

Running head: GROUP SUPPORT AND SKILLS TRAINING

An Evaluation of the Effects of Group Support and Skills Training to Help Maltreated Children
Overcome Their Socialization and Behavioral Shortcomings

Abstract

Children who come from negative home environments are often incapable of getting along with their peers and adjusting to their social surroundings. The lack of social ability among these students puts them at a serious risk of future hardships in the area of academic success. Previous research has shown that teacher intervention for these “at risk” student’s, has significantly increased their peer cooperation and decreased behavioral problems. The population for this study were 3 maltreated second grade students (2 eight year-old boys and 1 seven year-old girl) who each have significant difficulty interacting in a school environment and with their peers. An eight week support group, centered on teaching these students basic social skills, aimed to decrease behavioral problems and increase their cooperation with others, listening skills, conflict resolution and ability to control and manage their anger and sadness. There was reason to believe that this Group Support and Skills Training Intervention was a success for two main reasons. In each of the participants, the total number of incidents had decreased by at least 17 points. Another area of success was found in student-faculty/peer interaction. Faculty members reported improvement interacting with each student and their overall feelings regarding behavior, listening skills, respect and cooperation, had become more positive. Each of the participants felt that their behavior had improved and they were much happier in school because they learned to communicate, cooperate and respect school faculty, classmates and themselves.

An Evaluation of the Effects of Group Support and Skills Training to Help Maltreated Children
Overcome Their Socialization and Behavioral Shortcomings

Maltreated children suffer from developmental hardships at a much greater rate than their non-maltreated peers (Chapple & Vaske, 2010). Among the difficulties these children face is less guidance at home about how to properly interact cooperatively with others. Unfortunately, most of what they learn at home is that they aren't cared for and often have to fend for themselves. When they are thrown into a school setting, their defenses are always up and typically feel that they cannot trust anyone. This often leads to combative behavior, inability to work with others, problems socializing with their peers, and emotional and/or violent outbursts.

Children who come from neglectful homes are often less capable of getting along with their peers and adjusting to their social surroundings (Kinard, 2004). Several studies have evaluated the impact of neglectful homes on a child's inability to function in school surroundings. Maltreated children often suffer from behavioral and emotional issues that often lead them to be viewed as the "problem child" of the school (Kinard, 2004). Clearly, the amount and severity of a child's inability to socialize with peers and school staff, is highly affected by the type of maltreatment they experience at home. Regardless of the amount, substantial evidence and studies have shown that children who experience any amount of abuse or neglect are at an immense risk of developing behavioral and emotional problems in their current life and in the future (Mishava, 2007).

Although many studies are inconclusive of the long term effects that maltreatment has on children, it is very clear when they are examined close to the onset of neglect, that it plays a very heavy role on their behavior and wellbeing (Kinard, 2004). Overall, it is quite evident in boys who suffer from familial neglect, have a greater amount of behavior problems outside the home than boys that come from homes without these hardships. As with girls, behavior problems are

often correlated with the environment at home and any maltreatment or violence they see or experience (Kinard, 2004).

Behavioral problems and antisocial behavior are often very predominant in children that come from neglectful homes, which are the most noticeable in a school setting (Chapple & Vaske, 2010). Although maltreatment at home is often solely experienced in the early years of childhood, the long term affects haunt these children for much of their adolescent and adult life. Children who come from abusive homes (physical, emotional and neglect), suffer from a greater amount of problems in their life outside the home than their non-abused/maltreated peers, especially in the area of school (Chapple & Vaske, 2010). While most would consider educational abilities (test scores, reading and writing skills) as to be the most important factor that influence a child's educational success, the ability to socialize with peers, follow directions and successfully interact with others, has proven to be just as significant in influencing future success in school (Webster et al, 2008).

