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Developing Coping Strategies for Early Elementary Students in Relation to Anxiety

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Developing Coping Strategies for
Early Elementary Students in Relation to Anxiety
by
Kayle M. Ogrodzinski
August 2022

Master's Project
Submitted to the College of Education
At Grand Valley State University
In partial fulfillment of the
Degree of Master of Education



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

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Kayle M. Ogrodzinski

Abstract

There has been a growing concern about the number of students exhibiting anxiety in schools. Research shows that implementing interventions can help reduce the amount anxiety in students. School counselors can implement small group lessons with a focus on a theoretical approach using cognitive behavioral therapy to help address this concern. This method allows the student to be in control of their feeling and learn to cope with what is making them anxious. This project acts as a guide for school counselors to implement small group lessons. It provides an outline of seven weekly sessions for students in early elementary grades, who might benefit from this tier two support.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Mental health has continued to be more widely discussed in society and is more prevalent than ever before. One of the most common disorders with mental health is anxiety (Mental Health Foundation, 2020). Anxiety is defined as a feeling of worry or fear about something that occurs in an individual's daily life (Mental Health Foundation, 2020). Anxiety can begin to emerge in a school setting in early childhood. Anxiety disorder is perceived as the most prevalent mental disorder among children and adolescents (Ab Ghaffar et al., 2019). Currently, there is a high rate of anxiety among students in elementary school. According to Killu et al. (2016), anxiety in the classroom is manifesting in three specific areas: cognitive, behavioral, and physiological.

Killu et al. (2016) noted that elementary students are constantly worried, fidgeting, complaining of not feeling well (headaches, nausea), avoiding task, and displaying attention problems. They added that anxiety has crippling effect on students cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physiological functioning which can lead to students experiencing difficulties in the classroom. Ideally, elementary students would be able to self-regulate when faced with situations that anxious feelings are presented, however students are unable to self-regulate. As reported by Suveg et al. (2017), children with anxiety experience the inability to regulate their emotions. Additionally, Kupczyszyn and Oros (2021) stated implementation of certain social skills at different stages is essential, lack of those puts students at a greater risk for mental health concerns. School counselors have the education and training to assist students in managing their anxiety.

Importance and Rationale of the Project

With anxiety being more prevalent in society than ever before, it is a crucial topic that needs to be addressed. One of the factors to the high anxiety rates of elementary students are the perceived high academic demands in education. The academic demands are perceived as too much and are overwhelming creating stress for students (Giota & Gustafsson, 2021). According to Ginsburg et al. (2019), these academic demands foster constant feelings of worry due to the students' academic performance, as well as perfectionism. These researchers also noted that students may be concerned with failing and making mistakes in the classroom, which in turn these students might be constantly seeking reassurance from their teachers or compromised classroom behaviors. Ginsburg et al. concluded that reducing anxiety can improve school performance and allow students to meet the academic demands.

Ginsburg, et al. (2019) observed that an additional factor that is contributing to the high rate of anxiety of students are the lack of social skills. Students are fearful of being critiqued or embarrassed. Kupczyszyn and Oros (2021) stated that the developing basic social skills in the first six years of life are crucial for social development. They also noted that individuals with developed social skills have the ability to make logical decisions about stressful situations. Verbal skills, such as asking questions and sharing feelings is an essential component in regulating behavior as noted by Kupczyszyn and Oros. Masia Warner et al. (2013) emphasized that students experiencing difficulty with social anxiety have a negative association with friendships, classroom participation, and opportunities. Similarly, Kupczyszyn and Oros concluded that lack of these social skills put students at a greater risk for mental health issues.

According to Muthmainah et al. (2021), the root cause of high anxiety in children is the lack of coping skills, in dealing with the different types of anxieties students encounter. The lack

of coping skills is exacerbating the anxiety making it impossible for young kids to manage their anxious feelings. D'Agostino et al. (2021) found that the ability to cope with anxiety is a crucial step in student performance that could improve the educational experience of a student. As noted by Muthmainah et al., a skill that needs to be taught in early childhood is coping with emotions. According to Suveg et al. (2017), children and adolescents experience difficulty with regulating emotions. Suveg et al. reported that emotion regulation is one of the most prominent factors in anxiety disorders. Students who lack coping skills could further perpetuate their anxiety. Launching this project is imperative for elementary students as it promotes success for their K-12 experience. Teaching and continuing to foster these skills will help students manage their emotions.

Background of the Project

While there is a greater push today surrounding mental health, policy makers have made various attempts to help those within those circumstances. Under the United States Department of Education, the Office of Civil Rights aims to remove discrimination against students with disabilities. They created the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) in 1990. This act created access and opportunities for people who have disabilities. Under the Americans with Disability Act, students are protected for their disabilities, including mental health disabilities (US Department of Education, 2021).

In relation to the ADA stands the law of section 504. Section 504 is a federal law in part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 of which that protects the integrity of students. A 504 plan protects students in both primary and secondary education. The law covers both physical and mental impairments. The school district must provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students no matter the severity of the disability (US Department of Education, 2021).

Therefore, students with anxiety that inhibit their education may receive accommodations for this. Examples of this may include test taking conditions, classroom participation expectations, or presentation expectations. The school is responsible to evaluate the student and how their anxiety is impacted during the school day.

There is a perceived stigma for mental health. Many factors can contribute to the negative stigma surrounding mental health. Some of these factors may be religion, culture, and tradition. For those who experience mental health issues, feelings of loneliness, embarrassment, shame, and isolation. Those feelings may alter the decision to seek help.

Anxiety can have an early onset in a child's life. According to Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA; 2021), anxiety is highly treatable, yet less than 37% of the population receives treatment for it. Development occurs at a rapid pace in the beginning stages of life (ADAA, 2021). Baughman et al. (2020) reported that struggling in areas of emotional, social, cognitive, or exogenous domains can transfer problems in other areas. Typically, anxiety is first seen as separation anxiety in babies from 18 months until the age of three years. This is very common that babies will cry when a parent leaves them. These feelings can transpire into primary education. As students begin to enter the school system, they are faced with trials of developing academically and socially/emotionally. Without the proper foundation of learning how to cope with their feelings, this can further perpetuate anxious feelings. Baughman et al. noted that early intervention and prevention is an essential aspect for healthy development.

While mental health has been brought to the forefront of many conversations, there are still barriers regarding mental health. Many students do not have the access to combat the challenges of mental health. The resources to treating mental health are typically through different medications or through therapy. In most case scenarios, the most popular way to

combat anxiety is using medicine. This is not always a realistic option for children or adolescents due to the nature of the substances and the cost. While these treatments typical have positive effects on those who experience anxiety, they are not always an option. According to Reinke et al. (2011), teachers believed that the most logical place to help treat anxiety is within the school.

With the rapid increase of mental health issues shows the lack of training in the school environment with educators assisting students through their mental needs. Students whose needs have not been met for their mental health may show this in other ways, which often results in challenging behavior. Educators are more aware of the growing concern of anxiety among students. While educators are aware of this, there is a lack of training for educators on how to appropriately help students who are experiencing anxiety. As highlighted by Ginsburg et al. (2019), educators are not only expected to educate students, but aid in their mental health. Staff lack the training of social and emotional needs of students, in turn this is creating more discipline action, which is further perpetuating the problem. Reinke et al. (2011) found that teachers desired training in strategies for behaviors, understanding and recognizing mental health, and training in behavioral intervention. These authors found that only 34% of teachers felt they had the required skills to help students with mental health issues. Promoting positive mental health aids in success in all facets of life.

Students are faced with many life challenges such as social relationships, problem solving, collaboration, teamwork, and conflicts. All of this is occurring in the school environment. Students may not be getting exposed to coping mechanisms or at least healthy ones at that in their home lives. Much of a student's time is spent within the school building. Starting with the youngest age group is crucial to have continual success. Brown et al. (2022) argued that

it is also important for this age group because of their developmental level, they often lack the ability to advocate for themselves.

School counselors are the lead mental health specialist in the school setting. School counselors have training in the mental health compacity than other counterparts. A school counselor can recognize the warning signs of mental health, like anxiety. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA; 2020) stated that a school counselor should promote awareness surrounding mental health and offer short term counseling interventions. It is important to keep in mind that the school counselor may be the only service that is available to the student. According to ASCA (2016), it is a part of the school counselor's role and ethical responsibility to support students and staff.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project is to address the concern of high rates of anxiety with early education through implementation of a tier two research-based lesson plan for a small group intervention for students with high anxiety focused on the cognitive behavioral theory (CBT). This intervention will be conducted by the school counselor for children who meet qualifications of anxiety completed by the student's teacher through a questionnaire. The premise of the small group interventions is to help students identify different coping strategies to be able to self-regulate in their environment through social emotional learning. Ruocco et al. (2018) found that early intervention in the school setting is ideal.

The lessons would focus on cognitive, emotional, physiological, and behavioral aspects of student anxiety. This project utilizes techniques of visuals, scenarios, and play to talk about emotions, thoughts, and physiological symptoms that students are facing as well as the triggers. This intervention also focuses on teaching students' skills to cope with anxiety in different

situations. This curriculum addresses restructuring unpleasant thoughts to pleasant thoughts, as well as how to problem solve student's anxious feelings. This intervention has been designed to take place over seven weeks using a lesson module plan.

