

The Case for the *Curriculum-Based Support Group (CBSG®) Program During COVID-19*

To be successful this school year, amidst the uncertainties and anxiety of COVID-19, there is an increased need for all children and youth to be able to manage their emotions, set and achieve goals, develop and maintain healthy relationships, make healthy, responsible decisions and have a hope and belief in their future.

School leaders and educators are faced with unprecedented challenges in making high-stake decisions including: navigating logistical challenges of opening school buildings in safe and responsible ways; establishing effective virtual learning platforms; meeting competing demands from students, teachers, parents, and community leaders; and, addressing the lost learning most students have experienced since last March.

With all these challenges, there is legitimate concern some educators will by-pass students' social, emotional and mental well-being despite the mounting evidence the mental and behavioral health needs of our children and youth are rising exponentially. Moving ahead with a singular focus on academics, without addressing the realities of the mental and emotional issues students (and staff) are bringing to school is ignoring a basic reality:

“Children can’t process and retain new information if their brains are overwhelmed with anxiety.”

(Education Week, Arianna Prothero, Sept. 2020)

Realities to Consider:

- Life circumstances may have changed dramatically for many students and educators since the pandemic began: loss of income; family illness; additional stress from being together without usual healthy outlets; political and racial unrest; unknowns and uncertainties about COVID-19 and the future; changes in routine and structure; loss of social outlets; change or loss in relationships; loss of enrichment activities; reduced access to educational resources; increased homestead violence, abuse, etc.
- A mental health snapshot:
 - 30% of teens report they are more worried than normal about basic needs including food, medicine and safety. *(America’s Promise Alliance)*
 - Over 25% of teens report they are losing more sleep, feeling more unhappy or depressed, feeling under constant strain, or losing confidence in themselves. *(Education Week)*
 - 40% of teens reported they have not been offered any social or emotional support by an adult from their school since school closings last spring. *(Education Week)*
 - 50% of teens report feeling depressed, stressed, or anxious which made it hard to learn virtually last spring. *(YouthTruth)*
 - Elevated levels of adverse mental health conditions, substance use, and suicidal ideation were reported by adults in the U.S. in June 2020. During late June, 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance use including:
 - 31% Anxiety/Depressive Symptoms
 - 26% Trauma/Stressor-Related Disorder Symptoms
 - 13% started drinking or increased Substance Use
 - 11% seriously considered Suicide

(Center for Disease Control and Prevention, August 2020)

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- Data from the mid-July Kaiser Family Fund survey found if schools do not reopen, 67% of parents with children ages 5-17 are worried their children will fall behind socially and emotionally. (*Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF)*)

Benefits of *CBSGs®*: There are numerous well documented benefits children and youth gain from participating in a *CBSG®*:

- CONNECTIONS:
 - “We are hardwired to connect, it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives, and without it there is suffering.” “I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgement; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.” Brene Brown
 - Being connected is the single greatest protective factor humans have. (*National Research Council*)
 - In a *CBSG®* participants know they are not alone. They have a sense of belonging.
- SUPPORT:
 - *Curriculum-Based SUPPORT Groups*—support that is:
 - Unconditional;
 - Non-judgmental; and
 - Helps children and youth feel safe, connected and empowered.
- SKILL BUILDING:
 - Increase participant’s self-awareness, recognize and celebrate their capabilities, uniqueness, worth, and value. They have an opportunity to contribute.
 - Increase participant’s social awareness and competence and treat others as they want to be treated.
 - Enhance participant’s relationship skills and identify people who care about them and can offer support. They learn it is okay to ask for, receive and give help.
 - Participants learn and practice decision making skills so they can make healthy, responsible decisions including skills for reducing stress and anxiety and achieving calm.
 - Participants have a sense of purpose and hope for their future. They begin to recognize what they can and cannot change and to bounce back (forward) from disappointment.

Flexibility and creativity are essential to the virtual, hybrid and person-to-person implementation of the *CBSG® Program* this year. To assist *CBSG®* Facilitators there are resources available:

<http://rainbowdaystraining.org/covid-19/>

<http://rainbowdaystraining.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CBSG-Alternative-Implementation-Guidelines-8.pdf>

If you do not find the information or resources needed, please contact us:

info@rainbowdaystraining.org.

Rainbow Days Training

www.rainbowdaystraining.org

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