

Support Group Meeting
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Clinical Social Work Practice III with Groups

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Wellness Group meeting

On March 1st, 2023, I attended The Child Center Of Ny's school-based mental health (SBMH) wellness group meeting. This group provides students a place to express themselves in a non-judgmental zone. The students are encouraged to speak about topics they find exciting or want to learn more about, and this week focused on the stigma around mental health and the many disorders that exist.

Group Structure

The group meets in a small classroom during the student's lunch period. Since this is an open group, students can choose what day they want to attend the group and are encouraged to invite their friends and other students they feel need support. Students from grades 9-12 attend this group, and their ages range from 13-19. During my visit, most of the students were African American and Hispanic females, with about four males who were african american as well. The group is led by the SBMH's youth advocate Ms.Rose.

Group Process

Since it is the student's lunch period, the youth advocate gives the students about 10 minutes to get lunch from the cafeteria. The school does not want students to walk the halls during lunch, so the group facilitator provides them with a special pass that allows them to get lunch and then go to the classroom where the group is held. While the students are settling in, Ms.Rose places the chairs in a circle so that everyone can feel comfortable sharing, and this helps encourage participation. After the 10-minute grace period, the students sit in a chair and take a deep breath. Ms.Rose started the group with a breathing exercise. Students are told to

relax their bodies, inhale slowly for three counts with their mouth closed, then pucker their lips and exhale on a count of 6. They do this twice to help ease the tension in the room and help everyone relax. Next, Ms. Rose had the students set the ground rules for the meeting. One student said that if a person is speaking, everyone should be silent, to respect the speaker. The following rule was that anything said stays in the room. The facilitator spoke about the importance of expressing your opinion without being disrespectful. In other words, while it is okay to disagree, there is a way to do it while respecting each other's feelings. The facilitator asked the students how they were feeling. Each student shared what was going on in their life. They seemed comfortable with each other and did not hesitate to share. One student shared that she was stressed because she was trying to keep her grades up while awaiting college acceptance. She explained that she had had three anxiety attacks within the past week and is just trying to have a great school year. The other members of the group expressed that they were feeling the same way. What was interesting was that although the students expressed how stressed they were, at the same time, they were encouraging each other not to give up. They even shared numerous tips on how to cope with anxiety. Ms. Rose allowed me to participate in the group, and I was able to share some personal experiences with the students and gave them some advice. This helped segway into the topic of mental health stigmas. The students were asked to share some of the ones that they heard. One student shared that she has heard people say that mental health is unnatural and that people are just crazy. Hearing this has influenced what she shares with others because she does not want to be seen in a negative light. As each student shared a stigma, Ms. Rose counteracted it with a positive and explained why the stigma did not make sense. She taught them about mental health disorders and provided them with resources to share with their family and friends.

Group application

During the groups, I noticed that the RAP framework was used to help construct how the group would go. One of Ms. Rose's rules was accepting everyone's differences and keeping an open mind. Since the students are familiar with each other, they can recognize each other's uniqueness and are willing to learn. The facilitator shared that she has attended numerous diversity training and understands how to deal with racial tension within the groups. While the students were encouraging each other and giving advice, they were asked to name one pro and one con of each. Ms. Rose encourages the students to try to be a support system for each other.

The servant and position leadership style is enforced during these meetings. However, Ms. Rose's position allows her to be the group's designated leader. She focuses on the needs of the group. For example the, during one of their previous meetings, a student shared that instead of the usual ice-breakers, they should do more mindfulness techniques to help them in uncomfortable situations. She pushes her students to advocate for themselves and lets her know how she can best serve them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, being able to sit in on the wellness group was an experience that I will never forget. The students and facilitator welcomed me with open arms and allowed

me to observe the group and be a part of it. At the end of my school journey, I would love to work with high school students. Attending this group helped motivate me to continue to push myself to accomplish this goal. It also encouraged me to research the numerous strategies and techniques that can be used to be effective in working with teens.