Objectives of the Project

The objective of this project is to improve the overall ability of students who experience anxiety to be able to manage those feelings through coping skills. Students should not have to allow their anxiety to be a result of lower academics or lack social/emotional development skills. As a result of this process, school counselors should be equipped with successful techniques to utilize tier two intervention strategies with students who experience anxiety that they are unable to control. School counselors and educators should have a clearer understanding of how to help students who are experiencing anxiety in the classroom.

In addition to students managing their emotions, this project seeks to promote an increase in academic growth. Some students are struggling in the academic realm in school due to their anxiety. In order for students to put in their best effort academically, their needs need to be met. If students can better manage those anxious feelings, their brain will be more suited to take on the challenging academics that continues to increase as students get older. Thus, students will increase their academic growth.

In correlation with the increase in academic growth, there would also be a decrease in tier three supports in the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). Many schools utilize the method of MTSS. Teaching student's skills that they can utilize in everyday life, will decrease the need of intense cases. Students will learn to gain control of their anxiety instead of allowing the anxiety to control them. The school counselor can focus less time of a reactive approach in intensive intervention and do more direct proactive services.

Following this objective, additionally this project would continue to bring advocacy and action for the school community regarding mental health. As mentioned earlier, the school environment is aware of the increase in mental health. More specifically, anxiety. The question remains, what is being done to help students with anxiety? This project seeks to advocate for the population of students with anxiety and bringing action to the school district.

The last objective is to offer material for school staff to feel prepared with knowledge and resources to help students with anxiety. With the growing concerns of mental health with students in general, staff may not have professional development training in these areas. School counselors need to collaborate with the teachers and staff in the building to offer knowledge in this area. This project is expected to create comfortability in helping students cope with their anxiety within the classroom.

Definition of Terms

Anxiety– Refers to a worry or fear of something (Mental Health Foundation, 2020)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA)– An association that supports school counselors to better serve students in the academic, social/emotional, and career domains in education (ASCA, 2016).

Emotion regulation– Refers to the ability to change an individual’s emotions based on the situation (Suveg et al., 2017)

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)– Under section 504, all students are entitled to receive a free education that is suitable to the individual (US Department of Education, 2021).

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS)– An evidence-based framework to improve learning in academic and behavior needs based on intensities of the student (ASCA, 2021).

Section 504– A federal document for students who qualify with physical or mental disability to receive appropriate supports to obtain equal education (US Department of Education, 2021).

Scope of the Project

The scope of this project is to focus on early elementary students with anxiety and providing them with some resources to cope with their anxiety. The goal is to create a foundation of skills that these young students can continue to build and utilize through the K-12 experience. Anxiety is something that can be treated, but that does not mean it always is. This project expects to allow students to have strategies to help them that they can continue to utilize throughout the rest of their lives.

This solution is not a definite solution. Every student is an individual with unique needs and different lived experiences. Anxiety is a spectrum and not all students will benefit in the same way. For some students, this program can greatly benefit and build skills that may not exist. For others, there may not be much impact based on a variety of factors. Some students may need to continue getting outside resources from the community, as school counseling is not a long-term intervention.

There are different factors that could influence the outcome of this solution. The severity and type of anxiety being experienced can influence the outcome. Each student is an individual with their own set of experiences. School counseling is not a long-term solution. Some students may need beyond what the school is equipped to offer. Students and families may need to seek outside sources. Additionally, a student may be seeking outside treatment as well that can change the data of effectiveness. Every family will tackle mental health. Some families will be proactive, while others may shy from anxiety being their reality.

The last hinderance of this project is the lack of support and funding for mental health programs. A school counselor is a collaborator. Helping students is a partnership with the student, school, family, and community. If this support is lacking, this can hinder the outcome of the project. In order to serve the growing student population with mental health needs, there needs to be funding to do so. A school counselor will likely need to advocate for interventions to support students with anxiety as they collaborate with all stakeholders for this project to be successful.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

To adequately address the need for early elementary interventions for students who face anxiety, a thorough literature review is necessary. This literature review provides the foundation of the rationale of this project. An explanation of this chapter's layout follows. To begin, a theoretical orientation is reviewed. Following, this chapter examines the literature review that pertains to the rationale of anxiety manifesting in early elementary students. This includes the detrimental effects of students who experience anxiety in areas of cognition, physiological, emotional, and behavior. Next, a summary is given with the key research information that was discussed. Finally, a conclusion informs how the literature was used to create the project that is described in Chapter Three and provided in the Appendix.

Theory/Rationale

School counselors are typically the lead mental health specialist within schools. It is the responsibility of the school counselor to recognize the need for mental health instruction within the school and respond to this need (ASCA, 2020). All students should have access for support who are experiencing anxiety. ASCA (2020) stated that school-based intervention programs for mental health are essential. The growing concern of mental health is the current topic of American society. In the United States, 17.4% of children between the ages of two and eight were diagnosed with a mental disorder. These number continue to grow as students get older. School counselors can play a key role in education to help close the gaps of the increasing concern of mental health, specifically with anxiety. To provide the adequate interventions for students who experience anxiety, it is essential for this to be grounded in theory. This

examination focuses on two theoretical approaches: (1) cognitive behavioral theory (CBT) and (2) play therapy.

Cognitive Behavioral Theory

CBT is one of the most researched theoretical approaches in helping people with anxiety (Hofmann, 2021). CBT was created by Dr. Aaron Beck in the 1950s, a pioneer in the realm of psychotherapy. According to Hofmann (2021), CBT emphasizes that emotions and behavior are influenced by cognition, as well as the perceptions of specific events in a person's environment. Hofmann added that CBT is a problem-focused approach that focuses on the client. In this theory, the client is in charge. The client takes responsibility and gains control or maintains the problem. Hofmann further noted that much of the treatment of CBT focuses on the cognitive factor of a person. CBT is among the most popular methods of treatment of anxiety. Hofmann found that CBT is a strong theory of treatment for effectively helping both children and adults with anxiety disorder.

The CBT method can teach students a variety of skills that they can use into adulthood. Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski (2015) noted that some of these skills may include the ability to recognize and express feelings, utilize calming techniques (such as breathing and muscle relaxation), getting their own needs met, promoting positive self-talk and having better interactions with peers.

School counselors are able to implement CBT methods that can fit the different students in which they would benefit from this (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2015). School based counseling offers the ability to integrate interventions during the school day and monitor the new strategies that have been learned (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski). School counselors can use the CBT approach with students in elementary schools as a basis for intervention. Anxiety can often

feel as though there is a loss of control within the situation or environment. Teaching students at a young age that they can control or change the perception can alter the response to the issue.

The literature has shown positive results in helping students manage their anxiety.

Play Therapy

An essential aspect of a child's development is through play. Play therapy is the ability to help children through play. Mostafazadeh et al. (2022) described play therapy as the connection of a child's inner world to the outer world. Play therapy is an effective mental health intervention for children (Ray, 2022). According to Avci and Kurt (2022), play therapy is one of the most useful ways in effectively helping students with their problems. Ray argued that play therapy provides a safe environment for children to use their natural language in an environment where they can be fully embraced and understood by the therapist. Ray added that individual or group therapy typically starts as young as three years old. Additionally, Avci and Kurt noted that play therapy can be seen as an effective tool in helping students who have trouble expressing themselves due to verbal constraints or cognitive development. Mostafazadeh et al. concluded that playing allows the child to express themselves, their emotions, what they are thinking, or even what a current threat might be to them.

Ray (2022) observed that play therapy is a technique that can be utilized in the school setting by school counselors. Play therapy has exhibited to be an effective technique in minimal to extreme problems with emotional and behavior problems, including anxiety. Adelman and Taylor (2019) noted that play therapy was a tactic that did show a notable decrease in childhood fear. Ray added that children can better express themselves and become less frustrated with adults when training to express themselves. School counselors can apply this theory to the developmentally appropriate age level to help students. This theory is much more common

among young children, as they are still very interested in play and pretend play. Utilizing play therapy can help the school counselor get to the deeper-rooted issue a student may be facing.

Research/Evaluation

The main goal in helping students with anxiety is reducing the anxiety and learning to cope to be successful academically. The literature review addresses the different ways anxiety can affect student development and barriers that may occur upon implementation. To prevent further negative outcomes for student, mental health services need to be more readily available to students (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2015). As explained throughout this chapter, school counselors possess the skills and have the capability to implement interventions that can have a positive effect on student development with anxiety. This information has led to the progression of the project that is presented in Chapter Three.

The literature review provides evidence that teaching students coping strategies helps to lessen the amount of anxiety students are having. Ab Ghaffar et al. (2019) found that anxiety prevention programs in the school environment were effective in reducing anxiety. Students spend most of their day at school, therefore the school environment is a crucial place in talking about anxiety and teaching coping skills. Students who show early signs of anxiety may be subject to challenges in academic, career, and social/emotional development throughout their life without a planned intervention intact (ASCA, 2020).

Effects on Student Development

Anxiety can negatively impact a student in all aspects in life and have considerable impact in the school setting. Student unmet mental health needs can present challenges for students in areas of academia, career, social/emotional development (ASCA, 2020). This section

outlines the effects of student development that has been noted in research in the areas of academic performance and social/emotional development.

