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Exemplar 1: Group Curriculum
Refusal Skills: When Saying No Isn't Enough
CSP 670: Group Counseling, Spring 2013
Standards Addressed: 19, 21, 26, and 30

Introduction:

"Just say no" is a saying made popular through the Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program (D.A.R.E.) previously taught in schools and familiar to many Americans. Though the program was created with the intention of teaching students the harm caused by drug abuse, it has shown negative effects. Research has shown that, at best, D.A.R.E. produces minimal positive effects that are not sustained over time, and at worst, results in a higher drug use rate (Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Pollard, 1997; Satcher, 2001). In 2007, the Association for Psychological Science placed D.A.R.E. under a list of programs that has the potential to cause harm to clients (Lilienfeld, 2007). Weiss, Murphy-Graham, Petrosino, and Gandhi (2008) used D.A.R.E. as a case study to illustrate harm that can be caused by a program designed and implemented with no empirical evidence to support its effectiveness. Evidently, saying no is not enough.

In addition to drug use, a plethora of situations require our students to make a decision on whether to accept or deny a request. A peer may ask our students to skip school, to help cheat on a test, or to help hide drug paraphernalia or other items that our students should not have. Peer pressure coupled with the "be nice and be a team player" mentality instilled in many K-12 students create situations where the decision-making process can be challenging.

This curriculum provides students with a variety of refusal skills and decision-making skills, helps students identify a support team, and provides opportunities to role-play situations. The group format is a small heterogeneous group including role models, at-risk students, and students who are returning after a suspension. Research has shown that each of these areas is a critical component to the decision-making process in accordance with the cognitive-behavioral therapy model (Brigman & Goodman, 2008; Corey, 2013; Williams, personal communication, November 10, 2012). It is important to incorporate a support team to whom students can turn when guidance is needed so students feel supported. School counselors are encouraged to review data collected through school referrals, suspensions, and California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) to inform whether this curriculum addresses our students' needs.

Standard 19: Academic Development

- An important aspect of this curriculum involves decision-making around academically-related areas. Students are directed to examine the consequences of their actions in various spheres of their lives. Instances such as skipping school, not completing homework, or not studying for tests have more obvious academic consequences. Other instances may be less obvious, but still have an academic consequence. For example, a student who was asked by a friend to help hide drug paraphernalia may suffer academically when the paraphernalia is discovered at the school and the student is suspended.

- During our sessions, students are also asked to be responsible for their own actions and take responsibility as learners. Though peer pressure may play a role, nevertheless, the student is responsible for his or her own actions. Students are given the opportunity and encouraged to set academic goals (e.g. graduate from high school) and how their actions can effect whether they can reach these goals. As stated, though many actions may not seem to be academic-related, they can have an impact on the student's academic performance.

Standard 21: Personal and Social Development

- This curriculum is designed with high school students who are at-risk or have discipline records that points to decision-making skills as a possible solution. Sessions can be adapted for 7th and 8th grade students who are exhibiting at-risk behaviors. Through this curriculum, students will learn and practice skills to cope with peer pressure. In addition, students will learn decision-making skills that can be applied to other situations where no peer pressure is present. This curriculum also aligns with some of the American School Counselor Association National Standards for Students.

- *PS:B1.2 Understand consequences of decisions and choices.* Students are frequently presented with decision-making opportunities (i.e. do homework or watch television, study or hang out with friends). Though some decisions have short-term benefits, they may have long-term detrimental effects (i.e. choosing television over homework leads to lower grades). Decision-making skills taught though this group can be applied to these instances to help students evaluate each option and make the right decision.

- *PS:B1.8 Know when peer pressure is influencing a decision.* On occasion, the decision making process involves communicating with a peer. The communication can take form where a student is asked or pressured by a peer to perform certain actions. Lessons in

this curriculum ask participants to consider and role-play situations where peer pressure is present (i.e. skip school together). During role-plays, students will apply coping and communication methods to resist peer pressure.

Standard 26: Group Counseling and Facilitation

- Through attending different workshops and courses, I learned that group formation and dynamics is an important step to ensure that the group produces desirable change in students' individual behaviors, which ultimately leads to a better school climate and higher student achievement. Particularly important is the need to create a heterogeneous group so that students can learn from each other's different perspectives and avoid focusing on or glorifying of certain behaviors. During session 3, "Consequences", the facilitator is cautioned to be aware of these beliefs and help students process the motives behind them.

- Throughout the group sessions, participants are presented with opportunities to work individually, pair share, brainstorm, discuss as a whole group, and role play to practices skills learned. Providing participants with a variety of activities addresses different learning preferences and helps students maintain engagement.

- In addition to learning decision-making skills, the group sessions are also designed to help students build rapport and a sense of camaraderie. Ice-breaker games such as "Story Stone" and "Have You Ever" serve to help student share their stories and ideas in a nonthreatening manner. Students also learn that they share similar experiences with one another, perhaps with those whom they would not have otherwise considered as having similar experiences.

Standard 30: Research, Program Evaluation, and Technology

- Researching various programs available, such as D.A.R.E., taught me the importance of utilizing programs and strategies that are supported by empirical evidence to be beneficial to our students. In addition, we must utilize existing data (CHKS, referrals, and suspension) to determine student needs and appropriate prevention and intervention to be applied.

- Equally important to research is the evaluation of the program and the dissemination of the program's results. Program evaluation can be done in the form of pre/post-tests and analyzing target data. Evaluating the program's effectiveness on target behaviors helps determine future course of action, such as whether this curriculum is applicable and

should be used again. Disseminating program results helps stakeholders realize the value of our work as school counselors and the positive impact our work has on students. Research and evaluation are integral components to ensure our students receive the support needed as well as to promote the school counseling profession.

Conclusion:

Creating a group curriculum pushed me out of my comfort zone.   Writing a curriculum was not something that I believe I had the skills and knowledge to do well. I learned through this exercise that with appropriate research, preparation, and dedication to my students' welfare, I can guide my students with a group curriculum supported by empirical evidence. Through my personal experience as a student, I know the importance of providing a variety of activities to ensure students engagement and learning. This exercise has deepened my understanding for the need of different activities to keep students engaged, as well as to support students with different learning preferences. Different activities allow students to demonstrate skills and knowledge learned in a variety of ways. I have to consider what is beneficial to our students, even if it means pushing myself out of my comfort zone and conducting activities that I personally may not enjoy.

Before this curriculum is implemented, however, I would like to develop aspects that can help my students make the right decision. Exploring the delayed gratification component (i.e. do homework now and watch television later) may further students' understanding of why it is important to make the right decision when it can be difficult. Another aspect I would like to explore is time allotted to each activity. Based on instructor feedback, some activities appear they may require a different amount of time than stated in the curriculum (V. Gomez-Lee, personal communication, May 19, 2013). If possible, I would like to consult with teachers who are experts on curriculum implementation, classroom management, and time management of each aspect of the lesson/session to refine each session and activities involved. I believe that this curriculum can be improved and adapted to better address specific needs of my groups.