In most cases of maltreated children, mental health therapy is one of the most frequent services these children are referred to (Kinard, 2002). The idea of having them work through their hardships at home and talk about the pain that they are enduring, is hoped to shed some light on the root of their behavioral and social issues. The goal of these types of therapy sessions is to hopefully bridge the gap in their child's life and help them learn to manage and overcome their hardships, so that it does not continue to play a negative and volatile role in their lives. Research shows that any psychological therapy intervention for children who come from neglectful environments proves to have positive effects on the child's wellbeing and their ability to interact with others (Mishava, 2007).-

Children who suffer from behavioral problems seem to benefit the most from cognitive-behavioral therapy. In this form of therapy, children are able to work through their problems by

talking about what they are experiencing in life and how it makes them feel. It is also extremely important for children to set small goals to work towards with the therapist (Mishava, 2007). Through setting these small, attainable goals, the child is able to regain some control of their erratic and neglectful home life and make changes within themselves to help learn to better adapt to future difficult situations. Play therapy research has always shown to produce substantial results in the improvement of young children's behavior and mental health (Mishava, 2007). Child based therapy is often more beneficial when it is in the form of group therapy, as opposed to one-on-one. Group therapy makes children feel like they have the support of their peers and they are able to lean on others who experience similar shortcomings (Mishava, 2007). -

Since the main focus of this study was maltreated children who come from neglectful home environments, it is highly unlikely for the child to ever receive any outside services, as the parents play a minimal role in their lives as it is. Choosing to have the therapy in the school will ensure that the children get the appropriate services and help that they need. Also, a school setting as where therapy takes place also helps students feel at ease being that it is within the comfort and safety of their typical daily surroundings (Mishava, 2007). Giving children the skills to be able to interact with their peers is a huge part that influences a child's future abilities. In a training program for teachers, implemented by Webster and his colleagues (2008), teachers were taught different strategies to cope with students who had behavioral and social issues. Teachers were encouraged to promote problem-solving techniques and coach students on how to get along with their peers (Webster et al, 2008). These management techniques were taught to 153 teachers and applied to 1768 students for the duration of the school year. Results of the intervention supported the use of behavioral and socialization training the students received, which were based upon methods taught to teachers in the training program. At the end of the school year,

cooperation among students, which had initially been difficult, had risen and their behavioral problems had significantly decreased (Webster et al, 2008).

Intervention

Objectives

This intervention was designed to reduce the gap in academic achievement between children who come from neglectful and non-neglectful homes. Implementing this intervention may help boost the child's awareness of their behavior and motivate them to increase their respect and cooperation with others. In time, these students that come from neglectful homes will no longer be at a disadvantage and will have the social skills to excel in school to their greatest potential.

Outcomes

- Once defiant and unmotivated students will increase their ability to follow directions and work cooperatively with their peers.
- Verbal and physical altercations will greatly decrease in all areas of the school (classroom, lunchroom, school yard, bus).
- Students will learn to respect the property and boundaries of their peers, teachers and themselves.
- When students have a conflict, they will learn to remove themselves from the incident to collect their thoughts and cool down, without it escalating to a huge "melt down".
- Students will learn conflict resolution techniques to help them communicate effectively with others in school and at home.
- Effectively communicate with others about their feelings and anything that might be bothering them in school or at home.-

Participants

The target population that would benefit from this type of intervention were students that come from neglectful homes and have parents with little or no involvement in their school lives. More specifically for this study, participants are 3 second grade students (2 eight year-old boys and 1 seven year-old girl). These students come from a mid-sized public elementary school in an urban area in Staten Island, New York.

Student X is an 8 year-old boy whose mother is in and out of incarceration for drug possession. His home life is satisfactory at best, but he often feels the repercussions from his mother's absence. He has no contact with her when she is incarcerated and when she is out of jail, she rarely comes to visit or calls him. In school, he is often very angry and disrespectful towards his classmates and school faculty. He mouths off, breaks school property and has violent screaming outbursts when he is asked to correct his behavior. Complaints from other teachers and lunchroom/recess staff are quite common for this student.

Student Y is an 8 year-old boy that also comes from a broken home. His mother left the family when he was very young and currently suffers from drug addiction. He currently lives with his father, but---due to his father's involvement in the local gangs, drugs and uninvolvement in the student's life--he provides little to no guidance for this boy. This student is very withdrawn and often refuses to participate in class work. When on the bus, at lunch or at recess, he often gets into verbal and physical altercation with other students and staff. He has been frequently sent to the "safe room", a place where defiant and violent students are sent when they are unable to cooperate with other students and teachers. It is designed to discourage that sort of behavior by keeping the student isolated from their friends, until their behavior improves. For this student,

the “safe room” does not work. Not only has he gotten into several fights inside the “safe room” but once he returns to his regular classroom, his behavior quickly returns to normal.