Academic Performance. One of the ways that anxiety can affect students is through their academic performance. “Students with anxiety disorder display a passive attitude in their studies such as lack of interest in learning, poor performance in exams and low academic achievement etc.” (Khan et al., 2021, p. 303) It is an emotional reaction characterized by fearful anticipation of an unpleasant event in the future” (Khan et al., 2021, p. 304). Action control behaviors and positive emotions correlates with a more positive self-concept in academics (Lohbeck et al. 2016). A notable form of anxiety is described as test anxiety. D’Agostino et al. (2021) noted that student evaluations rely heavily on test scores, and test anxiety has become a global issue. According to Sanli (2021), worry and emotionality are the two factors that happen with test anxiety. If a student lacks confidence about a test, this can trigger the idea that they cannot do the task at hand. In order to combat those feelings or thoughts, students need to utilize strategies. Students who can self-regulate are more likely to perform better academically. CBT interventions have been shown to improve academic performance (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2015). Ruocco et al. (2018) utilized the “Get Lost Mr. Scary” CBT intervention program for small group intervention for students between the ages four to six. This study offered interventions within the school environment to combat some of the behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and physiological anxieties students are experiencing. Ruocco et al., found success in their study when implementing anxiety-based programs within a school environment through a CBT approach. D’Agostino et al. conducted a study on test anxiety using a four-point Likert scale. The findings from this study suggest that there is a relationship with students who are high

performing were experiencing these emotions more. D'Agostino et al. noted that there is a negative correlation between academic achievement and anxiety.

A student's anxiety can have a negative on their academic development, which can continue throughout the entirety of the K-12 experience. D'Agostino et al. (2021) believed anxiety is the leading indication of a negative school performance. Anxiety can have a direct impact on academics in the classroom. D'Agostino et al. conducted a study that found that not only does anxiety affect students who are underachievers, but also greatly affects highly motivated students. They believe high performing students seem to have higher fear of underperforming and failing grades. Thus, they found that it is imperative for teachers to recognize anxiety has a greater effect on higher performing students. D'Agostino et al. concluded that coping with anxiety is a nonnegotiable when it comes to improving academic performance.

Chronic absenteeism is also associated with a student's academic development. Anxiety can produce a physiological response in students. This response can range from peruse sweating, shaking, intense headaches, and unbearable stomach pain. These physiological responses in students can affect their attendance. Students who experience these physiological reactions to anxiety may think they are sick, instead of anxious. Students need to be in school to successfully complete their K-12 education. If students are going home ill or refusing to come in because they feel sick due to anxiety, they are more likely to fall behind their peers. Emotional Management Therapy (EMT), which is a concept under CBT, was an intervention utilized to teach students the physical feelings that can emerge when they are feeling anxious.

Kearny et al. (2014) utilized EMT to show children their anxious feelings and the relation of these feelings manifesting within their bodies. In this study by Kearny et al., children were

taught the connection of emotional feelings and where they manifest in their bodies. Students learned to identify the feelings that were responsible for headaches, throwing up, abdomen pain, leg shaking, or feelings of numbness in their bodies. This intervention taught self-soothing techniques of meditation and relaxation for students experiencing these feelings. This study looked at defining emotions, the triggers of emotions, as well as how those emotions can be regulated in healthy ways to benefit the students. “Given the number of CBT studies illustrating intervention effectiveness in school-based intervention across many mental health needs, tools for successful application of CBT methods are essential for practitioners” (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2015, p. 23). Students in elementary, especially early childhood, may not have a true understanding of emotions. Therefore, teaching them emotional management and where it can manifest in the body, can aid in their strength to use coping skills.

Social/Emotional Development. As a part of the K-12 experience, students not only grow academically, but they grow socially/emotionally as well. Students in early grades are extremely reliant on their parents for basic life skills and emotional support (Adelman & Taylor, 2019). In the early stages of their elementary education, students learn to build friendships, use teamwork, and collaborate with their peers. Kupczynszyn and Oros (2021) believed that the first six years of a person’s life are crucial for social development. Students who have anxiety may have a harder time developing socially. They are more likely to lack social skills to connect and have conversations with their peers. They may further isolate themselves and have trouble connecting with peers into adulthood.

Warner et al. (2018) conducted a study on children with anxiety in the forms of CBT interventions and emotional cognitive behavioral therapy (ECBT). The study compared the two forms of therapy. The CBT group completed ten weekly individual sessions utilizing the CBT-

based Coping Cat protocol. This group focused on skills to help children manage anxiety in the first half and practicing the exposed skills in the second half. The ECBT group also completed ten weekly sessions that focused on the typical CBT strategies, as well as a different emotion each week. The counselor discussed the emotion and what behavioral or physiological feelings may be associated with that emotion. Warner et al. found that both studies were effective in treating childhood anxiety.

One of the most common forms of anxiety is social anxiety. Feelings of shyness or being self-conscious are not uncommon for children (Coplan et al., 2010). Greca and Stone (1993) argued that there is a correlation between development and social behavior. As mentioned earlier, students with anxiety may begin to feel a sense of isolation. Greca and Stone (1993) completed a study of 587 students with an average age range of ten years-old. This study utilized the Child Anxiety Scale. They found that social avoidance and inhibition leads to more restricted socialization and developing relationships with friends. Therefore, if students are experiencing social anxiety, this will continue to affect them negatively in their social development.

Shy children are vulnerable to social-emotional problems, especially in early childhood (Coplan et al., 2010). Children who have social anxiety may be unable to understand nonverbal social cues and may base interactions on inaccurate emotions (LaGreca et al., 2001). McClure and Nowicki completed a study that observed 31 male and 31 female students. The age range of these students were between the ages of eight and ten who participated in this study. This study found that the more students have social avoidance, the more difficulty these students have deciphering emotional cues. This is an issue as this will affect students with current and future social development. The long term effects in adolescents and adulthood can be very detrimental (Coplan et al.).

Children may be unaccepted with their peers and subject to harassment. Unfortunately, this can make them a target for bullying. Crippling anxiety can have detrimental effects on the human brain. Without the ability to manage anxiety, students may develop depression. Anxiety and depression continue to be exasperating for adolescents which can mount to suicide or self-inflicting harm (Baughman et al., 2020). Anxiety can keep students from participating or becoming successful in other aspects of life such as marriage.

There has been an increase in push for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to be in the general education classrooms. Students with ASD also experience anxiety and their social development is already affected. Simpson et al. (2019) conducted a study to address the need of school support services using CBT on students with ASD to reduce the anxiety symptoms these students are experiencing. In this study, 187 students participated ranging in the ages between 7 and 15. The interventions were in the form of weekly sessions that lasted between 60 minutes to 90 minutes. They used the approach of recognizing anxious symptoms, restructuring anxiety, and changing techniques. They found the overall study to be positive in ASD students with over 81% of the participants to be considered treatment responders. “The three highly manualized CBT programs used in the eight studies (BIACA, Building Confidence, Exploring Feelings) may be of interest and benefit to school personnel (e.g., school psychologists, school counselors, special education teachers) working together with clinical professionals to meet the needs of students with ASD” (Simpson et al., p. 309).

One intervention technique that has been promising among the literature is teaching cognitive thinking among people who experience anxiety. Teaching students to think sensibly is an important skill to decrease the rate of anxiety a student may be experiencing. Reframing, problem solving, and restructuring were some of the ways this skill was taught in two of the

intervention studies. These skills were practiced using pictures of facial expressions for the students to identify (Kearny et al., 2012). Ruocco et al. (2018) taught restructuring through play utilizing balloons of two different colors to teach helpful and unhelpful thoughts. The use of play and props could aid in having elementary students grasp the concepts of anxiety since a lot of anxiety is based on irrational thinking. Teaching students to restructure their anxiety to think sensibly and problem solve is a form of coping with anxiety. Reframing is a cognitive concept to combat anxiety. There are many symptoms that can be associated with anxiety, so it is important to keep in mind that every student will show anxiety differently. According to Duvall and Roddy (2019), the number one aspect in supporting students with anxiety is helping the student understand why they are so anxious. Duvall and Roddy (2019) also mentioned many different strategies to help students who are dealing with anxiety. They listed positive self-talk/affirmations, muscle relaxation exercises, grounding, deep breathing, journaling, and imagery.

A study conducted by Javadian and Sabet Eqlidi (2022) found that teaching skills such as reframing allowed students to see their problems differently. It is worth mentioning that while there are many different techniques to utilize while teaching these skills, not every student will use all of them. Some of these skills can further perpetuate the anxiety; therefore, it is up to the counselor to discover what strategies work for each student (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2015). An additional technique that was utilized in various research is teaching people to use positive self-talk. Humans can naturally talk to themselves. Positive self-talk is the ability to say positive things inside your head. It is the internal dialogue that many people can have inside their head. Speaking negatively to oneself can limit someone in different areas of life.

Barriers of Implementation

Although research has noted many benefits of educators, more specifically school counselors, intervening and providing support for students with anxiety, there are still barriers for implementation. This section outlines some of the benefits that have been noted in research.

