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Resilience in Youth Related to Adult Relationships

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Abstract

Having close relationships with adults can increase children's resilience and decrease risk factors such as mental health problems and feelings of loneliness. A program that targets resilience in youth is the Kaleidoscope Connect Program. This program focuses on the emotional and social needs of students and establishes connections with caring and supportive adults, a key protective factor of this program. The goal of the project was to examine the effectiveness of Kaleidoscope Connect in increasing resilience and decreasing problem behaviors in a sample of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students in Western Montana. In addition, we examined descriptive data that focused on participants' reported proximity to adults. We anticipated that over time, students would report closer proximity to adults, as well as a higher number of adults with whom they are connected.

Why is Resilience Important?

Ann Masten (2001) defined resilience as the "phenomena characterized as good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development." Promoting resilience in schools is important to decrease behavioral issues and increase the chance that students will be successful when confronted with adversity. Because Montana is a rural state and has higher rates of suicide, implementing programs that help foster resilience is critical. The current project highlights the importance of children having adults in their life that are both supportive and nurturing.

Method

Procedure

Students in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade participated in the Kaleidoscope Connect program during the 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 school year. At the beginning and end of each school year, students completed two self-report scales, the RSCA and BASC-3 BESS. In addition, they also completed the *Student Support Card (SSC)*, which focused on the specific areas addressed in the Kaleidoscope Connect Curriculum. This study examined the descriptive data for the number of reported close adult relationships (i.e., anchors) and the proximity of the youth's relationship to these adults, referred to as the *Red Phactor* of the SSC.

The *Kaleidoscope Connect* curriculum is comprised of seventeen lessons that are approximately 45-60 minutes long. Each lesson focuses on different areas for student reflection, including risk factors, adult support, and increasing self-confidence.

Measures

Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents (RSCA): A standardized self-report measure for resilience used with youth ages 9-18. Responses are included on a 5-Point Likert Scale, ranging from Never to Almost Always. This measure includes three subscales, with two subscales focusing on positive traits of resilience: Sense of Mastery (focusing on optimism, self-efficacy, and adaptability) and Sense of Relatedness (focusing on trust, support, comfort and tolerance). These subscales were used in this project.

BASC-3 Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BASC-3 BESS): A standardized behavioral screening tool for youth age 8-18. The BASC-3 BESS generates an overall score, indicating the risk level for problem behaviors. Responses are included on a 4-Point Likert Scale, ranging from Never to Almost Always.

Results

Student Support Card: Participants reported an overall greater proximity to the anchors, with an increase in mean from Fall 2016 (2.46) to Fall 2018 (3.28). Participants did not report having more anchors in Fall 2018 (4.89) than in Fall 2016 (5.80). It is important to note that more students completed the SSC in Fall 2016 (N= 36) than in Fall 2018 (N=9), which likely influenced these results. Youth endorsed parents/relatives as being their most frequent anchor. Other anchors such as school staff/coach were also endorsed, yet less frequently.

RSCA (Mastery and Relatedness): Paired sample T-tests were conducted to determine whether there was a significant increase in the RSCA Mastery and Relatedness scores. Although there was not a significant increase over time, there was a general increase in mean scores, as per visual examination of descriptive statistics.

BASC-3 BESS: Paired sample T-tests indicated that there was not a significant decrease in BASC-3 BESS scores over time. However, results indicated that for some of the time points and grades examined, there was a decrease in mean score.

Recommendations

- Build relationships with adults either in schools or at home that can provide support, therefore, increasing resilience.
- Have students learn self-care and stress management through meditation and/or exercise.
- Have student get involved in extracurriculars to increase moral and create meaningful relationships with peers.

References

Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227-238.