Student Z is a 7 year-old girl that come from a single-parent household. She is the oldest of four siblings and because of that, she is barely even acknowledged by her mother. Another issue that is the basis of this student’s anger is that her family, mother included, often discriminates against this child because her appearance is different from her siblings. Student Z often comes to school very angry and has trouble making friends with her peers. Her attitude can be very abrasive and she typically lashes out with insults when they try to talk to her.

Overall, these three students don’t have trouble keeping up class work or reading/writing at their level. On the contrary, these students are among the highest level learners in the class and often are able to make connections (text to self, text to world, etc.) that their classmates are still unable to do. The only thing that holds these students back is their attitude toward class work and their behavior in school and with their peers and school staff.-

Procedure

Students X, Y and Z met with the intervening teacher 2 times a week for 2 months, for a total of 16 sessions. This took place on the days that they did not have extended morning. Before the start of the intervention, students were interviewed, based upon questions from a self-report questionnaire, in order to ascertain how they feel they behave in school and get along with their peers and teachers. Teachers, bus and school staff were also interviewed before the start of the intervention to gauge the type of behavior patterns the students have.

Interviews with School Staff (Pre-Intervention)

Student X: *“When asked to ‘Please raise [his] hand, instead of calling out’, the child jumped up from the meeting area, stomped to the back of the classroom screaming ‘I hate you! I hate this school! You’re not my mother!’ and began throwing chairs”.*

“Student got very angry when another student was giving him ‘hard’ looks. Began physically fighting and had to be split up and restrained by school staff, until he calmed down.”

Student Y: *“Almost every time the student is on the bus, he fights with other students (verbally and physically). Recently has been caught threatening and throwing things at a kindergarten girl.”*

“Student refused to wait in the lunch line. When asked to ‘stay in line and wait [his] turn’, student began screaming and cursing at the lunch staff and smacked a lunch tray out of the hands of a child passing by”.

Student Z: *“When another student was given a prize for good behavior, she snatched it out of the child’s hands and smashed it on the floor.”*

“While speaking to the teacher, she was asked to please quiet down and she snapped back very nasty ‘Why don’t you shut up, stupid!’”.

Interviews with Participants (Pre-Intervention)

All students reported that they felt some level of awkwardness and introversion around their peers, often feeling like an outsider. There were also reports of “feeling like they didn’t belong” among all three students. When asked how they felt about their teachers and other faculty in the school, Students X, Y and Z all felt that teachers “hated or didn’t like them. “ When asked why they felt that way, students responded with “I don’t listen, I’m bad, I do bad things and the [teacher] gets mad, or I can be very disrespectful and curse”. Students were also asked if there was anything they would like to change about themselves, and each of them responded positively

and desired to find a way to improve their behavior, communication with others and find an outlet for their anger.

The following table displays the number and type of incidents in a 2-week period for each student before the start of the intervention:

Table 1.

	X	Y	Z
Fighting With Others (Physical/Verbal)	6	7	5
Disregard For Rules/Property Of Others	10	12	8
Disrespect Towards Teachers/Staff	14	16	11
Outbursts (Violent/ Emotional)	7	5	3
Refusal To Participate In Class Activities	3	7	4

Weekly Intervention Structure

Each first session of the week will consist of the following parts:

- 1- Group Talk Time- The facilitating teacher will always be the one to start the sharing sessions with their own personal anecdotes or experiences. Students will also be encouraged to share their experiences at home or school. If a student doesn't wish to

share, they will all be equipped with a drawing journal where they can write/draw their feelings in regards to what is being shared. (10-15 minutes)

- 2- Learning Life Lessons- The facilitating teacher will either use a book or a dramatization to illustrate the week's current life lesson. (15 minutes)
- 3- Practice Life Lessons- Students will be practicing the current lesson that was taught with each other, either through role playing or acting out the lesson with toys. No conferencing during the 1st session of the week. (15-20 minutes)

Total time spent: 40-50 minutes.

