
Preface

“Harry—yer a wizard.”

“I’m a what?” gasped Harry.

“A wizard, o’ course,” said Hagrid... “an’ a thumpin’ good’un, I’d say, once yeh’ve been trained up a bit.”

—J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*

ix

We believe in the value of group counseling for kids. We are aware that creating a group program can seem like a daunting task in any setting, schools included. Counselors and other mental health professionals in schools face the daily challenges of limited time and great demand for service. Groups would seem the answer to at least part of the problem. Yet the old saying “It’s hard to remember that you’re clearing the swamp when you’re up to your (shall we say) waist in alligators” comes to mind. Planning and setting up groups can often seem like tall orders and several more items on a very long list.

We wrote this book in response to these concerns and with the intention of helping busy professionals in schools take the leap over the hurdles of creating new or expanding current group programs. This book presents a foundation for group work and a guide for developing effective and efficient groups. Although the discussion is based in educational settings, the practical approach we describe need not be limited to that context. It is our hope that helpers who work with young people in other settings will be able to adapt these practical ideas to meet their unique needs.

The group work model presented in this book addresses counselors’ need for efficient use of time; the need for students to gain skills to advance personally, socially, and academically; and the need for schools to take a positive, strengths-based approach to students’ needs. This group model is specifically aimed at something we believe all students need to succeed: a strengthened sense of self. Thus the name of our model became Strengthening Sense of Self, or SOS. The SOS model takes the foundation of group work with all its benefits and adds solution-focused approaches in combination with psychoeducational content. This model calls on the personal resources of group members in a structured setting that teaches kids to have strengths-based dialogues with themselves and others and teaches new skills each time they meet as a group. The goal is for students to help themselves and each other to become increasingly competent in handling the challenges that come their way.

This is a group work model that is positive *and* versatile. Each kid in an SOS group can work on a different referral issue while all the members learn the skills that they need to know to grow into successful adults. The structure is well defined and easy to manage. The result is that many more kids can participate in groups during the school year, with no need for the counselor to create an array of topical groups.

In many respects this is a “how to” book. We assume that the reader has had basic instruction in group counseling, but we offer numerous opportunities to expand and develop skills through exercises, tips, and examples. Brief vignettes help illustrate concepts and

hopefully enrich your reading experience. The book is divided into eight chapters. In the first three chapters we present a discussion of the benefits of group counseling, what the SOS model includes, and how to successfully use SOS group leadership skills. In Chapters 4 through 6 we describe the practical aspects of establishing groups in schools, how to get kids ready to participate in your SOS groups, and what the sessions look like when the model is implemented. Chapter 7 comes complete with scripts and detailed plans for the sessions and will enable you to facilitate the six-session unit. Chapter 8 includes group activities and reproducibles in the six content areas for primary, intermediate, and secondary levels. There are three levels of activities of increasing difficulty in each age group—for a total of fifty-four group activities—to provide the foundation for the psychoeducational portion of each group session. Additionally, the reproducibles are available on the enclosed CD-ROM.

There is a critical need for kids in schools to receive excellent counseling to assist them in meeting their challenges. Counselors are continually disheartened by the difficulties in reaching all of the students in their care. The SOS model offers hope for counselors and kids. Counselors are provided with a carefully defined program that offers students the benefits of group work and the opportunity to learn new skills, to find their own solutions and meet their goals, and to leave the group with a stronger sense of self. We began this project with enthusiasm, and this enthusiasm has carried us through with the belief that we are offering you and the kids you work with an innovative and energizing approach to group work. We wish you a fulfilling future of SOS groups!

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