



AND



Jenks Public Schools

Behavioral Activation Group Therapy Evaluation

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Jenks Middle School SKILLS Group Evaluation



Brief Description of Group. SKILLS is a group manualized treatment developed by Dr. Brian Chu and colleagues at Rutgers’s University for anxiety and depression in middle school students. Specifically the treatment is intended to teach students to (1) identify how mood and anxiety are getting in the way of things they want to achieve and (2) use active coping skills to work towards meaningful goals. The recommended course of SKILLS is a 10-12 week hour long program facilitated by therapists in a school setting. Due to time constraints the current group met for 5 sessions and targeted main themes from the full treatment package.

Outline of SKILLS Groups by Week
1. Introduction, confidentiality agreement and established rapport. Student’s described feelings when “stuck.”
2. Distress loops, strategies for getting active, and introduction of activity chart.
3. Identified trigger, response, and anxious/anger patterns (TRAP) and applied to student’s life. Also, discussed active choices to get out of being “stuck” (TRAC).
4. Reviewed TRAP and TRAC and introduced behavioral exposures to combat avoidance. Conducted behavioral exposure for one student.
5. Completed several behavioral exposures to decrease avoidant responses.

Presenting Concerns. The adolescents in the group shared several life stressors with the group facilitators. The majority of students shared that they had been bullied and dealt with name calling. Several students discussed relationship disruptions such as difficulty with siblings and parents. Multiple students disclosed difficulty with school work including anxiety over completing and handing in assignments. Most students also expressed interest in healthy lifestyle (e.g., exercise and eat healthy). Finally, several students talked about difficulty falling and staying asleep.

