Cultivating Self-Compassion through a Youth Resiliency Program

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Research Interest

- Self-esteem culture

- Gap in the literature!
  - Self-Compassion
  - Positive Psychology

Overview
Demonstration Project

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review

    Preliminary Curriculum

Chapter 3: Methods

    IRB

    Interview with Expert

Chapter 4: Discussion

Chapter 5: Results

    Revised curriculum

    Future Recommendations

Literature Review
Positive Psychology

- Theoretical orientation that focuses on strengths and protective factors

- Alternative to the pathology-based models, which focus on deficits or abnormalities and attempt to decrease problems

Positive Youth Development Program

- Strength-based approach that uses positive psychology interventions and research on resiliency

- Emphasizes available protective factors that youths' can practice to cope with adversity

Introduction

- McLean Hospital and Harvard University
  - Program in Education, After-school and Resiliency (PEAR)
  - Clover Model
    - 4 aspects or "leaves" of youth development
    - 3 manuals exists but a 4th was needed!

Assertiveness: Power, Voice, Choice, Leadership, Executive function

Belonging: Connection, Trust, Relationship, Empathy, Support

Active Engagement: Physical activity, Movement, "Here and now," Body, Impulse, Hands-on

Reflection: Self-awareness, Understanding others, Learning, Insights, Observation, Analysis

Belonging

Assertiveness

Reflection

Active Engagement

Reflections

- Participant Selection
  - Key strengths
    - Making sense of one's own experiences, emotions and thoughts to create a sense of identity
    - Inclined to thought, analysis, observation, understanding
  - Key struggles
    - At risk for anxiety, rumination, depression and isolation
  - Age: 12-15
    - Neurological changes- susceptible to emotional dysregulation
    - Gradual maturation of metacognitive abilities, better able to self-reflect

Reflections

- Tend not to share experiences with peers
  - Need for a supportive intervention, which increases their resilience
- Protective Factors
  - Reflection
  - Optimism
  - Self-Compassion
  - Sense of Belonging

Protective Factor: Reflection

- Redirecting reflective capacity to more adaptive possibilities

- Allows for creativity and positive change

- Use this strength to improve interactions with others and in turn, the neural integration in the brain, which makes them more resilient (Siegel, 2001)
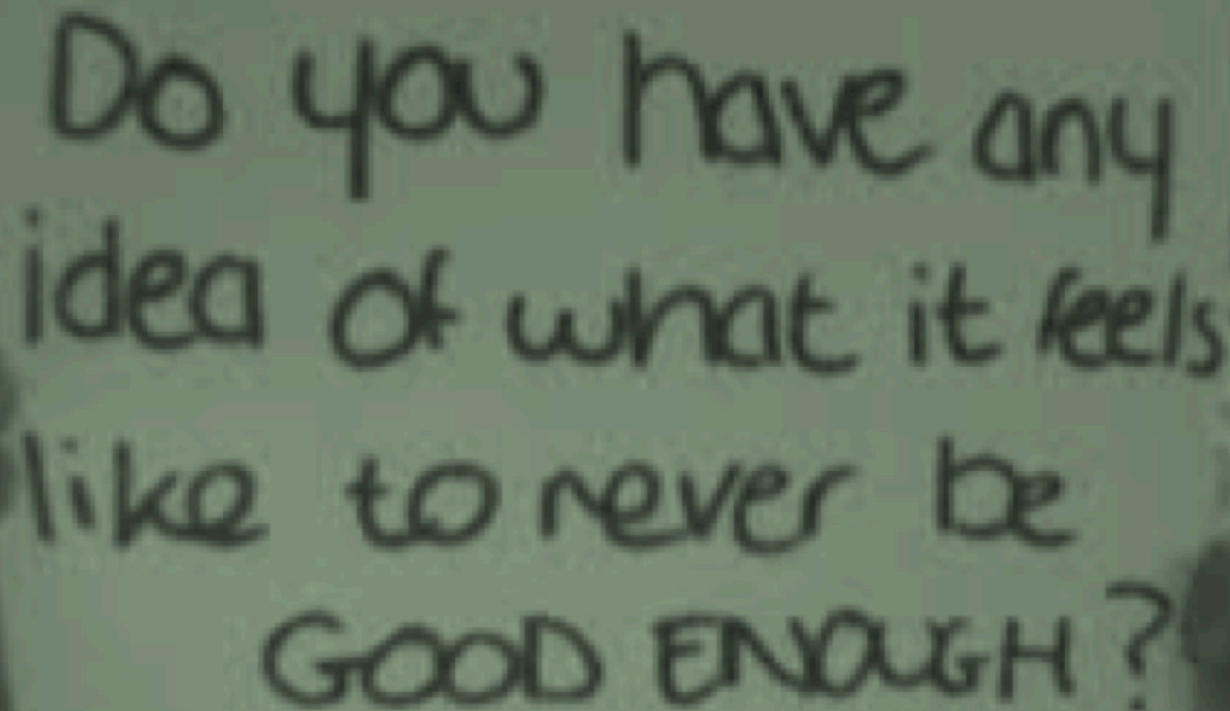
Protective Factor: Optimism

- *Holistic Student Assessment* (Noam, 2014)
    - Optimism: "measures one's level of positivity in their perspective about the world and the future."
    - Highly self-reflective individuals are prone to rumination and need direction to develop optimism.

Protective Factor: Self-Compassion

Do you have any idea of what it feels like to never be GOOD ENOUGH?

Protective Factor: Self-Compassion

She does!

Protective Factor:
Self-Compassion

Self-Kindness

Common Humanity

Mindfulness

(Neff, 2003)

Self-Compassion
So What!?