Each second session of the week will consist of the following parts:

- 1- Reinforce Life Lesson- Students will have a quick review of the previous session's lesson. Any questions or things that might need clarification will be answered during this part of the session. (10-15 minutes)
- 2- Quiet Reflection & Relaxation- Students will be instructed to close their eyes and breathe deeply for this part of the session. This will teach students calming skills to help them with their anger/frustration in future scenarios. While students are "relaxing", they will also be instructed to quietly reflect on today's lesson and think about how they would like to use what they learned in their own lives. (5 minutes)
- 4- Practice Life Lessons- Students will be practicing the current lesson that was taught with each other, either through further role playing or acting out the lesson with toys. (20 minutes)
- 5- Conference Time with Students - While students are practicing the lesson, I will pull each student aside and discuss with them the following:
 - a. Do the students see any similarities between the lesson and their lives?
 - b. Their current behavior in class/school/bus, as it relates to today's lesson.

- c. Discuss progress, give praise and offer suggestions in an area where student is lacking. Often ask students “how ___ makes them feel?” in order to ensure students are playing an active role in their improvement and development.
 - d. “Goals for Tomorrow”: Set small goals with the student.
- 6- Wrap Up: Discuss closing thoughts and/or questions and set a group goal for the future.
(5 minutes)

Total time spent: 40-45 minutes.

Week 1- Respect for Others

Goal- I will have respect for others and their property.

Session 1-

Group Talk Time Question- Have you ever felt like you weren't being respected? How did that make you feel? Have you ever done something to disrespect others? How do you think that person felt when you were disrespectful to them?

Learning Life Lessons- Use the book **Respect and Take Care of Things** by Cheri J. Meiners. Stop at various parts of the book and ask students “Find and Fix” questions. “Find and Fix” questions are designed to help students find a part of the story where the character is doing something wrong and give a suggestion of how they should fix the scenario.

Practice Life Lessons- Students will practice the concepts and scenarios in the book by a role playing activity. The facilitating teacher will be playing the role of the child not showing respect. Each student in the group will play the part of either the teacher or friend. Their job is to mediate and give the disrespectful “student” advice on the proper way to act.

Session 2-

Practice Life Lessons- Students will be working together role playing the following scenarios:

- One student making fun of the teacher.
- Destroying a classmate's art project.
- Throwing toilet paper and making a big mess in the bathroom.

Students will alternate being the disrespectful student/student that tries to mediate and give advice. During the second session practice, the facilitating teacher will have little or no input in student's role playing, unless students are getting off task and/or unable to make the proper choices on how their characters should behave.

Week 2- Importance of Following Directions

Goal- I will follow directions because they're purpose is to help me succeed.

Session 1-

Group Talk Time Question- Do you always follow the directions that my teachers or parents give you? Why might it be important to follow directions?

Learning Life Lessons- Use the book, The Amazing Adventures of Anita Brownbag Learning to Follow Directions by AC Brown, to help teach students the importance of following directions.

Practice Life Lessons- For this role playing activity, the students will be the "teacher" and the facilitating teacher will be the "unruly students". For the following scenarios,

students will have to explain why it is important to follow directions and help the “student” see the error in what is being done:

- Walk/not run in the halls.
- Student doesn't want to read during quiet time.
- Student wants to a science project however they want and doesn't want to listen to the proper way to do the steps.

Session 2-

Practice Life Lessons- Students will act out the following scenarios with little/no help from the facilitating teacher, unless needed:

- Student is giving the teacher a hard time because he/she does not want to do class assignment.
- Refuses to listen to his classmates during sharing time.
- Refuses to listen to directions and runs and talks with friends during a fire drill.

Students will alternate being the disrespectful student and the teacher/student that tries to mediate and give advice.

Week 3- Everyone is Different and that is What Makes Them Unique.

Goal- Being different is what makes everyone special. I will always respect people's differences.

Session 1-

Group Talk Time Question- Was there ever a time that your differences weren't respected? How did that make you feel? Was there ever a time that I didn't respect someone's differences? How do think that made them feel?

Learning Life Lessons- Use the book The Sneeches by Dr. Seuss, to show students how hurtful it is when people aren't respecting other's differences and view them badly because of it.