Lack of Training. One of the main barriers in implementing some form of anxiety interventions for students, is a lack of training for school counselors. There is especially a lack of training for students who are in early elementary. Much of the current studies are geared toward older grades. Many school counselors do not feel adequately trained in techniques to offer support for their students. In a study conducted by Avci and Kurt (2022), a total of 116 school counselors who had been working a total of a minimum of one year participated in a study in effort to explore the perceptions of play therapy. Of the 116 school counselors in this study, 98 identified not having any training in play therapy in their education. About half of the school counselors reported doing one to five hours of counseling sessions in a week. Only 8 school counselors reported doing ten or more hours of individual and group interventions, while 22 have stated they have not done any counseling sessions. This study showed the limited time school counselors are doing individual or group interventions a week. There were 12% who indicated a lack of time for using play therapy, while 87% noted a lack of training was the reason for not using play therapy.

In order to minimize the potential impact of development for students, early intervention is key (Baughman et al., 2020). There has been substantial evidence that there have been many advancements in treatment for childhood anxiety (Comer et al., 2019). Adelman and Taylor (1998), noted that most schools only offer the minimal essentials for students in schools. While the support is growing, there is still a lack in providing support for early elementary students.

Lack of Time. In addition to lack of training, the biggest hurdle in implementing interventions in a school, is the lack of time available to do so. According to ASCA, the student to school counselor ratio should be 250:1. While this is very ideal to offer adequate services to all students, most school counselors are well beyond this ratio. Thus, many school counselors have limited time to conduct interventions due to the caseload of students.

School counselors utilize a MTSS approach with helping to support interventions for students. Tier one interventions encompass a whole group intervention that would typically take place in the classroom. While some students may benefit from this approach, one lesson is most likely not enough to adequately help students with anxiety. Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski (2015) finds that students with severe mental health disorders may need more extensive CBT approaches to address their social and emotional challenges unlike tier one interventions.

Elementary school counselors tend to spend more time in small group counseling in comparison middle and high school counselors. According to Tomori (1995), find that small group intervention can reduce anxiety as it offers a supportive environment of students with similar concerns where students feel they are not alone. Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski (2015), believe that tier II interventions include many elements of CBT, such as calming techniques and identifying emotions, as it addresses the more common needs of students. Baughman et al. (2020) created and conducted a study called the “Fun FRIENDS program”, which seeks to prevent anxiety and promote social/emotional skills as well as resilience all while in early childhood. This program adapts CBT principals to the developmentally appropriate age range in early childhood, thus relating thoughts and feelings. Baughman et al. (2020), find that the approach of CBT is based on the concept that mental health disorders is a result of the assumptions about one’s self and the world. Baughman believes that utilize therapy with this

approach aims for positive recognition while restructuring negative thinking patterns students may have.

Ginsburg et al. (2019) utilized the Teacher Anxiety Program for Elementary Students (TAPES). This program included 40 volunteer elementary teachers and 60 elementary school students who participated in this randomized study. The study was meant to be completed by one student at a time. This approach was also meant for a school and home collaboration that included both students and parents. While the results of this study are reassuring, there are limitations. Due to the increased need of interventions for students with anxiety, this study poses problems because it is very time consuming. Teachers and school counselors alike are extremely busy with the caseloads of students and the current needs for all students. Individual sessions may not be the best use of time, due to the increase statistics of anxiety manifesting in children.

Summary

The research indicates a need to decrease the number of students who experiencing anxiety. School based mental health services are essential for students (ASCA, 2020). School counselors are in a position in their role to help students cope with their anxiety. School counselors can have a tremendous impact on students unmet emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2015).

Anxiety can affect a student's development in many ways. Anxiety can have a direct impact on a student's academic performance. A common form of this anxiety develops into what researchers define as test anxiety. Not only are students faced with academic performance issues due to anxiety, but students are also facing problems with social and emotional development when they have anxiety. Many students are forming social anxiety disorders. They are lacking

skills to adequately develop their social skills and build peer relationships. Anxiety is affecting children's development.

There are several barriers that are impacting school counselors from implementing interventions for students with anxiety. One of these barriers are a lack of training for staff to implement interventions that can decrease a student's anxiety. Many school counselors and educators do not feel they are appropriately trained to provide enough intervention to help students. Additionally, school counselors lack the time to work with students. School counselors are being spread thin and are often in tier three interventions. They are consistently having to do a reactive approach because the caseloads are too high. To adequately meet the number of students and the needs for all students experiencing anxiety, a tier two intervention is ideal. With the amount of student's experiencing anxiety interventions are essential to improve a student's success, but also their quality of life.

Mental health is a high priority in the nation, including the delivery within the school environment (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2015). School counselors have the training and ability to implement interventions when necessary. They are an essential piece in supporting students in helping to provide coping mechanism to be in control of their anxiety.

Conclusion

Anxiety is a normal and natural response in humans. While this may be true, too much anxiety can cause problems in everyday life and academic achievement (Javadian & Sabet Eqlidi, 2022). The review of literature demonstrates a need for interventions related to anxiety for early elementary students in order to help them be successful in school and beyond. The literature shows that CBT is a theoretical approach that is commonly used, but all of the approaches utilize different strategies of CBT. Many of these approaches are geared towards older children and adults. There are limited interventions for elementary students when anxiety emerges. Counselors and school mental

health specialists alike help to develop programs for students to aid; improve; or prevent behavioral, emotional, and social problems children may face (Javadian & Sabet Eqlidi).

Currently, with the rise in students having somewhat debilitating anxiety, there are barriers that the education system faces. These include a lack of training for educators to provide adequate support for students with anxiety. There is also a lack of time for educators to get into the classrooms to provide supports. With the case load doubling the recommended amount, many school counselors are spending much of their time in tier three interventions.

To support all students including those who have anxiety, a consistent plan needs to be put in place. Providing support within the school environment is a necessary step in helping students succeed. CBT and play therapy have shown important elements have can provide a safe environment and strategies that can help combat childhood anxiety. In a small group setting, students can learn with their peers and can develop strategies that work well for each individual student. The plan for this project is derived from the current research presented in this chapter as well as a theoretical approach. This plan seeks to provide thorough lessons that offer clarification, Chapter Three discusses the specifics of this project. This includes the description of project components, the plan for project evaluation, anticipated project conclusions, plans for implementation, and Appendices that include more detailed descriptions of the components of the program.

Chapter Three: Project Description

Introduction

The increase of students with anxiety continues to rise. School counselors cannot stop all the anxiety in the school alone, but it is my hope that they can provide a decrease in the population of students who are experiencing anxiety. Research indicates that while anxiety may not fully be resolved, coping mechanisms can allow for ease with anxiety. Teaching students coping skills can allow students to be more successful in their academics, career, and their social/emotional development. Early intervention is essential to improve child development (Baughman et al., 2020). To improve a students' well-being and prevent new cases, anxiety needs to be reduced (Hugh-Jones et al., 2019). This project provides a theoretical approach framework for a small group intervention with students with anxiety.

The comprehensive goal of this project is to increase student success while simultaneously decreasing constant anxiety. A description of the components of this project is explained in this chapter. First, the project components are identified, included is the overview of the small group, the description of lesson plans, and prompts. Second, the project evaluation is explained, including the scales used to measure the project's effectiveness, data collection methods, and indicators of success. Third, anticipated project conclusions are presented with reference to both the prior body of research and the conclusions drawn from it. Lastly, a discussion of the plans for implementation are included. This component also discusses attention to how this small group intervention should be used and suggestions of who this information should be shared with. This project is meant to be a resource for elementary counselors to utilize with the growing concern of students experiencing anxiety with the inability to cope.

Project Components

CBT methods have been showing to improve anxiety among older age groups. Small group interventions among early elementary is extremely important in providing a foundation of coping mechanisms for students to be successful in various aspects of their life that can be utilized within the school setting and beyond. This project provides a foundation for school counselors to work with a small group of early elementary student with anxiety. This project gives a starting point to implement action with students through an overview of lessons that can be adjusted as school counselors see fit. This small group intervention will have one session a week for seven consecutive weeks to help students learn about their anxiety and worry. The following project components are explained in more detail below and appendices are included.

To begin the group, teachers need to first communicate to the school counselor about who they believe struggle with anxiety. The school counselor can use a referral form (Appendix A) to address this concern. Once the counselor believes they have the students who will be in the small group a permission form (Appendix B) will need to be signed by the parents or guardian of the student. A student/teacher agreement (Appendix C) was created with the understanding between the teacher and student about the group meeting times that it will not negatively affect their learning time. After the completion of this, the student will take a pre-test (Appendix D) and teacher will also take a pre-test (Appendix E) to track the success of this project.

The main component of this project is the small group lessons. These lessons (Appendix G) were created to develop skills to combat or manage the anxiety that is being experienced. The first session of this anxiety small group will focus on the introductory portion of the small group. Anxiety is a vulnerable topic; therefore for students to feel comfortable and confident to share their experiences in order to make progress, it will be imperative to build some common ground

with their group members. This is why the first session simply focuses on learning a little bit about one and other. Students will create name tags (Appendix H), if necessary. Following introductions, expectations should then be created. Creating expectations are intended to aid in eliminating confusion and allow everyone who is participating in this group to be on the same page. The students should create a physical contract with a blank sheet of paper. Once completed each student and the school counselor are expected to sign this contract to show their understanding and acceptance of the rules. Once the basics are established, a roll and respond game (Appendix I) should be played to continue building on the creation of a safe environment to share their own stories. The group should come back together to summarize the session, share goals for next time, and remind the group when the next session is scheduled to take place.