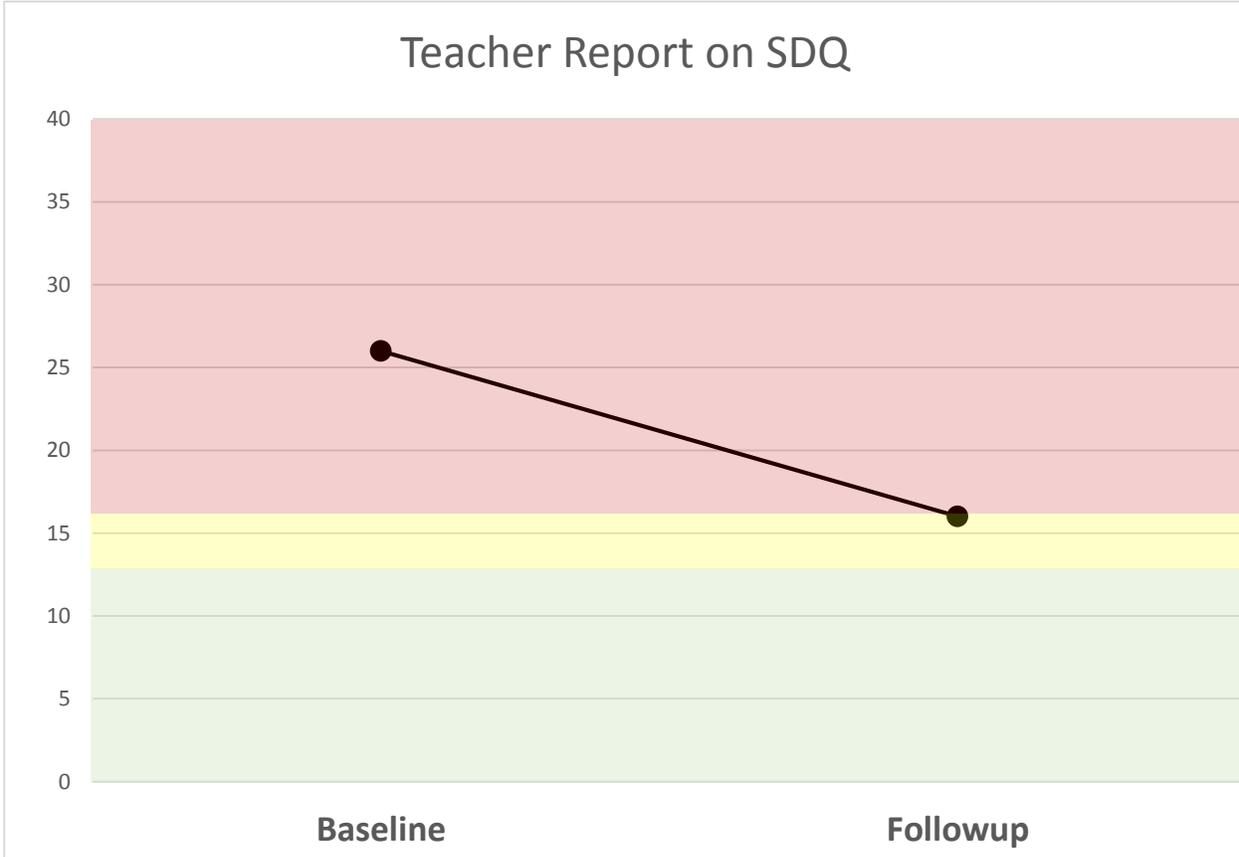
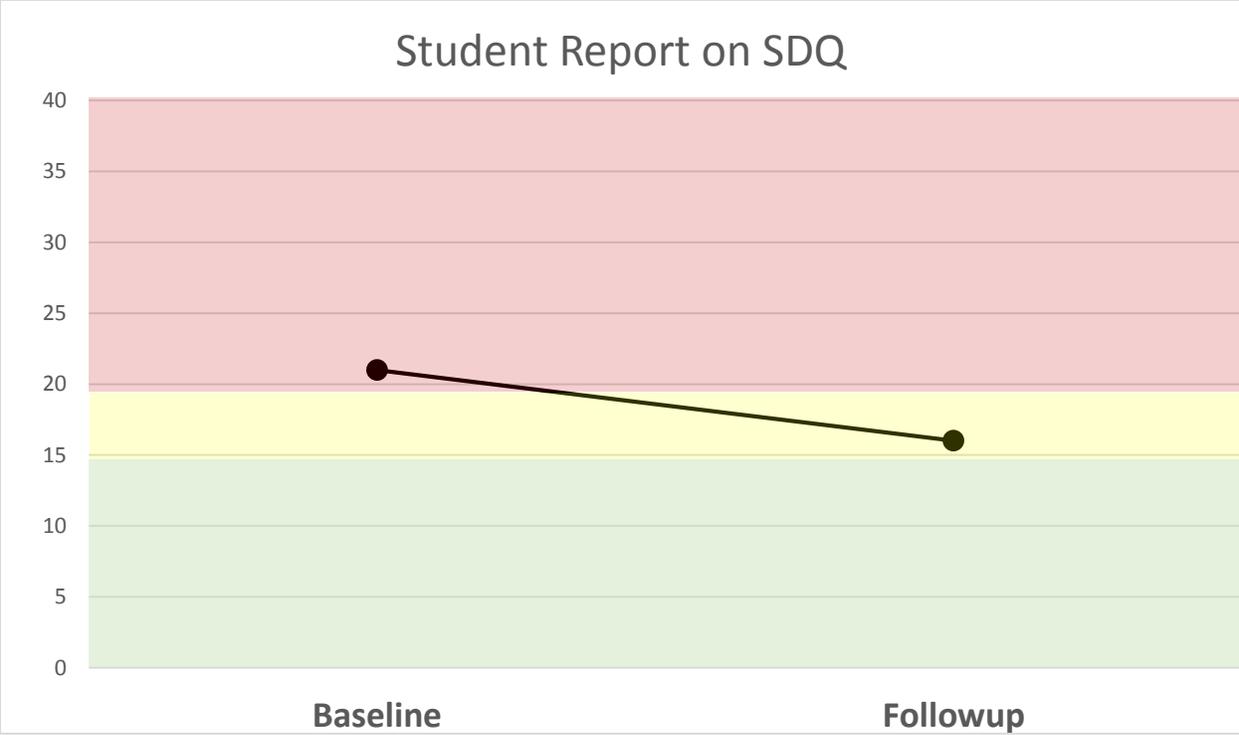
Anecdotal Reactions. The majority of students in the group appeared engaged and actively participated in the group. Students seemed to grasp group content and gave strong examples of when they had been “stuck” in a distress loop and related it to their personal life. Several students spontaneously reported that the behavioral exposures were beneficial. One

student disclosed that although the exposure made her feel very anxious she felt capable and more confident about actively approaching what she had been avoiding.