Practice Life Lessons- As a group, point out something different about each other (glasses, freckles, missing tooth, etc.) and practices using kind words to embrace each other's differences. Instead of pointing out what not to do, teach students a better way to view the unique qualities in each other.

Session 2-

Practice Life Lessons- During a role playing activity, students will be given several pictures of children that look different from what they are used to (wheel chair, glasses, braces, etc.). Students will be given the following scenario:

Pretend you are in the school yard and there is a group of your classmates making fun of this student (in the picture). Come to the student's rescue and explain to each other why it is wrong to make fun of someone for being different.

Week 4- Being a Good Friend

Goal- I will always be a good friend and treat others the way I want to be treated.

Session 1-

Group Talk Time Question- How does it make you feel when someone isn't being a good friend to you? Do you consider yourself a good friend? How can I be a better friend to others?

Learning Life Lessons- Use the book, How to Lose All your Friends by Nancy Carlson, to show students all the wrong things to do to friends. During each section, have students point out what the characters are doing wrong and how it might make the others feel.

Practice Life Lessons- Use scenarios like what were featured in the story and make a game out of it where students are to guess if you are showing what it is to be a good friend or not. If not, students must offer a suggestion of how to fix the situation.

Session 2-

Practice Life Lessons- With little or no help from the facilitating teacher, unless needed, students will act out using toys or puppets different scenarios that show what is means to be a good friend.

Week 5- When I get angry, I feel..

Goal- I will learn a better way to cope with anger and not let it get the best of me.

Session 1-

Group Talk Time Question- How do you feel when you get angry (physically)? How do you act when you get very angry? Is it healthy to act that way?

Learning Life Lessons- Using the book, When I Feel Angry, by Cornelia Maude Spelman, students will see that they are not alone and other people get just as angry as they do. Through reading this book, students will learn different ways to manage anger so that it does not affect them so negatively.

Practice Life Lessons- As a group, practice the following ways to manage anger:

- “Cool Down Time”- take a few moments for yourself to relax and calm down before the situation escalates.
- Count to 10 and take deep breaths.
- Respectfully remove yourself from an angry situation until you can talk about it calmly.

Session 2-

Practice Life Lessons- Each student will make a poster of what “angry” looks like.

Once complete, they will share and explain their posters to each other and teach/offer suggestions to each other of how to get away from this angry place.

Week 6- When I get Sad, I feel...

Goal- I will learn a better way to cope with sadness and not let it get the best of me.

Session 1-

Group Talk Time Question- How do you feel when you get sad? How do we act when you are sad?

Learning Life Lessons- Using the book, When I Feel Sad, by Cornelia Maude Spelman, students will see that they are not alone and other people get just as sad as they do.

Through reading this book, students will learn different ways to deal with sadness so that it does not affect them so negatively.

Practice Life Lessons- As a group, practice the following ways to manage sadness:

- Write in a journal to express how you feel.
- Draw a picture that shows what you are feeling.
- Talk to a friend, teacher, family member you can trust.
- Respectfully remove yourself from a sad situation and try to do something that makes you happy (play with toys, listen to music, dance, draw, etc.).

Session 2-

Practice Life Lessons- Each student will make a poster of what “sadness” looks like.

Once complete, they will share and explain their posters to each other and teach/offer suggestions to each other of how to get away from this sad place.

Week 7- Fighting with Others and Conflict Resolution

Goal- I will find a better way to resolve a conflict, other than fighting.

Session 1-

Group Talk Time Question- What do you fight about with others? How else can we settle out differences?

Learning Life Lessons- Using the book, The Adventures of Alfred in the Greatest Fruit of All: Conflicts and Resolutions by Gail R. Wright, students will learn different methods of conflict resolution.

Practice Life Lessons- Since every student has had a conflict with one another at some point, they will each state the conflict and use the following sentence to help express themselves:

I feel _____ when you _____ and I would like you to _____.

Session 2-

Practice Life Lessons- Students will role play the following scenarios with each other:

- Someone cut you in line at the movies.
- You and your friend both want to play with the same toy.
- Someone ran into you and you dropped your lunch.

Students will also be able to come up with their own conflicts to role play and resolve without fighting.

Week 8- Review and Graduation

Goal- I will remember all that I have learned about getting along with others and live by my pledge.

