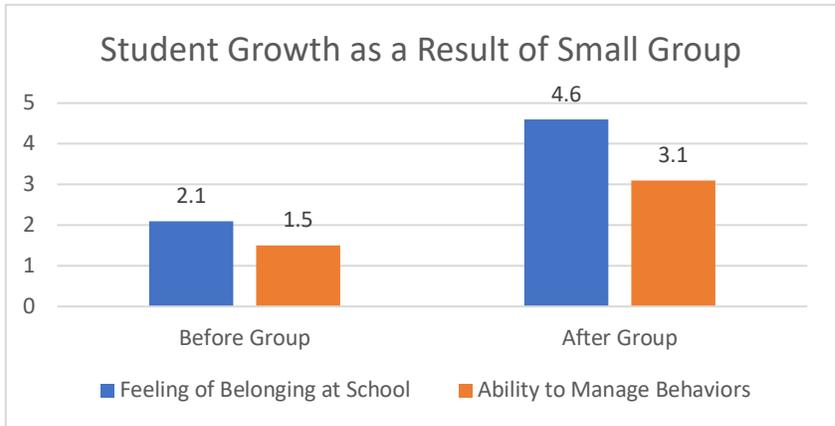
**Goal:**

By the end of the six-week small group, students will feel confident in their ability to manage their behaviors and take responsibility for their behaviors.

**Data Collection:**

Each participating student completed a pre- and post-test assessment. Before starting to lesson, the students took a pre-test to measure their skills, attitude, and knowledge related to time-management. Immediately after the lesson, the same test was administered. The pre- and post- test were compared to understand how students were different as a result of the lesson

**Results:**



**Conclusions:**

The data suggests that students who participated in the behavior management small group have a stronger sense of belonging at school and feel more confident in their ability to manage their behaviors. Research shows that a sense of belonging is linked to positive academic outcomes, increased motivation, and lower absenteeism (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Therefore, it’s anticipated that students will also improve their grades, standardized test scores, and attendance.

**Recommendations:**

Although students who participated feel a stronger sense of belonging at school, the average students rating was still only a 3.1/5. To increase this, I would recommend implementing additional interventions that support students’ sense of belonging at school.

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The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of Shayna Brooks in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

  
Elizabeth Petroelje Stolle, Project Advisor      4/28/21  
Date

Accepted and approved on behalf of the  
School Counseling Program

  
Shawn Bultsma, Graduate Program Director

04/28/2021  
Date

Accepted and approved on behalf of the  
Educational Leadership & Counseling Unit

  
Catherine Meyer-Looze, Unit Head

4/28/2021  
Date