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Feasibility and acceptability of an approach to emotional wellbeing support for high school students

Sarah Kendal
B.A., RMN, MHSc, PhD
Reason for the study

- Mental health of young people a public health concern (Meltzer et al, 2003; WHO)
- Young people’s voices marginalised in research
- UK schools under pressure to deliver emotional support (Stallard et al, 2005; National Healthy School Standard (DH/DES 2004))
- Supported self help could be a useful model - need to ask young people (Khan et al, 2007; NICE 2005)
Plan

• Develop a new intervention that is intended to be feasible and acceptable
• Introduce it in schools
• Conduct a research study to evaluate feasibility and acceptability
Complex interventions design
(Craig et al 2008)
Development of the intervention

- Focus groups with 54 young people (12-15 yrs) in three UK high schools
- Collected ideas about emotional support for them in school
- Designed a supported self help intervention
Focus groups with teenagers!
Our intervention

• Available to every student/ 3 schools (A, B, C), 9 months
• Self referral/ Confidential
• Short appointments (15-30 minutes)/Practical and emotional support
• ‘Therapists’- support staff, not teachers or clinicians
• ‘Therapists’ had brief training in CBT techniques e.g. anxiety management, problem solving, goal setting
• Advertising: school TV, newsletter, posters, announcements, in class, leaflets, letters home
• Works with existing pastoral support
The Research Study

- **Aim:** explore staff and student thoughts on feasibility and acceptability of the intervention
- **Design:** Based in Complex Interventions Framework
  - Exploratory aim
  - Qualitative methods
Complex interventions design

- Plan
- Theory
- Evaluate
- Pilot study
Data collection

- Purposive sampling
- Students and staff from schools A, B, C
- All ages (students), genders, roles (staff)
- Semi structured interviews
- Participants chose time and place
- Interview questions changed during study to match our growing understanding of the issues
Data analysis

• Recorded and transcribed interviews
• Stored and coded in NVIVO 7 folder
• Analysis started during data collection
• Each new interview compared with previous interviews
• Themes developed iteratively from data
• Advisory group checked coding and themes
Results

- Interviews N = 50
- 9 students who had used intervention
- 14 other students
- 8 ‘therapist’ staff
- 19 other staff
- Student data consistent
- Staff data variable
Impact on emotional wellbeing

• “Before ...I didn’t know who to turn to”
• “I’m no longer thinking I’m rubbish”
• “I’m looking to pass my exams”
## Confidentiality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student opinions:</th>
<th>Staff opinions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “It’s private”</td>
<td>• “Teachers need to be kept in the loop”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Nothing worse than other people knowing your business”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Students like it**

**Some staff don’t like it**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self referral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student opinions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “You get the help when you need it, not when someone else says”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students like it</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff opinions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A lot of children ... lack basic life skills”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Many staff worried that students cannot understand self referral</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unqualified ‘therapists’

Student opinions:
• “You know you can trust them”

Students like it

Staff opinions:
• “We haven’t got time” [‘therapist’ staff]

• “they have a great relationship with the kids” [other staff]

Staff doubt feasibility
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short appointments</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student opinion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Staff opinions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No strong opinion about this</td>
<td>Long appointments not practical in the school day but short appointments are difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No problem for students</strong></td>
<td><strong>Staff have mixed feelings</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Structured Goal Setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student opinions</th>
<th>Staff opinions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I like talking... (but) you have to learn about strategies, to help you”</td>
<td>“Having short term and long term goals works very, very well with kids this age” ['therapist']</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Students like it**

**Staff like it**
Feasibility depends on management support

Intervention was not promoted effectively in School A.

“If you advertise that we offer emotional support,] people looking in are likely to say, well there must be a big problem there.”

School manager, School A
Feasibility and acceptability

- Supported self help can be feasible and acceptable in high school
- ‘Therapist’ staff must have time to deliver it
- Managers must support it
- Students must
  - Know about it
  - Trust it
Reference


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