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Road Map for Teen Groups

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Reconnecting Youth™ Inc.

CAST

Coping And Support Training

A Brief Group Preventive Intervention for Curbing Suicidal Behaviors, Depression/Aggression and Drug Involvement Among High-Risk Youth



BACKGROUND

Adolescent drug involvement, depression and suicidal behaviors are major co-occurring health problems, particularly among high-risk youth. A health promotion and prevention challenge is early identification of these youth and implementation of targeted, multi-faceted prevention programs to reduce co-occurring health-risk behaviors.

Youth at risk for high school dropout are at elevated risk for suicidal behaviors. They also typically experience co-occurring health risk behaviors, including depression and drug involvement. They are in need of *selective or indicated* preventive interventions.

Research shows that behavioral interventions are promising. Effective programs:

- Select for individuals or groups at high-risk for suicidal behaviors
- Incorporate cognitive-behavioral interventions for building problem-solving skills.

Suicide Risk and Protective Factors

Suicide Risk Behaviors—prior attempts, planning & preparation, suicide ideation and exposure to suicidal behaviors.

Related Risk Factors—hopelessness, anxiety, depression; drug involvement; anger, violence/victimization, impulsivity/risky behaviors.

Protective Factors: Personal Resources—personal control, problem-solving coping behaviors, self-esteem.

Protective Factors: Social Support Resources—amount and availability of network support, sense of support, and family support.

Surgeon General's Call for Suicide Prevention

- Suicide is a 2nd or 3rd leading cause of death among youth ages 15-19 years (varies by state), and in some states the youth suicide rates exceed homicide rates among young people.
- Youth suicide is a major public health problem.
- Implementation and tests of prevention approaches are needed.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

CAST (Coping and Support Training) is a proven evidence-based group approach to decreasing suicidal behaviors, depression and drug involvement among teens.

The CAST Program is grounded in a partnership model among students, school or agency personnel, parents and prevention specialists. CAST facilitator support is critical to the success of the program. Skills training is taught in the context of carefully nurtured peer group support. Parent involvement provides essential support at home. A crisis response team serves the CAST site by providing guidelines for staff and others to gain skills in recognizing suicide warning signs and providing help.

CAST can be offered to an entire population (as *universal* prevention, e.g., all 8th graders), to a high risk group (as *selective* prevention, e.g., potential school dropouts or LGB youth) or to specific at-risk youth (as *indicated* prevention, e.g., individuals who screen in at suicide risk).

The 12 CAST sessions are delivered to small groups of youth (6–8), twice per week over a six week period.

Below, we detail the CAST structure and content as well as the six essential prevention components of the program.

CAST Group Structure and Content

- **6-8 students per group, INVITED to participate**
- **Implemented in a school, community center, or youth oriented agency**
- **Conducted by a specially-selected and RY Inc. trained group facilitator**
- **Twelve 1-hr sessions over a 6-week period**
 - ~ A welcome session
 - ~ 10 skills training sessions (outlined below)
 - ~ A graduation celebration

The 10 skills training sessions cover these topics:

- Group support and self-esteem
- Monitoring/setting goals
- Building self-esteem
- Decision-making
- Anger Management
- School Smarts
- Drug Use Control
- Relapse Prevention
- Recognizing Progress/Staying on Track

CAST—Essential Program Components

Assessment/Feedback

Access to Help

Adult Motivation and Support

Peer Group Support

Coaching and Skills Training

Monitoring

CAST: A SCIENCE-BASED PROGRAM

In the research conducted at the University of Washington (UW), the CAST Program was evaluated using a repeated measures, experimental design that included random assignment to either CAST (including the CARE interview) or 'intervention as usual,' which replicated what a school would provide to a student at risk for suicide. Trend analyses and HLM served to compare patterns of change for CAST vs. the comparison group at baseline, 4 weeks, 10 weeks following CAST, and at 9 months follow-up.