Data findings. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief behavioral screening that measures strengths and difficulties on five different sub components (i.e., prosocial behavior, hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, conduct problems, and peer problems). In addition to relative strengths and difficulties on subcomponents it also yields a total impact score from 0-40 with higher scores indicating more difficulty (0-15 = normal range; 16-19 borderline range; 20-40 abnormal range). As a group, the average score on the SDQ at baseline was 24.1, indicating that the group, consisting of 7th and 8th grade students, fell in the abnormal range. In addition, when scores were looked at individually, all 6 students fell into the abnormal range on the SDQ. Based on teacher reports at baseline, one student fell in the abnormal range, one in borderline range, and four in normal category. This discrepancy between student and teacher reports is consistent with the research literature that shows that teachers and parents are less able to identify internalizing concerns. At the beginning of fifth and final session, the group mean remained at 24.1 on the SDQ. Specifically, four students remained in the abnormal range. However, it should be noted that two students moved into to the borderline range by the final session. Due to a small number of students and teachers involved in this initial project we were unable to explore statistical significance.

Case Example. Only one student was able to complete a behavioral exposure prior to completing the follow-up SDQ. Below is a case summary of this student's group results. The student indicated that she had a lot of anxiety about completing homework and submitting it to her teacher. She specifically indicated she was "stuck" initiating homework assignments. For her behavioral experiment a group facilitator acted as a teacher and assigned her homework. The experiment was designed to mimic real life events (e.g., put homework in backpack, walk out the door, walk into a "room" and sit down to do homework).

This student came to all five skills sessions and activity participated in each group. At the conclusion of her behavioral experiment she reported feeling hopeful that she would benefit from the activity. By her self-report on the SDQ, this student went from answering in the abnormal to borderline range. See graphs below (Green = Normal; Yellow = Borderline; Red = Abnormal).



Below is a summary of the example student's changes on the subcomponents of the SDQ.

	Baseline	Follow-up	Interpretation
Prosocial Behavior	8	10	At baseline the student reported answers that placed the student in the normal range and at follow-up further increased prosocial behaviors
Hyperactivity	4	4	Student remained in the normal range.
Emotional Symptoms	6	2	At baseline the student reported symptoms in the abnormal range. At the conclusion of the group her reported symptoms fell in the normal range.
Conduct Problems	3	0	The student reported problems in the borderline range at baseline and dropped to the normal range at follow-up.
Peer Problems	2	5	Student reported normal peer problems at baseline and abnormal at follow up.
<p>*On this scale increases are indicative of better functioning. Range on scales is 0-10.</p>			

Limitations and Future Directions. An important future direction for the current project is to extend SKILLS to the full number of sessions (10 to 12 sessions). Using the full treatment package will allow us to increase the number of behavioral exposures for each participant which is an extremely important component to the treatment. Unfortunately two of the students were unable to participate in the behavioral exposures due to insufficient time. Future groups could also include more sensitive measures of student functioning to better track changes over time. In addition, an important future direction is including multiple groups at multiple schools.

There are a number of limitations to the current project. For instance, there was a very small number of students ($n = 6$), a limited number of sessions, the project was started late in the

semester, conflicted with spring school testing days, and it was difficult getting back parental consents. Also, time was often lost at the beginning of each group calling down students who may have forgotten about the group. In the future it would be beneficial to identify students prior to the semester (e.g., teachers nominate from previous year) and promptly begin the group after summer and winter break.