Session 1-

Group Talk Time Question- What is something that you have learned these past weeks that have helped you in your own lives? How can you help others behave the way you have learned to?

Review- Parts of every lesson will be reviewed and students will reminisce with each other of the different activities done during these past weeks.

Conference- During this week's conference, review with each student the progress that they have made during this intervention and the long term goals you expect of them for the future.

Session 2-

Students will recite their goals for the future and receive awards for completing this group intervention. Host a small party with snacks and prizes to celebrate the student's progress and dedication to improving their behavior*.

* In the event that the eight week session does not provide enough skills training for the students, group intervention would be extended for the remainder of the school year, or until significant change is shown.-

Materials

- Weekly teacher-student progress reports.
- Pre and post intervention interview questions for students.
- Pre and post intervention interview questions for teachers, lunchroom and bus staff.

The following can be used to help students express their feelings (home, school, etc.) and separate their emotions into more manageable parts:

- Puppets, toys, dolls.
- Construction paper

- Crayons
- Markers
- Colored pencils

The following books can be used to teach students how to manage their feelings, get along with their peers and resolve future conflicts in a productive way:

- Billy Bully by Ana Galan, Alvaro Galan, and Steve Simpson.
 - How to Lose All your Friends by Nancy Carlson.
 - Mean Soup by Betsey Everett.
- The Adventures of Alfred in the Greatest Fruit of All: Conflicts and Resolutions by Gail R. Wright.
- Don't Laugh at Me by Allen Shamblin.
- How Do Dinosaurs Play with Their Friends? by Jane Yolen and Mark Teague.
- Words Are Not for Hurting by Elizabeth Verdick.
- When I Feel Angry by Cornelia Maude Spelman.
- Is It Right To Fight? by Pat Thomas.
- I'm Mad by Elizabeth Crary.
- When I'm Feeling Angry by Trace Moroney.
- The Sneeches by Dr. Seuss.
- The Amazing Adventures of Anita Brownbag Learning to Follow Directions by AC Brown

- [Respect and Take Care of Things](#) by Cheri J. Meiners.

During their final session, students will be given the following:

- Certificate for completion/award for hard work and effort.
- Prizes
- Snacks

Results

The total number of incidents for Student X had decreased from 40 incidents at week 0, to 21 incidents at the completion of the intervention. The total number of incidents for Student Y had decreased from 47 incidents at week 0, to 28 incidents at the completion of the intervention. For Student Z, the total number of incidents has decreased from 31 recorded at week 0, to 14 at the completion of the intervention.

The following table shows the change in total amount of incidents for each student, recorded biweekly:

Table 2.

	X	Y	Z
Week 0	40	47	31
Week 2	39	45	29
Week 4	31	38	32
Week 6	27	34	27
Week 8	21	28	14

Figure 1. Shows the change in the total amount of incidents for each student, recorded biweekly.

The following table shows the specific incidents involving each student's targeted behavior, post-intervention*:

Table 3.

	X	Y	Z
Fighting With Others (Physical/Verbal)	3	5	2
Disregard For Rules/Property Of Others	7	9	8
Disrespect Towards Teachers/Staff	8	7	5
Outbursts (Violent/	3	4	1

Emotional)			
Refusal To Participate In	0	3	2
Class Activities			

*Taken during the 7th and 8th week of the intervention period.