« You're ALWAYS there for yourself »

- Protective factors for anxiety, depression and rumination
- Increases happiness, optimism, and curiosity
- Increases compassion for others
- Holds one's emotions and imperfections

(Neff, 2009)

Self Compassion

Benefits for Teens

1. Decreases comparing yourself negatively to others
2. Decreases feelings of isolation
3. Increases feeling connected to others
4. Provides a way to deal with all emotions

(Neff, K. & McGhee, 2010)

Protective Factor: Sense of Belonging

- Clover Model definition:
  - "the relationship with peers or feelings of connection with classmates"

- Puberty, brain changes
  - development of emotional awareness, i.e. peer relationships

- Early adolescence time for programs to focus on empathy and peer support

Curriculum Overview Session Guide

Part I: Introduction to Self-Compassion

Session 1: Embracing Vulnerability

Session 2: Selling Self-Compassion

Session 3: Self-Kindness

Session 4: Common Humanity

Session 5: Self-Appreciation

Part II: Appreciative Inquiry and Digital Storytelling

Session 6: Discovery I

Session 7: Discovery II

Session 8: Discovery III

Session 9: Dream

Session 10: Design

Session 11: Going Digital

Session 12: Celebration

Group Structure

- Length: 60 minutes
- Number of participants: 7-9
- Co-leaders: 2
- Number of sessions: 12 (1 per week)

Example Session

Opening
Appreciative Check-In

Middle
Activities

Closing
**Self-Compassion Journal Exercise**

Appreciative Check-Out

ACTIVITY

- Refocus your attention to a time in the past month, when you were at your best or a time that you felt good about yourself. Perhaps, you were able to be kind to yourself or to take extra good care of yourself.

- Did you exhibit self-kindness, welcome connection or feel capable of being present?

- Tell a partner the whole story and listen deeply to what your partner is saying to you. You can take note of strengths.

Appreciative Check-Out

- What did you appreciate about your partner's story?

- What did you like about this activity?

- How did you feel when someone was listening to you?
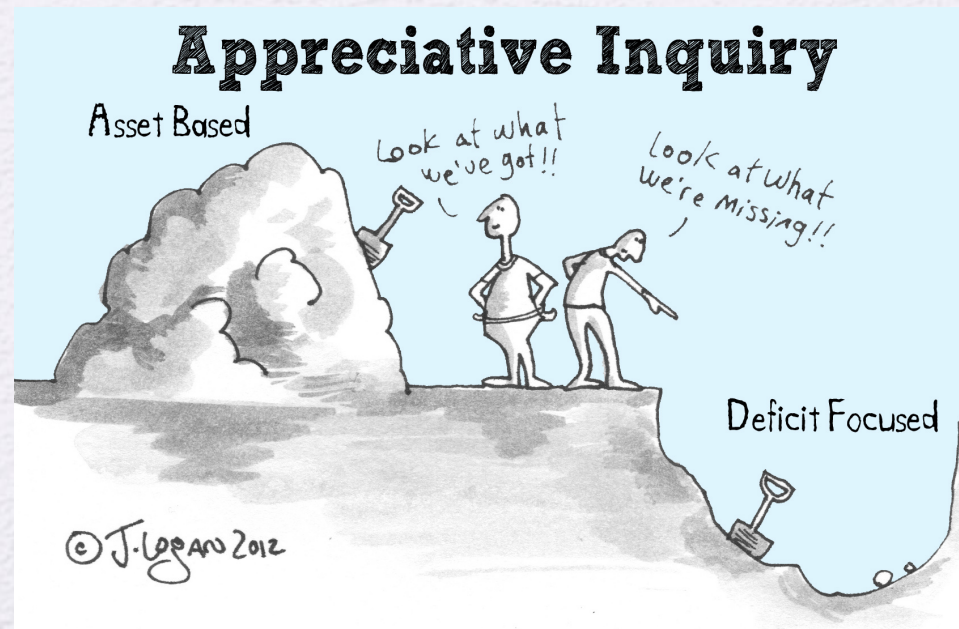
Positive Outcomes

- Storytelling & Narrative

- Listening

- Reflection

- Optimism

- Self-Compassion

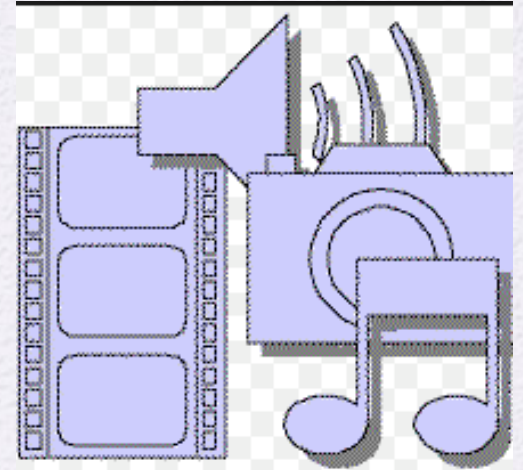- Sense of Belonging

- Active Engagement

Appreciative Inquiry

- Refocuses memory and attention on what individuals are already doing well in order to cultivate individuals' strengths (Cooperrider, 1987; Fialkov & Haddad, 2012)

- Positive dialogue creates positive change

Digital Storytelling

- Short narrative to share a message about themselves

- Strategy for developing self-compassion (Meadows, 2003)

- Appear to increase active engagement and sense of belonging (Wexler, Gubrium, Griffin & DiFulvio, 2013)

Conclusion

- There is a need for a *Reflection Curriculum*
  - Increase Reflection, Self-Compassion, Optimism, Sense of Belonging
  - Through Appreciative Inquiry and Digital Storytelling

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