Session two focuses on what anxiety is and means. Based on the developmental age of students in early elementary, a term utilized is a worry. Developmentally, students at this age most likely do not have an understanding what anxiety is. The school counselor should read *Ruby Finds a Worry* by Tom Percival. The book follows the story of a little girl who is plagued by a worry monster who follows her every day. The worry continues to grow and get bigger. Ruby must learn how to cope with her worry in order to feel like herself. Once the book is completed student should then complete their own worry monster. Creating their own monster can help students identify their worries and gain more understanding of why they are worried.

Session three is the continued expansion on defining the feeling of anxiety or a worry. This session focuses on what a worry feels like both mentally and physically. There are many different physical symptoms that can be associated with anxiety. Some of these symptoms may include stomach pain, headaches, sweating, foot tapping, nauseous, rapid breathing and more. Mental symptoms associated with anxiety may include negative self-talk and low self-esteem.

The school counselor will break down both the physical and mental feelings that can occur. The students will be asked to show some of these feelings they may be experiencing. Each student will be given an image of a person (Appendix J). Each student will be asked to draw or write the physical and/or mental feelings they have when they are experiencing.

The premise of session four is the introduction of coping strategies for anxiety. Students will be introduced to several different coping strategies. One of the strategies focuses on controlled breathing. In an anxious state can feature rapid breathing. This strategy attempts to correct that breathing to return to a calm state of mind. Students will be given a sheet of a rainbow on it (Appendix K). They will be told to inhale down the line of the rainbow and exhale one they reach the cloud. They will continue down each line to calm their nerves. Students will be taught grounding strategies. Two of these types of strategies are a power hug or alphabet search. An additional strategy is muscle relaxation. Lastly, the five senses technique (Appendix L) is a strategy that will be addressed in this session. After each new technique is introduced and thoroughly explained through the school counselor, students will be given adequate time to practice their new learned skills.

Anxiety can cause tense feeling that may be displayed through tense muscles. Some types of strategies the school counselor will address are wall pushes and holds, squeezing and releasing hands, as well as full body tense and release. Most of these strategies are strategies that can be done at anytime and anywhere. This is important in these solutions that they can be done at any moment; therefore, students can feel in control of their anxiety. Teachers will be given the description and instructions on how these strategies work. So that when anxious students are in the classroom, the teacher can encourage these students to utilize the techniques when necessary.

The focal point of session five focuses on positive self-talk. The session begins with defining a chain reaction and explaining how negative thoughts can cause a negative chain reaction. This can be demonstrated to the students through the use of dominos. Students should be able to explain how these thoughts can affect them. Students will be given several minutes to try the dominos themselves to better gain understanding. Next, the school counselor should define positive self-talk and what it means to reframe worry. To reframe worry, the school counselor can explain that recognizing the worry, challenging the thought, and changing the thought are steps to reframing a worry through a series of cards (Appendix M). The group should come back together (sitting in a circle) and go around the group describing one thing they are worried about and how they can reframe it. If time permits, students should go around again and say one positive thing about themselves. The students will be asked to create a “Positive Self-Talk Shield” (Appendix N) where they will be asked to write and draw things about their own strengths that can help shield them from their negative thoughts about themselves. This is something they can take with them and leave in class if they so choose to do so to help with their anxiety.

Session six is all about control and whether the student is in control of their worry. Students will be given playdough to play with for two minutes. They will then be given a rock with an additional two minutes. They will ask what kinds of things they could make with the playdough and what they could make with the rock. The school counselor should proceed to explain how students can manipulate and change the playdough. The school counselor should continue and talk to students about the inability to change the rock. Students will each be given a hula-hoop. The teacher can give students different examples such as the weather. Students will then have to identify if they should go inside the hula-hoop of things they can control and what

should be on the outside of things they can control. Students will be given a worksheet called “What’s in my Control” (Appendix O). Students will be asked to write or draw things they can control in one box. They then be asked to write or draw things they are unable to control in another box. After, the group should come back together in the circle and process through the concept of control.

Session seven is the final session of this small group intervention. In any group session, it is key to have an ending session. This allows the students to take what they know and continuing to apply it. Thus, session seven is focused on termination of the group. This session summarizes what was learned throughout this seven-week session. This week students should complete post-test (Appendix E) and evaluations (Appendix P). Students will be asked to reflect on the small group and all they have learned. Students should lastly be asked to honestly evaluate the effective of the group. This session is extremely important to see if the sessions were effective and what feedback can make the group even better. As Tomori (1995) mentioned, group sessions are not a cure all. Students will have to work at continuing to build and refine their skills.

Following the end of the small group intervention, the students’ teachers will be asked to complete the post-test (Appendix E) several weeks after to see whether or not there are any changes in the students. The school counselor should also send a letter home to parents (Appendix Q) to communicate the topics covered, progress made in the group, and how to continue helping their student at home. Lastly, an important component of helping to improve this project is collaborating with parents and guardians. An assessment (Appendix R) should be sent home to parents to see how they evaluate the effectiveness of this group for their student to continue to improve this intervention technique.

The rationale of this project comes from the fact of the continual increase of students with anxiety. With the rise of anxiety among the child population (Adelman & Taylor, 1998), there needs to be support to slow the curve and decrease the number of students who are being crippled with anxiety. Fostering coping skills to combat anxious feelings is what allows students to be successful. Students have positive strengths about them, even if they have an internal struggle (Adelman & Taylor, 1998). These strategies are things that any student can do at any point in the day, which allows them to feel in control of their anxiety. School counselors are the most equipped people in the education system to help students who experience this, as they are the mental health specialist within the school environment. School counselors are trained in their education programs for mental health concerns (Brown et al., 2021). For school counselors to help produce a sustaining difference for students, it is imperative for collaboration to take place among students, teachers, parents, and the school district to continue this work.

Project Evaluation

An essential component of this project is the evaluation of the program's effectiveness in developing early elementary students in coping mechanisms. This process is evaluated through several types of data of which include perception, process, and outcome. The initial process data should be evaluated through the teacher referral. Process data will be obtained by compiling the information gathered on the referral sheet, as well as the number of students involved, the number of meetings, and the duration of meetings. The perception data will be assessed through the student and teacher pre/post-test assessments. The school counselor should review these to see if/how students are different from this intervention. Outcome data can be evaluated through behavior, attendance, and grades of the students who participated in this project. Attendance can be measured by an anxiety ridden student missing class due to feeling ill because of anxiety

which can be compared before and after the project. Academic grade data such as homework completion can be examined to determine if the project was successful. An indication of success can be if the students' attendance and/or grades are improving over the course of the school year after the completion of this project.

Project Conclusions

There is a high prevalence of anxiety today and the numbers are continuing to increase. To stop or decrease anxiety, there needs to be an understanding of why it is happening and what is the protocol to make it better. The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) created access and opportunities for people who have disabilities, including those with mental health students. Every public school district must provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students no matter the severity of the disability (US Department of Education, 2021). Therefore, it is the responsibility of school personnel to help students who are experiencing anxiety to the best of their ability.

CBT and play therapy, which provide the theoretical orientation for the literature review in Chapter Two, are based upon the concepts that thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are interconnected. Play therapy can aid in teaching these concepts for this developmental age. This small groups work through identifying the feelings and thoughts of behavior. Each session focuses on different concepts to address the various aspects of anxiety while utilizing some play therapy.

Previous research indicates that there are barriers to successfully helping early elementary student with anxiety. The barriers that were indicated was the lack of training and lack of time. This project provides a theoretical approach to combat early childhood anxiety to aid in the lack of training some school counselors may feel. While this project does not remove

the time barrier of school counselors, it initiates a solution to help school counselors help more than one student at a time. Thus, school counselors are spending less time in individual counseling sessions with students who have similar needs. This project allocates time differently benefiting the school counselor.

This project fulfills the need of addressing the increase of anxiety through intervention for very young elementary students. Many school personnel are seeing the effect on anxiety of students as they continue their K-12 education. Much of the interventions are geared towards secondary education. If there are interventions for students in primary school, they are designed for older grades, such as fifth grade. This project provides a framework for school counselors to help students in early elementary. This project is intended to provide a basic intervention that can be edited to fit the different needs of anxiety. This project can promote a lasting effect on students to overcome anxiety in healthy ways throughout their K-12 experience and beyond.

There appears to be measurable and comprehensible indicators of success of this project. If this project is successful, the school counselor will have data measuring improved student success academically. Furthermore, a successful project should specify an increase in students social and emotional development within and outside of the classroom, including peers. Lastly, the project will be considered successful if school counselor can effectively collaborate with teachers and parents to increase student confidence in ability to overcome anxiety in the classroom.

While this project fulfills a need, there are still unanswered components. This project does not answer if the coping skills will be successful for the student population. The project does not indicate what coping skills will be. Also, it does not answer if the coping skills will be

utilized outside of the small group. It is nearly impossible to predict if the coping skills will be successful as they may not meet every student's individual needs.