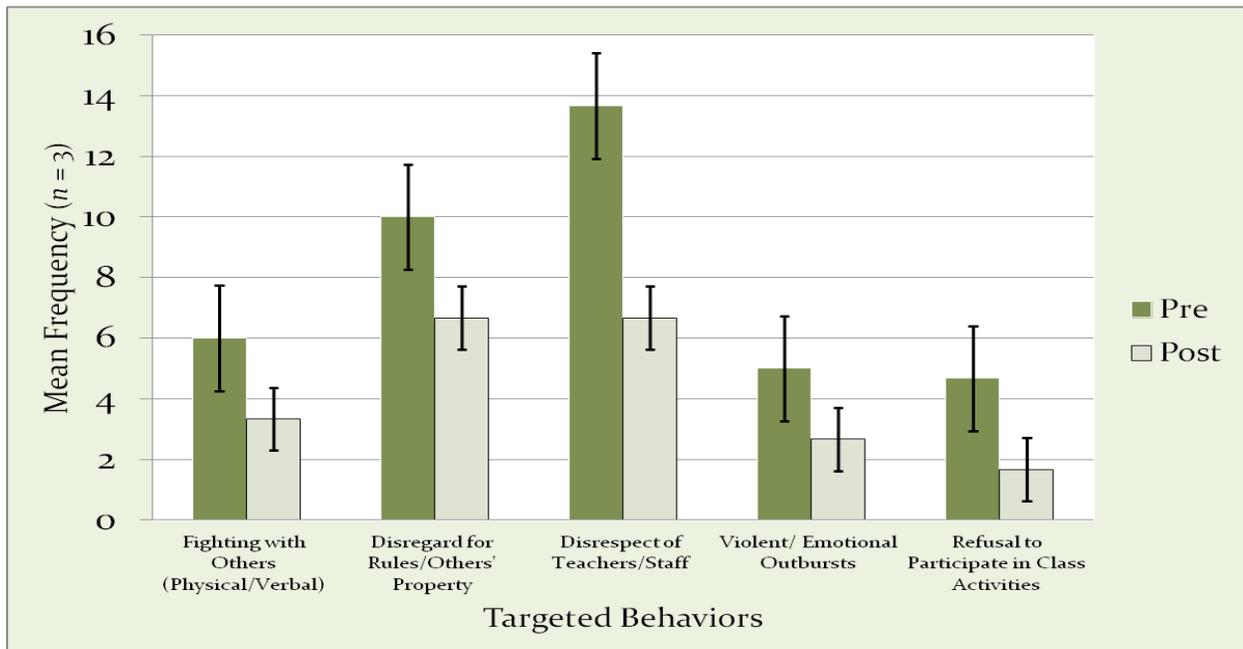


Figure 2. The graph shows the average number (frequency) of the targeted behavior for all three students pre and post intervention:

Interviews with School Staff (Post-Intervention)

Student X: “While calling out during time in the meeting area, student was asked to return to his seat until he was ready to respect the classroom rules. Without outburst or any defiance, student returned to his seat. After a few minutes, he returned to meeting area, and calling out did not continue.”

“When the student began getting worked up and angry, student was reminded to practice what was learned in group. He immediately began to take deep breaths and try to control his behavior. He removed himself from the hostile situation, and was able to collect his thoughts and regroup.”

Student Y: “Incidents on the bus have dramatically decreased. Has been ‘caught’ being kind to another student and helping them pick up their belongings that has fallen on the bus floor.”

“Lunch time behavior has improved, student has learned how to wait patiently in the lunch line and not argue with other students in front of him.”

Student Z: “Lunch staff reposts decrease in back talk, attitude and rudeness when dealing with staff and classmates.”

“Student seemed to be angry when praise was given to another student. Instead of yelling at the child or having an attitude for the rest of the day, she pulled the teacher aside and said ‘it makes me sad when you said good job [to her] because you didn’t say anything about me.’ She was able to articulate herself and express to the teacher what she was feeling without having an outburst and acting out.”

Interviews with Participants (Post-Intervention)

At the completion of the Group Support and Skills Training Intervention, all students reported that they felt that very happy about the change in their behavior and their overall mood. Each student reported that they believed that their behavior had improved and they were much more respectful of teachers and school rules, all of which made them feel good that they were doing the “right” thing. Students felt that the way teachers and school faculty interacted with them had also improved, and all believed that this was largely due to the improvement in their behavior, respect, and/or cooperation. Each student was very happy with the decrease of “getting in trouble” and reported better relationships being built with their peers. For the future, students

reported that they were very eager to continue doing what they have learned throughout the intervention and believe this will help them in the future.

Discussion

There is reason to believe that this Group Support and Skills Training Intervention was successful for two main reasons. In each of the participants, the total number of incidents had decreased by at least 17 points. Another area of success was found in student-faculty/peer interaction. Faculty members reported improvement in interactions with each student and their overall feelings regarding behavior, listening skills, respect and cooperation, had become more positive. Each of the participants felt that their behavior had improved and they were much happier in school because they learned to communicate, cooperate and respect school faculty, classmates and themselves.