Study Procedures

- ☑ Identify high-risk youth—randomly select
- ☑ Invite to participate; obtain written consent
- ☑ Complete baseline High School Questionnaire (HSQ), including the Suicide Risk Screen (SRS)
- ☑ Conduct assessment interview, CARE or Intervention as Usual (IAU)—connect to school personnel & parental support
- ☑ Participate in CAST six-week program
- ☑ Complete HSQ and interview (CARE or IAU)
- ☑ Follow-up at 9 months with HSQ including SRS Screen

The high school students who participated in CAST were an ethnically diverse group that included equal numbers of males and females. Importantly, 90% of the students in both groups completed questionnaires across all time points.



Student Characteristics

- 460 high risk youth at suicide-risk participated in the evaluation research project.
- Ages ranged from 15—19 years; in grades 9—12
- From multiple Pacific Northwest urban high schools
- 52% female; 48% male
- Diverse ethnic representation—55% ethnic minorities
- ~90% retention rate across the two study conditions
- Baseline equivalency across groups was established

Program Development

Over the past two decades, prevention scientists at the UW *Reconnecting Youth Prevention Research Program*, under the direction of Dr. Leona Eggert, designed and tested numerous programs to help high-risk youth decrease drug use and suicidal behaviors, and increase school performance.

CAST, a brief version of the parent *Reconnecting Youth* group approach to building life skills, was developed by Dr. Eggert and Ms. Liela Nicholas. CAST received extensive federal funding from NIH to test its efficacy in preventing suicide-risk and related behaviors. Dr. Eggert was the Principal Investigator on the CAST study, while Dr. Elaine Thompson served as the Co-Investigator and conducted the evaluation.

RY Inc. offers training onsite, on demand, both nationally and internationally, in the implementation of its prevention programs.

Program Outcomes

Relative to intervention as usual (IAU) comparisons, youth participating in CAST including CARE evidenced:

Reduced SUICIDE-RISK BEHAVIORS

- Sustained reductions in suicide-risk behavior 65% for CAST; 56% for IAU

Reduced DEPRESSION, ANXIETY AND ANGER PROBLEMS

- Sustained reductions in depression—44% for CAST and 24% for IAU; and in hopelessness—29% for CAST and 22% for IAU
- Reductions in anxiety—34% (females) & 27% (males) for CAST and 13% (females) & 21% (males) for IAU
- Reductions in anger—24% (females) & 20% (males) for CAST and 12% (females) & 20% (males) for IAU

Reduced DRUG INVOLVEMENT

- Significant reductions in hard drug use —62% for CAST; 27% for IAU
- Reductions in alcohol use—16% for CAST; 3% for IAU
- Reductions in drug use control problems —33% for CAST; 2% for IAU

Increased PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- CAST was significantly more effective in enhancing and sustaining higher levels of problem-solving coping—24% increase for CAST; 4% increase for IAU
- CAST was also more effective in enhancing higher levels of personal control—24% increase for CAST; 16% increase for IAU
- CAST was more effective for enhancing family support—27% for CAST; 14% for IAU

Conclusions:

The feasibility and efficacy of school-based suicide prevention (and suicide-risk screening) were demonstrated. CAST, combined with an assessment interview, was effective in reducing suicidal behaviors and related emotional distress and for enhancing protective factors. (Am. J of Public Health 2001, 91, 742-752)



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Coping And Support Training

IN SUMMARY . . .

What is CAST? Coping and Support Training (CAST) is a proven prevention program for youth at risk. It is a 12-lesson skills training program used by schools, community centers and other youth-oriented agencies. CAST is appropriate for middle or high school-aged youth.

What is the goal? The goal of the CAST program is to build coping skills, increase time spent in healthy activities, and enhance social support resources. The intended outcomes are decreased suicide risk behaviors (i.e., decreased depression, anger/aggression, increased school achievement (i.e., grades, credits earned, attendance, school bonding), and increased drug use control (i.e., decreased drug use, drug use control problems and adverse consequences).

PAY-OFFS . . .

- **CAST** worked to reduce suicide-risk behaviors, depression, hopelessness, anxiety and anger, reduce drug involvement, and increase school bonding and social resources (family support).
- **CAST** was more effective in enhancing and sustaining personal resources (personal control and problem-solving coping) when compared to intervention as usual.
- **CAST works! And we all benefit!**



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Reconnecting Youth™ Inc.