Plans for Implementation

This project is intended to be utilized by school counselors as a foundation to create more awareness and resources for school counselors who are working with anxious students in early elementary school. Before this process can begin teachers have a decent grasp on their students' personalities to refer their students for this group. Therefore, this process is intended to happen after the first two months of the school year at earliest or any time after this. Once the referrals are completed by the teachers, parents should be sent a letter to explain the intentions of the group and see if their child has permission to attend

After the process, perception, and outcome data have been collected, the school counselor can sort and evaluate the data. Following the evaluation of data, the school counselor can determine the success of the intervention. The school counselor can then present the informational data of the small group intervention results to the school's administration team, teaching, support staff, parents, the school board, and all stakeholders. This data can be utilized to conduct improvement to the intervention for the following school year. School counselors within the district may consider implementing the program within the various elementary schools. Additionally, school counselors can provide this information to various journals to continuing literature. Data are an integral part of this project and can further push continued research and literature to improve early elementary anxiety.

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Appendix A

Referral Request for Small Group Counseling

Appendix B

Parent/Guardian Small Group Permission Form

Parent/Guardian Small Group Permission Form

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian,

Hello! My name is _____. I am the school counselor at _____ Elementary School. I have been a School Counselor for _____ years at this school. As a School Counselor, I have the opportunity to work with students on academics, social/emotional support, and career readiness.

I am looking to have your son/daughter be a part of a small group focused on anxiety. This group will aim to understand anxiety/worry, develop skills, and find positive strategies to help cope with anxiety.

If you have any additional questions, comments, or concerns, please reach out to me at _____@_____.com or xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Please check the box if you would like your son/daughter to participate

Return to counselor (check one).

My child may participate in these counseling sessions.

My child may not participate in these counseling sessions

Parent/Guardian Signature Below

X _____

Appendix C
Student-Teacher Agreement

Student - Teacher Agreement

_____ has my permission to be in the small group, which meets for 7 weeks on Thursdays during lunch for small group.

_____ (Teacher's signature)

I, _____ (student's name),


agree that it is my responsibility to get any assignments or notes I miss while in group meetings. I also agree to let the counselor know if I am unable to attend of the meetings due to tests, reports, etc.

_____ (Student's signature)

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

Appendix D
Student Pre-/Post-Test

Student Pre-/Post-Test

 The picture can't be displayed.

This area is intended for student responses to the pre- and post-test questions. It is currently blank.

Appendix E
Teacher Pre-/Post-Test

Teacher Pre-/Post-Test

Teacher Assessment

Please provide responses to the questions below regarding your student. Circle the number that indicates how you feel about each question below. Please try to stray away from the neutrals in order to adequately assess to create the right small group. Thank you!

Teacher Name:

Student Name:

1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neutral 4= agree 5= strongly agree

1. The student can adequately express their worry to the teacher.

1 2 3 4 5

2. The student is using coping skills to manage some of their anxiety.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I feel this student anxiety avoids work due to their anxiety.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I feel this student's anxiety is negatively affecting their social/emotional development.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I feel I can adequately help this student cope with their anxiety in the classroom

1 2 3 4 5

Please provide any additional feedback below

Appendix F

Counseling Small Group: Overview

Counseling Small Group: Anxiety Overview

Topic: Anxiety

Objectives:

Group Information

Who: K-2nd grade

Number of Sessions: 7 sessions, 30 minutes each, meet once per week

How many students in group: 5

Group Objectives:

- 1) Students will learn and be able to use effective coping skills and strategies to reduce anxiety.
- 2) Anxiety/worry will be normalized and deconstructed to reduce student concerns.
- 3) Students will be able to identify their own individual strengths and abilities.

Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge to be developed: Attitudes

- Build confidence in self and abilities (Attitude)
- Reduce fear of anxiety (Attitude)
- Positive self-talk (Skill)
- Neutralizing negative thought loops (Skill)
- Understand coping skills/methods (Knowledge)
- Identify anxiety/worry (Knowledge)
- Know what types of coping skills are available (Knowledge)

Data Collection:

Process: Seven 30-minute small group sessions for early elementary student with anxiety

Perception: Pre/Post test

Outcome: Compare behavioral reports and attendance to previous with growth

Follow up: Individual session with students

Letter sent home to parents to determine needs

Before Group:

1. Teacher will submit referrals
2. Students will be screened to see if they are a fit for this small group
3. Parent permission slips will need to be completed
4. Pre-test will need to be completed by students/teacher
5. Teacher/student agreement completed

During Group:

1. Session One: Introduction
2. Session Two: Defining A Worry
3. Session Three: What A Worry Feels Like
4. Session Four: Calming Strategies
5. Session Five: Positive Self-Talk and Reframing Worry
6. Session Six: Let's Talk Control
7. Session Seven: Group Termination

After Group:

1. Have students complete group evaluation
2. Review data collected
3. Follow up with students 1 on 1 (Determine next steps, i.e. if they need more help)
4. Letter to parents about the small group and encouraging their help in student success
5. Share results with stakeholders at the all monthly staff meeting
6. Assess all information and gather new/different material that was ineffective

Appendix G

Lesson Plans

Session One: Group Introduction

Objectives:

Students will become acquainted with group members
Set group expectations and norms with members
Students will share about their own experience with anxiety

Mindsets and Behaviors:

B-SS 3. Positive relationships with adults to support success
B-SS 2. Positive, respectful and supportive relationships with students who are similar to and different from them

Materials:

1. Name tags
2. Markers
3. Paper for group agreement
4. Roll and Respond sheet
5. Dice

Procedure: 30-minute session

Welcome Students to the group! We are going to be working together through the feelings of worry that can happen during the day and how to deal with those feelings. This group will help us name those feelings and find ways to work through them. Discuss confidentiality aspects and expectations for the group

Let's spend some time getting to know each other!

Activity One: Write and color name tag. Students will introduce themselves and tell me, if they were a color, what color they would be? Each student will go around in the circle and respond to the above prompt.

Activity Two: Next we will go over group rules and expectations. We will draft up a group contract with everyone's input. After, each group member (including the school counselor) will sign the contract.

Activity Three: Roll and Respond

Processing:

How are you feeling about joining this small group?
What makes you nervous?
What are you looking forward to learning from this group?

Session Two: Defining A Worry

Objectives: Students to define a worry and what may make people worried

Mindsets and Behaviors:

M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being

B-SMS 7. Effective coping skills

Materials:

Read *Ruby Finds a Worry* by Tom Percival

Markers/crayons

Sheet of Paper (enough for each student)

Procedure: 30-minute session

Welcome back to the group! Review group agreement from last week and allow for questions. Invite students to share one positive or happy thing that happened to them over the past week.

Define what it means to be worried. A worry is a feeling being very nervous of something that may or may not happen. Have students share what they think it means to be worried. What color would you say it is? How does it make you feel if you are worried?

Activity One: Read *Ruby Finds a Worry* by Tom Percival

What color was Ruby's worry?

What made Ruby's monster get bigger? Smaller?

Did her worry ever go away?

Activity Two: Create A Worry Monster

Every student will be given a worry monster template to create what they think their worry monster looks like.

Once completed, ask students when do they see their worry monster? Why does their worry monster come out?

How do they know?

Processing:

Explain that a worry isn't a bad thing. It can be a good thing to worry, but sometimes it can be too much

Session Three: What a Worry Feels Like

Objectives:

Students will identify 1-2 physical feelings related to anxiety

Students will identify 1-2 thoughts related to anxiety

Mindsets and Behaviors:

M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being

Materials:

Person Outline Sheet

Pencil

Markers

Procedure: 30 -minute session

Welcome Students to the group! We are going to be working together through the feelings that happen when you are worried and what those feelings may look like in your body.

Worry is felt throughout our whole body. Discuss the difference between physical and mental things one might when they experience anxiety. Physical being stomach pain, sweating, tapping, etc. Mental things can be the thoughts that one might have during the test. Break down the concept of this is the bodies response to the anxiety that you are feeling

Fight vs. Flight-Explain this concept to students. When we feel scared our brains sense danger, which sends a signal from our brain to our bodies to sense danger. For example, if a lion was standing right in front of you, what do you think your body would do?

Activity One: Students share what sensations they feel when they are feeling worried or anxious.

Activity Two: Each student will be given an outline of a person. Everyone will be asked to draw what they look like then they are worried. This may be through a color, symbols, words, etc. Once they are finished, students will be asked to share some of the things they put for when they feel worried.

Processing:

What does a worry feel like?

How does it make our bodies feel when we are worried?

Session Four: Calming Strategies

Objectives: Student will be able to verbalize one calming strategy they can use when they are feeling anxious

Mindsets and Behaviors:

B-SMS 7. Effective coping skills

M 4. Self-confidence in ability to succeed

Materials:

Rainbow Breathing Sheet

5 Senses Sheet

Paper plates (2 per kid)

Markers + Pencils

Procedure: 30-minute session

Check in: Welcome students back to the group. Review group agreement and open the discussion for any questions. Over the last few weeks, we have been discussing what a worry is and how it may look for each of us. Today, we are going to be talking about some strategies to calm our bodies when we are feeling worried. When we feel worried or nervous, our hearts might be fast and it might feel hard to breath. Our muscles might tighten and it may become harder to focus. What are some things you do when you feel worried at school or at home?