It can be concluded that Group Support and Skills Training Intervention helped students fulfill their personal goals and overall objectives in regard to targeted behavior. Students showed improvement in as little as 2 weeks into the program. As shown in Table 2/Figure 1, the frequency of targeted behavior for each student consistently decreased, as it was recorded on a biweekly basis. There was slight discrepancy in Student Z's behavior during the 4th week because her incident total had increased. This was attributed to problems that this child was experiencing at home and struggling with. Once she learned to manage the problems and regain control of her behavior, her incident frequency continued to decrease consistently with her fellow participants.

Though done at a less invasive level and in an informal setting, there were many similarities between the Group Support and Skills Training Intervention and what is experienced in psychological group therapy. Much like in a therapeutic setting, students were able to talk through their emotions in a safe environment and were encouraged to feel comfortable about

sharing their experiences (Kinard, 2002). Similar to the treatment experienced in cognitive-behavioral therapy, students were taught ways to manage their hardships and take positive control of their lives (Mishava, 2007). Choosing to do group sessions instead of one-to-one skills training, helped show students that they were not alone and had the support of their peers. Similarly to the study done by Webster and his colleagues (2008), students were taught coping and problem-solving techniques. Both studies alike had shown to produce positive results at the conclusion of the intervention, showing significant decrease in behavioral problems and increase among student cooperation, behavior, and respect (Webster et al, 2008). In the foundation of this intervention was trust; among students and with the facilitating teacher. Without trust established, students would not have been able to open up and allow themselves to grow and change using the skills taught. Trust enabled students to feel that they were in a safe environment, which also contributed greatly to the success of the intervention (Mishava, 2007).

The Group Support and Skills Training Intervention used participants (students) strictly from a lower income neighborhood and came from a neglectful home environment. Future populations do not have to be as extreme as the one used for this study. This type of intervention can be beneficial for any student that is having difficulty managing their feelings and/or acting out, misbehaving or having trouble following school rules. Children that are suffering from other types of crisis at home (divorce, death of a loved one, etc.) would also benefit from this type of intervention. Regardless of the type of hardship the child is experiencing, Group Support and Skills Training Intervention will teach them to manage and express their feelings without them allowing it to negatively affect their lives. Also, if students are already acting out, this intervention can help them reduce negative behavior and teach students to channel their feelings to be expressed in a less destructive and more appropriate and healthy manner.

Limitations

Small sample size was one of the limitations of this study which tested the successfulness of Group Support and Skills Training to help reduce the gap in academic achievement between children who come from neglectful and non-neglectful homes. Regardless of the small sample size, this intervention produced positive results in reducing targeted behavior and increasing cooperation, motivation and overall respect with the students. For future studies, a larger sample size would be desired to examine how well the intervention influences and improves student behavior. Another limitation of this intervention was the population's lack of diversity. This sample was taken from a lower-income, urban neighborhood in Staten Island. For future research, it would be beneficial to implement this intervention in different neighborhood schools and to any students struggling with following the rules, showing respect, getting along with others and managing feelings. Future studies can be done with students within the age range of 4-10 years old (older students would need different books and activities). Another limitation of this study was the short amount of time spent observing/implementing the intervention. Eight weeks, although shown to have improved the student's behavior, was still fairly a short amount of time to truly gauge the successfulness of the intervention. For future research, the intervention would start earlier in the school year (November-December). This time period would allow teachers to get to know students during the start of the school year and evaluate which ones would benefit from this type of intervention. Once the eight weeks of the intervention is complete, students would also continue to be observed, to determine if the change in student's behavior was consistent. This type of intervention can have positive effects on any student that is having difficulty with behavior, following the rules or getting along with others.

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Appendix

Pre/Post-Intervention Interview Questions (For Students)

- 1- How do you feel you get along with other students/teachers/faculty?
- 2- If you were your teacher (or another faculty member), what would you say about yourself?
- 3- What do you think about your behavior in school?
- 4- Is there anything you want to change/improve about yourself?

Pre/Post-Intervention Interview Questions (For School Faculty)

- 1- How have you observed the student interacting with his/her peers?
- 2- How would you describe your experiences with the student?
- 3- Is there anything you would want to see the student improve on?