

Will The Way 12-Step Program Improve Student's Coping Skills?

What is the effectiveness of The Way 12-Step program on the achievement of struggling students? I have been developing my vision of using an age-old psychosocial solution with children for the last several years. I have thoroughly searched the Internet, college libraries, and other sources to see if I could find the therapy solution of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) being used to help children with their problems. Alcoholics Anonymous World Services' response was that other than Ala-Teen or Ala-Tot, programs geared for young people who are impacted by a family member's drinking, or A.A. itself for young alcoholics, they know of no other situation of children being helped by using the same principles and steps as they are used in A.A. In my quest, there was not one instance found. The program I envision will give children simple tools for navigating challenging life situations, improving their relationships, and increasing their understanding of who they are.

Background Information (Theoretical foundations)

What is The Way 12-Step program? While similar to Twelve Step Facilitation Therapy (TSF), it is not. TSF is the method of therapy used by counselors who are supporting a client who is also a new 12-step program member. It is, though, the same "form of treatment that addresses human psychological vulnerabilities that alcoholics and others share related to problems of self-regulation. (Galanter, 1989, p. 67) The Way Therapy is described well in 24 Magazine, in this 1976 article:

...ills of our age: anxiety, resentment, depression, confusion, sick eating, sick drinking, sick drugging, sick money, and sick sex. There are not many ways to survive these ills and come out into a full and happy life. There is only one way. This universal path to freedom has always been called, simply, the Way. This is what Christ called it, what Lao Tse and Buddha called it, what all the great teachers and all the sacred traditions of mankind have called it. The best formulation of the Way that our century has produced is the Four Absolutes and the Twelve Steps. (P, 1976)

Without changing the application of each step, the working of it, the solution of it, I have modified each for children and adolescents.

1. I am powerless over x, y, or z, and other people's behavior and this messes up my life.
2. I need help. I can't do it alone anymore.
3. I have made a decision to reach out for some Power greater than me for help.
4. I write down all of the things that bother me about myself and others, and the things that I like too.
5. I share these with someone I trust because I will not keep them a secret anymore.
6. My Higher Power helps me with all this too.
7. The more I know myself and my Higher Power, the happier I am.
8. I made a list of the people I hurt and ways I hurt myself.
9. I do what I can to make things right with these people because I will be happier by doing the right thing.
10. I keep on discovering more things about myself each day; and if I hurt someone, as soon as I realize it, I make things right.
11. I pray and meditate so I can be super-powered, happy, and free.
12. By using these steps, I become the person I was created to be. I do not feel alone anymore, and I can help others.

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This process is effective in helping children help themselves. This Way can be a life-long foundation for personal empowerment as well as an awareness of helping others and having something meaningful to share.

Research Questions

Will the twelve steps may need fine-tuning? The process of each step must be maintained, while the wording is made most clear for children and adolescents. Will some people think this is religious? Is there a better name for this program? Children might be more attracted to participating in the Wild, Wild West program or the Go West program. Would there be support of school administration? When during the school day would the group meetings best be held? How much coercion, if any, should be used to impact a child's initial and subsequent attendance?

Significance of the Study

If my thinking is correct, that this program for at-risk children is effective, than that is quite significant. I also see a time when this can be reproduced in other schools across the country, throughout the world. It is a Way that works in all cultures.

Assumptions and Delimitations

My personal experience with A.A.'s Way, both as a solution in my own life and through helping hundreds of other people over the past several decades, brings me to where I am today and causes me to be biased.

Definition of Terms

The 12-Step process is summarized by The American Psychological Association as:

- admitting that one cannot control one's addiction or compulsion
- recognizing a greater power that can give strength
- examining past errors with the help of a sponsor (experienced member)
- making amends for these errors
- learning to live a new life with a new code of behavior
- helping others that suffer from the same addictions or compulsions

("Twelve-step program - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia", 2009)

The Four Absolutes are Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness, and Absolute Love. (A.A. World Services Inc., 1980, p 54) Absolute Purity includes purity of mind, body, emotions, and heart. Absolute Honesty would mean to have fidelity in thought, word, and action – to not lie to self or others. Absolute Unselfishness means aiming to do the right thing in every situation. Absolute Love means to love yourself and others, to be more concerned about giving love, than receiving it, because in giving love, we live in love, and ultimately receive.