Today, we will practice some strategies to help us manage those physical feelings when we are feeling worried.

Activity One:

- Controlled rainbow breathing: Students will each receive a rainbow breathing card to practice rainbow breathing.
- Grounding: practice two grounding strategies. Power hug or alphabet search
- Muscle relaxation: practice wall pushes or hold a wall push, squeeze and release hands, and full body tense and release.
- 5 senses technique

Activity Two:

Students will create a wheel of coping skills to help them utilize the skills that they just learned. They will be given a paper plate to write down coping skills in a pie chart.

Processing:

Which of these strategies did you like the best?

Which one helped you feel the most calm?

Which strategy do you think you could use before the test to calm yourself down? During the test?

Wrap Up:

We notice our bodies telling us that we are worried. We can always take a moment to calm our bodies

Session Five: Positive Self Talk and Reframing Worry

Objectives:

Student will generate alternative thought/reframe worry

Mindsets and Behaviors:

B-SMS 7. Effective coping skills

M 4. Self-confidence in ability to succeed

Materials:

Dominos

Pencil + Markers

Recognize, Challenge, and Change Cards

Positive self-talk shield sheet

Procedure: 30-minute session

Define a chain reaction and explain how negative thoughts can cause a negative chain reaction. Use dominos as a prop to show this. Explain how these thoughts can affect you. Define positive self-talk and reframing worry. Explain that in order to this these steps need to happen. Use task cards to have students participate and show understanding.

- Recognize
- Challenge
- Change

Activity One: Group will go around the group describing one thing they are worried about and how they can reframe it. If time permitting, students will go around again and say one positive thing about themselves. The school counselor can create examples if students are too anxious to share. Example: Todd is worried he won't get tagged at recess.

Activity Two: Students will spend time creating a positive self-talk activity. They will identify positive things that they are in order to start utilizing self-talk. Students will get the opportunity to create a positive self-talk shield. This shield serves as a symbol for students to bring to class and utilize to challenge their negative self-talk when they feel it taking over. Students will each be given a shield where they can write or draw four different strengths to remember to encourage positive self-talk.

Processing:

How do you think talking about yourself affects you?

What is something positive you can say to yourself on test day?

How will you remind yourself to speak positively to yourself?

Session Six: Let's Talk Control

Objectives:

Students will identify what is in or out of their control

Mindsets and Behaviors:

M 4. Self-confidence in ability to succeed

Materials:

Play-dough (enough for each student)

Rocks (enough for each student)

Hula Hoop (enough for each student)

What's in my control sheet

Paper + Markers

Procedure: 30-minute session

Warm Up: Each student will first be given a play-dough. They will have two minutes to create something with their play-dough. The same procedure will happen after with the rock. Ask the students what they were able to create with the play-dough and what they were able to create with the rock. Discuss how play-dough is something that can be manipulated while rocks cannot be. Worries can be like play-doughs or rocks. Some things are in our control, while others are out.

Define and explain what control means. What happens with the things we can control in our lives? What happens when we can't control it? Explain how sometimes we worry about things that are out of our control.

Activity One:

Students will each be given a hula-hoop. The teacher will give students different examples such as the weather. Students will then have to identify if they should go inside the hula-hoop of things they can control and what should be on the outside of things they can control.

Activity Two:

Students will be given a sheet of paper of what's in my control. Students will be asked to write or draw things they can control on the paper. They then be asked to write or draw things they are unable to control on the paper. After the group should come back together in the circle.

Processing Questions

What does control mean to you?

What happens if we are always worried about the things we can't control?

What is something that is in your control?

Session Seven: Group Termination

Objectives:

Students will identify the impact of the group
Group will wrap up

Mindsets and Behaviors:

M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being
M 4. Self-confidence in ability to succeed

Materials:

Book: *The Whatifs* by Emily Kilgore
Pencil
Group evaluation sheet
Post-Test

Procedure: 30-minute session

Welcome group back for their seventh and final discussion. Allow for questions, comments, or concerns. Recap all of the topics that have been discussed over the last several weeks.

Activity One: Read the book, *The Whatifs*. Discuss book.

Activity Two: Complete group evaluation individually

Activity Three: Complete a post-test questionnaire individually.

Come back into a final group circle and discuss all that has happened in the last seven weeks.

Processing:

How do you feel about test taking after this group?
Do you feel more or less confident about test taking?
What is something you will take with you after this group?

