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Supporting Our Students

ECHO

Session will start in less than 15 minutes
Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement

No Conflicts of Interest
Peer to Peer Support Programs in Schools

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Take away points

• Multiple forms of peer-to-peer support that can be delivered in schools exist
• Evidence that peer to peer support can have positive benefits for students
• Peer to peer support programs should be implemented in ways that support mentors and mentees so as to prevent negative consequences
Adolescence

• Time of individuation, self-identity formation
• Time of significant transitions
• More time spent with peers than with family (Brown, 1990)
• Peer relationships become more salient and complex (Brown & Larson, 2009)
  • Friendships are more intimate and have more influence on decision making
Peer Influences in Adolescence

• Adolescents are more likely to engage in risk behaviors when with peers (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005)
• Co-rumination can increase internalizing symptoms (Rose, 2002; Stone et al., 2012)
• Despite focus on risk, peers can both negatively and positively impact prosocial behaviors
  • Having a same-sex friend has been found to change a teenagers risk activity level (Maxwell, 2002)
  • Peer support linked to prosocial goal pursuit (Wentzel, 1998)
Adolescent Mental Health

Depression, Anxiety, Behavior Disorders, by Age

Past Year Treatment Received Among Adolescents with Major Depressive Episode (2017)
Data Courtesy of SAMHSA

- Health Professional Only: 19.6%
- Medication Only: 2.4%
- Health Professional AND Medication: 17.9%
- No Treatment: 60.1%
Types of Peer Support

- Educational and academic support
- Developmental/cross-age mentoring
- Same-age peer counseling
- Peer-led interventions at school level
- Peer educators
Peer support mentors

• Peer to Peer Counselors in Schools
  • Support connectedness (Karcher, 2005)
  • Providing empathic, active listener for students to reach out to
  • Connecting peers to supportive adults; may help to bridge connections between student and supportive staff
  • Offering support and may help student consider alternatives

• Cross-age Mentors
  • Not be overly problem focused
  • Goal is to form a supportive relationship with mentee (Karcher, 2005)
Peer leaders

- Goal may be to change the culture in the school around specific issues
- Can help facilitate increased connectedness of students to school
  - Students' perceptions of school environment influence academic achievement
  - Low connectedness to school predicts adolescent depression, risk taking, underachievement, and alienation from peers, teachers, and parents (Bonny et al., 2000)
- Can help normalize conversation around mental health issues and help seeking
- “Agents of Social Change” (Sources of Strengths)
Benefits of peer support interventions

• Can provide supportive relationship during challenging transitions/times and teach valuable skills
• Can provide support when there is lack of access/low accessibility to mental health services
  • High school students are more likely to seek out peers than school counselors to discuss personal issues (McAuley, 1984)
• Can help to reduce stigma associated with and normalize seeking help
• Can help to transform norms at a school-wide level
• Benefits to mentors as well as mentees
Peer Mentoring & Peer-delivered Interventions

• Peer education has been used to target:
  • Improving adolescent girls’ body esteem and eating attitudes (Mcvey et al., 2003)
  • Violence prevention (Sheehan, DiCara, LeBailly, & Christoffel, 1999)
  • Decreasing alcohol use in 8th graders (Komro et al., 2001)

• Teen mentors found to be effective at increasing school connectedness in younger mentees (Karcher, Davis, Powell, 2004)
Concerns and considerations for peer support programs

- Iatrogenic consequences of peers/peer groups found
- Need for training and support for peer mentors
- Programs function better when there is a structured approach
- Considerations about resources and availability of adult supervisors and school resources
- Choosing mentors and mentees that will benefit from program
What contributes to successful peer mentoring?

• Showing up (Karcher, 2005)
• Choosing mentors that are prepared
• Having a structure for mentors
• Successful programs are those that:
  • Carefully select peer and cross-age leaders
  • Engage adult supervisors to support and supervisor peer mentors
  • Have developmentally appropriate training materials
  • Set expectations for peer leaders and provide them with support

(Johnson, Simon, Mun, 2014)
Peer Mentoring: Peer Group Connection
(Powell, 1993)

- High school and middle school programs
- Aimed at facilitating easier transitions to new school
- Older students meet with groups of younger students
- Goals to create supportive and nurturing environment
  - Mentors provide an average of 18 weekly meetings where they discuss relationship, emotional, and academic skills
- Considerable support provided to mentors across program implementation

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Peer-led interventions: Sources of Strength

- Peer Leaders
  - Are chosen from diverse groups across the school
  - Trained to be opinion leaders
  - Prepare and conduct suicide prevention-messaging activities
- Activities are aimed at:
  - Changing norms around help-seeking,
  - Encouraging connection to friends and trusted adults,
  - Improving communication between adults and students
When considering starting a peer support program

• Evaluating needs of students in the school
• Assessing support for program at school and staff level
• Identifying which populations/behaviors will be target of intervention
• Identifying, based on needs, what level of intervention school would like to implement; choose a curriculum or program
• Determining how mentors/counselors will be chosen, trained, and structure of mentoring program
Discussion
Peer Support & Bullying

- Estimated that 20% of youth have been bullied with 8% reporting being bullied every day (CDC, 2013)
- Bullying changes over time as other forms of peer victimization emerge
- Considerations for interventions around bullying
  - As kids get older nature of bullying changes - Guerra et al. (2011) conducted a more systematic qualitative inquiry by using focus groups in elementary school and high school. For younger children, bullying was seen by children as when a person is “wrecking your stuff” or “kicking” you, whereas older adolescents “focused more on getting and keeping power and not letting ‘perfect’ kids get too full of themselves” (p. 305).