There is inconsistent use of the label "at-risk". For the purpose of this study, at-risk students are those referred to this school psychologist.

Review of Literature

While The Way 12-Step is not TSF, there is research already done on TSF which will be helpful in developing this program for school children. Twelve-Step Facilitation (TSF) consists of a structured, and manual-driven approach to facilitating early recovery from alcohol abuse/alcoholism and other drug abuse/addiction. It is intended to be implemented on an individual basis in 12 to 15 sessions and is based in behavioural, spiritual, and cognitive principles that form the core of 12-step fellowships such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). It is suitable for problem drinkers and other drug users and for those who are alcohol or other drug dependent. (Nowinski, 2000)

Marc Galanter, M.D., professor in the Department of Psychiatry at New York University School of Medicine, wrote.

AA's success rests on its ability to establish and maintain abstinence. This basic and essential accomplishment has tended to detract from the fact that AA is successful in good part because it is a sophisticated psychosocial form of treatment that addresses human psychological vulnerabilities that alcoholics and others share related to problems of self-regulation. (Galanter, 1989, p. 67)

This is one example of available research sources on the 12-step process.

There are journal articles on how peer mentoring plays important roles in promoting resilience and providing support for at-risk children and adolescents. (Southwick, 2006) Further exploration of them will be beneficial in thoroughly planning the essential peer-mentoring component of this new program.

The 1976 article in 24 Magazine, referred to earlier, is only one of numerous reference sources about The Way. A rich reservoir of knowledge is available. Some very helpful books are *The Way: The Essential Classic of Opus Dei's Founder* from the Christian tradition; *The Way: Using the Wisdom of Kabbalah for Spiritual Transformation and Fulfillment* offering teachings of the Kabbalah, which “is the birthright of all humanity” (Berg, 2002), not a part of any religion or ethnic group; *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way*, the Chinese Tao Te Ching (Daodejing), the way of Taoism; and *The Tao of Jung: The Way of Integrity*, a combination of Jungian concepts and Asian philosophies.

Methodology (Hypothesis)

Struggling students who participate in The Way 12-Step program achieve at a higher level and are happier than they were before participating in the program.

Type and Design

A program evaluation will be in place right from the beginning. Information will be collected from teachers, other staff, parents, administrators, and anyone else that has an interest. A committee will be formed, with supporters and skeptics alike. On down the line, exit interviews will be incorporated as well. A budget will need to be determined.

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A component of The Way Therapy will be regular group sessions. These could begin with once-a-week frequency. As the program develops, having several group times to choose from might be a possibility. This would enable attendance at more than one group session a week as well. The initial requirement to be a member of the group will be to have met with, or be meeting with, me. The only other prerequisite would be a personal acknowledgement of needing and wanting help. I see myself volunteering my time to do this, until I am fortunate enough to possibly do this during my normal school hours.

Peer mentoring will also be a key component. To begin with, young people recovering in Alcoholics Anonymous will participate in the meetings and as mentors until the program develops to the point where the children will mentor each other. Those with more experience will share their experience, strength, and hope with the newer children, regardless of age or grade.

A child will be guided through each of the twelve steps. They will then incorporate the process of each into their daily lives. Principles of the steps, including the Four Absolutes, become a part of who the child is. They may begin by “acting as if” they are honest, unselfish, and kind until they genuinely are.

Statement of the Problem, Sample, Instrumentation & Procedure

Will The Way 12-Step program improve students' coping skills? I see no need to compare one group of children to another so there will be no control group. The comparison is best made child by child, to where they were and where they are now after being in the program for a minimum three months.

Statistics

The effects on behavior and grades (achievement) will be measured by collecting new data and comparing to data collected on the child which brought them to be participating in The Way in the first place. Self-reflection surveys on happiness will also be given to the participants. These would be the results of comparing the data before The Way and at spot-checks afterward. A minimum time frame of three months will be needed before collected the first data.

Summary

I have a vision of helping children, preferably in grades four through six; although to begin with, any group of children from grade four and up would suffice. This program could be implemented in any school setting, mainstream or any degree of alternative. Will struggling students who participate in The Way 12-Step program achieve at a higher level and be happier than they were before participating in the program? I do contend so. Children will be guided through the Way and learn principles for living that will empower them and give them solutions for navigating challenging problems and creating healthy relationships.

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