Appendix H

Name Tags

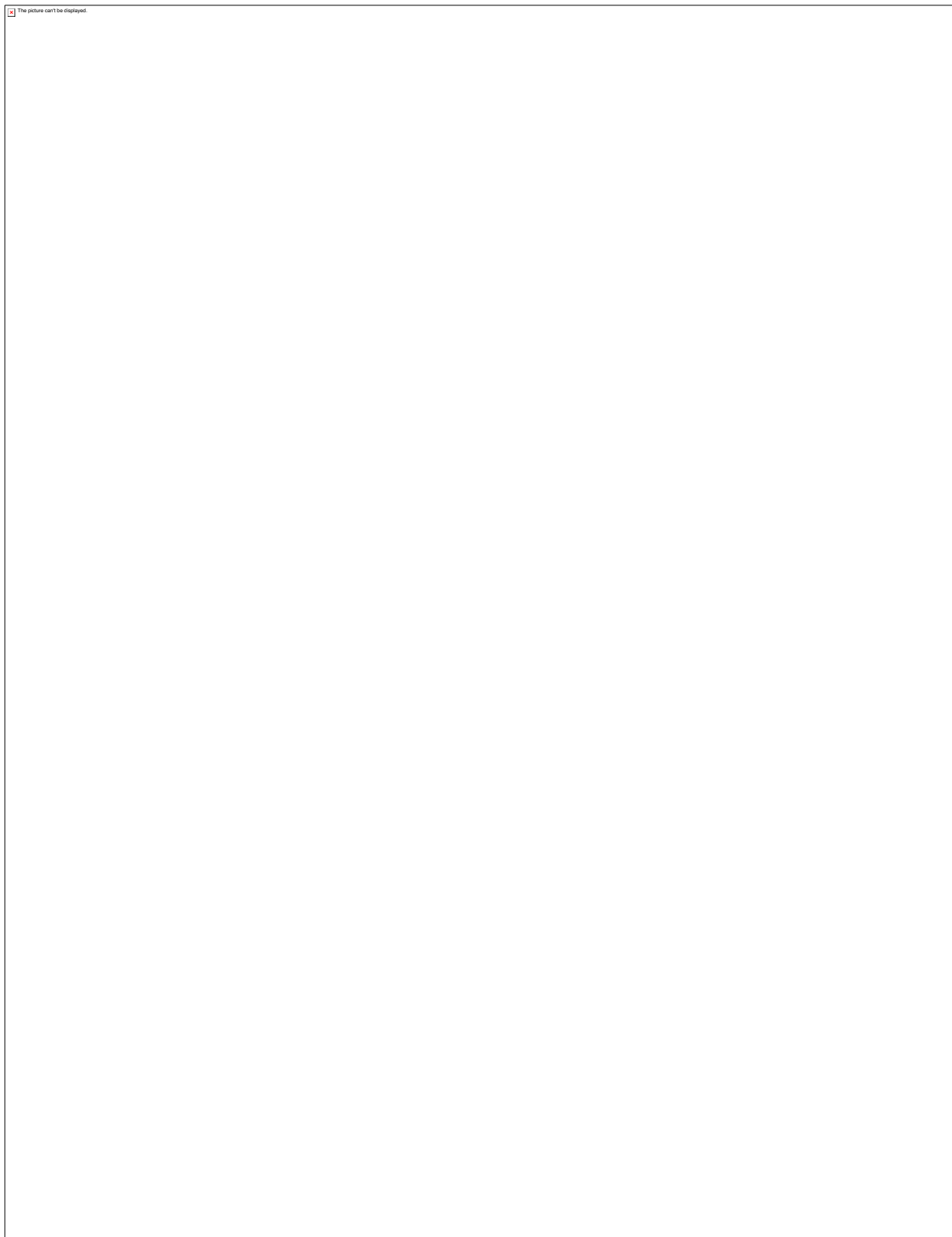
Name Tags

Name Tags

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Appendix I
Roll and Respond

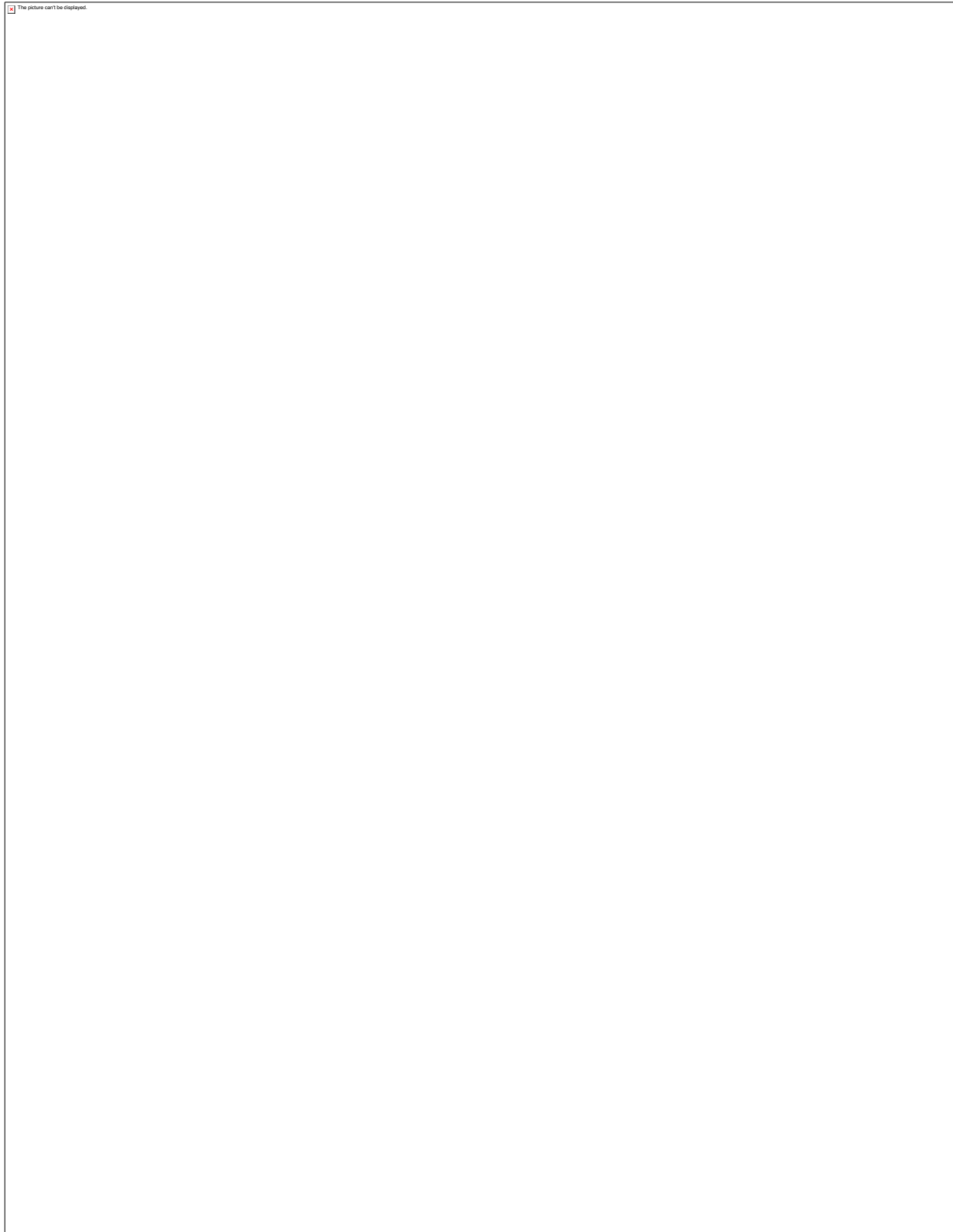
Roll and Respond



Appendix J
What I Look Like When I Feel Worried

What I Look Like When I Feel Worried

 The picture can't be displayed.



Appendix K
Rainbow Breathing

Rainbow Breathing

 The picture can't be displayed.

Appendix L

Five Senses Calm Down

Five Senses Calm Down

 The picture can't be displayed.

Appendix M

Recognize, Challenge, Change Cards

Recognize, Challenge, Change Cards

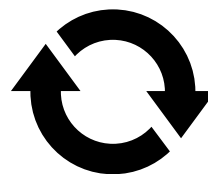
Recognize



challenge



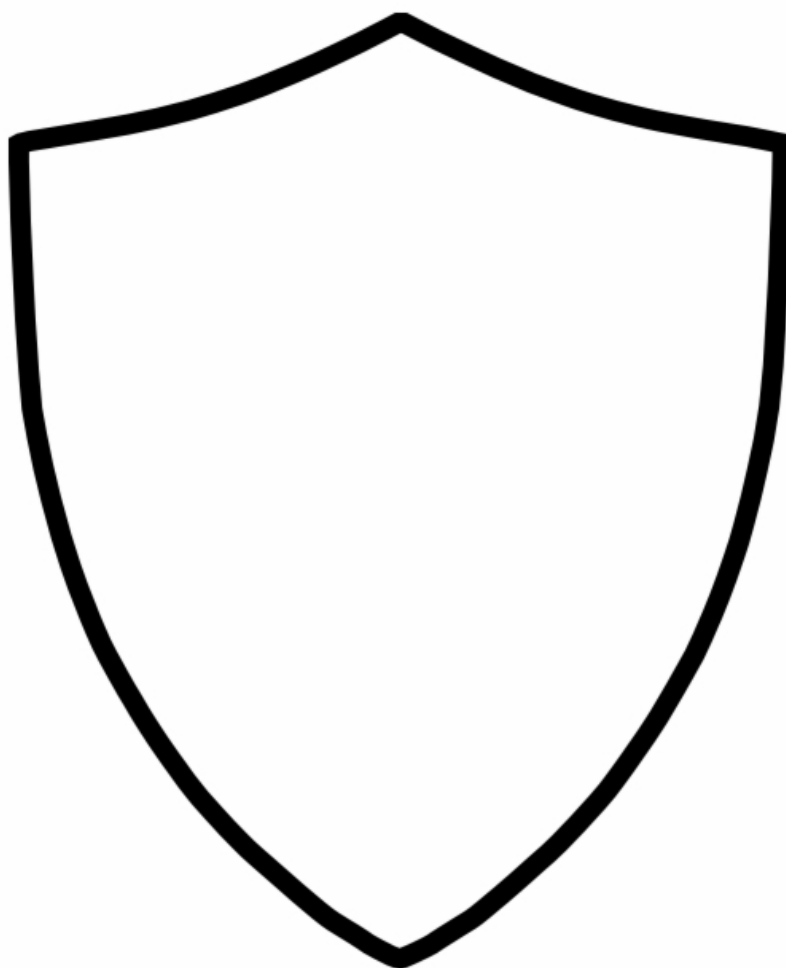
change



Appendix N

Positive Self-Talk Shield

Positive Self-Talk Shield



-

Appendix O

What's in My Control

What's in My Control

What's In My Control

Directions: Each student will identify what are some things in and out of their control. This will help students to worry less of what is out of control and take control of things that they have the ability to change.

Things I can't control

Things I CAN control

Appendix P
Small Group Evaluation

Small Group Evaluation

Name:

This group was helpful (circle one): YES or NO

In this group I learned:

I felt have improved in:

One thing I would change is:

Overall, I like this group (Circle one): YES or NO

Explain:

Appendix Q

Letter Home to Parents after Small Group Completion

Letter Home to Parents After Small Group Completion

Dear Parent/Guardian (s),

_____ has completed seven-week small group sessions on anxiety related to test taking.

Within the seven sessions many topics have been covered. These topics range from the following

1. Understanding and recognizing test anxiety
2. Test preparation
3. Test taking strategies
4. Calming strategies when faced with anxiety
5. How to reframe worry and develop self confidence

I feel that your student has shown great progress in relation to test and anxiety and can apply this in their various test situations. I encourage you to continue to develop these skills at home with your child. The more developed their skills are, the more they will continue to be successful with your help.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to work with your child on a small group session geared toward test anxiety. We learned a lot of valuable information that I hope they can utilize in different aspects of their life and we had a lot of fun doing it. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have any additional questions, comments, or concerns.

Sincerely,

Kayle Ogrodzinski

School Counselor

_____ Elementary

xxx-xxx-xxxx

kayleogrodzinski@_____.com

Letter Home to Parents After Small Group Completion

Dear Parent/Guardian (s),

_____ has completed seven-week small group sessions on anxiety related to test taking.

Within the seven sessions many topics have been covered. These topics range from the following

1. Understanding and recognizing test anxiety
2. Test preparation
3. Test taking strategies
4. Calming strategies when faced with anxiety
5. How to reframe worry and develop self confidence

I feel that your student could benefit from additional one on one sessions regarding test anxiety. I would love to continue building the necessary skills to be successful. I would like to continue meeting weekly with your child. Please check yes or no if this is something you would be comfortable with.

____Yes ____No

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to work with your child on a small group session geared toward test anxiety. We learned a lot of valuable information that I hope they can utilize in different aspects of their life and we had a lot of fun doing it. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have any additional questions, comments, or concerns.

Sincerely,

Kayle Ogrodzinski
School Counselor
_____ Elementary

xxx-xxx-xxxx

@_____ .com

Appendix R
Parent/Guardian Assessment

Parent/Guardian Assessment

Please provide responses to the questions below. Circle the number that indicates how you feel about each question below. Your feedback is very valuable in providing adequate support for students and will help us to improve this process for the future. Thank you!

1=strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neutral 4= agree 5= strongly agree

6. My child can adequately express their worry to me.

1 2 3 4 5

7. My child is using coping skills to manage some of their anxiety.

1 2 3 4 5

8. I feel my child's anxiety has gotten better since the small group.

1 2 3 4 5

9. I feel the small group was beneficial for my child.

1 2 3 4 5

10. I feel I can adequately help my child cope with their anxiety from this program.

1 2 3 4 5

Please provide any additional feedback below