Evaluating Mindfulness: Self Care for the Caretaker Group Intervention
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Introduction

Mindfulness is described as a psychological process which enables the individual to bring specific attention to the present moment in order to achieve greater focus and centering (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Evidence suggests that use of mindfulness-based practice is effective at reducing anxiety in a wide variety of population groups (Stahl and Goldstein, 2010).

Mindfulness: Self Care for the Caretaker is a new educational group being offered through GA Family Services’ Foster Care Program. The group is designed to help foster parents reduce anxiety and to provide them with important coping skills to deal with potentially stressful situations.

The Mindfulness group operates over six, two-hour sessions which take place over the course of a few weeks. Prior to participation, foster parents are asked to complete a questionnaire describing their perceived anxiety and ability to cope with it.

This study will evaluate the effectiveness of this mindfulness-based group intervention using experimental design. Recommendations for improvements to the mindfulness group will also be provided.

Program Description

Mindfulness is the practice of being aware of what is occurring in the present moment. Related techniques can be formal or informal practices that bring the user into the present moment (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010). Mindfulness comes with many positive effects both physically and mentally as the practitioner becomes more aware of themselves and their environment.

The program under study offered opportunities to explore several mindfulness concepts and techniques as described in the session overview below.

Session One provided an general introduction to mindfulness. Participants were educated on some of the history of mindfulness as well as foundational concepts. Basic techniques were shared, as well as an overview of future lessons were given.

Session Two focused on stress reduction and an explanation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. It opened with a review of the previous material and included an open discussion about participants’ experience with stress and how mindfulness can help to address it.

Session Three examined mindfulness-meditation for dealing with stress reduction.

Session Four focused on mindful acceptance in dealing with pain and stress. The session also focused on explaining different types of pain and the theories behind dealing with said pain.

Session Five examined the concept of inner peace within mindfulness and remaining centered in stressful circumstances.

Session Six introduced mindful breathing exercises and grounding techniques. The benefit of both was explored along with a wrap-up of all the previous lessons. The final session ended with an extended guided meditation practice.

Logic Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Logic Model</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff / volunteers, Space for participants to sit, Computer, Projector or television, Mindfulness materials (PowerPoints, handouts, etc.), Grounding objects such as playdough, Materials for exercises</td>
<td>Students felt their anxiety levels reduced.</td>
<td>Of ten program participants, nine (9) were willing to complete the post-program evaluation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Activities were effective at reducing anxiety among program participants.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Session One</strong></td>
<td>• Educating about the basic principles of mindfulness</td>
<td>Participants (100%) reported they felt their overall anxiety has declined since engaging in mindfulness sessions.</td>
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<td><strong>Session Two</strong></td>
<td>• Teaching and applying various mindfulness exercises</td>
<td>Participants felt more prepared to cope with anxiety and to provide them with important coping skills to deal with potentially stressful situations.</td>
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<td><strong>Session Three</strong></td>
<td>• Educating about stress and anxiety’s effects on the body</td>
<td>Participants felt more prepared to cope with anxiety and to provide them with important coping skills to deal with potentially stressful situations.</td>
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<td><strong>Session Four</strong></td>
<td><strong>Short-Term Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Students felt their anxiety levels reduced.</td>
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<td><strong>Session Five</strong></td>
<td>• Increased knowledge about the concept of mindfulness</td>
<td>Students felt their anxiety levels reduced.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Session Six</strong></td>
<td>• Increased understanding about their own stressors and past experiences with stress</td>
<td>Students felt their anxiety levels reduced.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intermediate Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>• Increased knowledge about anxiety and its effect on the body</td>
<td>Students felt their anxiety levels reduced.</td>
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<td><strong>Long-Term Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>• Identifying effective personal use of mindfulness techniques</td>
<td>Students felt their anxiety levels reduced.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td>• Increasing open discussion of mindfulness discussions during sessions</td>
<td>Students felt their anxiety levels reduced.</td>
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Method

The researcher conducted a formative process evaluation of the Mindfulness: Self Care for the Caretaker program. The evaluation enabled the researcher to examine the functioning of the new program from the participant perspective.

Intervention

Participants completed the six (6) program sessions at GA Family Services. These sessions involved formal instruction as well as opportunities to practice specific mindfulness techniques during class.

Hypotheses

H1: Mindfulness: Self Care for the Caretaker will help to reduce anxiety in foster parents.

Fostering a child is a difficult task with a lot of emotional difficulties and challenges mixed with many rewards. By educating parents on easy-to-use mindfulness techniques, the program hoped to reduce anxiety associated with foster care.

H2: Mindfulness: Self Care for the Caretaker is being delivered in an effective manner.

While this is the first time the program is being offered, the researcher anticipates that it will be viewed as effective as it draws on evidence-based practices and utilizes well-developed techniques including the work of Kabat-Zinn (1990) and Stahl & Goldstein (2010).

Measure

The researcher crafted a survey to secure feedback from program participants. Participants responded to a total of twenty-nine questions which asked about their pre- and post-program anxiety levels as well as their opinions about the current program. Four (4) short answer sections were also provided to receive qualitative feedback on particular parts of the program.

Ethics

All program sessions began with a pledge from all participants and staff that any information shared during the session would be confidential. Participation in the survey was also completely voluntary. All surveys were de-identified prior to data review.

Recommendations

This study suggests that the initial implementation of the Mindfulness: Self Care for the Caretaker Program was successful at reducing anxiety among foster parents. The data also suggests that the program was well-implemented with few recommendations for program improvement. Given this, program staff should strongly considered moving forward with the delivery of this program in the future.

Additional research examining pre-, mid- and post-program anxiety levels among program participants should also be undertaken to secure a clearer understanding of the program’s effectiveness.