

THE DESIGN OF A MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM  
FOR 6TH GRADE STUDENTS

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# MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

## Abstract

Aggression is defined as any action done with the intention to harm another (Coie and Dodge, 1998). Whereas overt aggression is defined by behaviors such as physical fighting or verbal threats, relational aggression includes behaviors that have the intent of harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of peer relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006). Taken together, nearly half of all students in grades 4-12 report being bullied in the previous month in school, and persistent bullying is associated with increased mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, poor academic achievement and difficulty forming meaningful relationships. The literature regarding various types of aggressive behavior, gender differences, school-based aggression prevention programs, and the potential role of mindfulness strategies in decreasing aggressive behavior was reviewed. The program was designed for sixth grade students in a suburban middle school and was informed by the results of a needs assessment that explored the extent to which students reported engaging in, or being the victim of, aggressive behavior. The results of the needs assessment suggested that these students regularly experienced types of overt and relational aggression and often did not intervene when they witnessed this occurring between peers. The designed program consists of 12 lunch-time sessions that include psychoeducation about the purpose of anger, its situational antecedents and somatic cues, mindfulness-based strategies, assertiveness skills training and perspective-taking exercises to decrease bystander behavior. Also included are detailed lesson plans, handouts and other helpful resources for program implementation. Finally, limitations and implications for school-based mental health were discussed.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Aggression Defined**

Most broadly, aggression is defined as any action done with the intention to harm another (Coie & Dodge, 1998). Decades of research citations have focused on the issue of aggression in youth, and its maladaptive effects on wellbeing. However, it was not until the 1990s and early 2000s that researchers (i.e. Bjorkqvist, 2001; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) noted how previous studies on aggression among school-aged children were skewed in the direction of male aggression, and how female aggression might encompass a different set of behaviors. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) were the first to conceptualize relational aggression as being fundamentally different from other forms of aggression and observed that relational aggression is more prevalent among females than males.

Relational aggression, as defined by Crick and Grotpeter (1995), includes a set of behaviors that have the intent of harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships. Recent studies suggest that first experiences of peer relational aggression are likely to occur between the sixth and ninth grades (American Association of University Women, 1993), and that relational aggression is more common among females than males (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Remillard & Lamb, 2005). Females tend to experience increases in levels of social intelligence earlier on than males, and are more capable than males of relational aggression at an earlier age (Bjorkqvist, 2001). In addition, recent studies suggest that the emotional damage from relational aggression is more dramatic for girls (Crick et al., 1996). In fact, exposure to relational aggression is consistently related to poor mental health outcomes such as loneliness, depression, and suicidal ideation (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) as well as low self-esteem in the areas of social relationships and physical attractiveness, especially for girls

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(Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Furthermore, adolescents who admit to having bullied their peers in such ways also admit to having been victims (Adler & Adler, 1998), so the experience of relational aggression is likely to perpetuate a cycle of victim-aggressor within friendship groups.

### **Context, Purpose and Rationale of Study**

The PI for this project worked as a counselor at Highland Park Middle/High School during the 2016-2017 academic year as part of the Highland Park Teen Center, a school-based youth services program providing individual and group therapy, as well as other extracurricular programming/activities for both schools. A common theme throughout the academic year, as noted by the PI herself as well as colleagues at the Teen Center, teachers and principals, was the prevalence of mental health and relational issues that were a direct consequence of being the perpetrator of, or victim of, aggression. This was particularly true for students in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. For these reasons, it is expected that the needs assessment will reflect a need to develop a program to target these issues.

Another motivation for undertaking this project is the ultimate goal of developing a group-based psychotherapy program that may prevent relational aggression from escalating over the course of the Middle School years, and beyond. Research demonstrates that relational aggression typically peaks in the Middle School years (Crick, 1996; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000), and that relational aggression will be more common among females than males (i.e. Remillard & Lamb, 2005), so it is likely that the students taking part in this research will endorse experiences with relational aggression, as either a perpetrator, victim, or both.

Taken together, this evidence base suggests that if relational aggression is a problem in sixth grade students at Highland Park Middle School, it will have a potentially lasting effect on their mental health, self-image, and ability to form relationships with others. Currently, there are



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no specific programs in place to address these issues in the Middle School. As such, a needs assessment will allow for the design of a program that would address school-specific issues with relational aggression in order to prevent further escalation of these behaviors and their adverse effects on students' self-esteem and mental health.

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## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Types of Aggression

Decades of research citations have focused on the issue of aggression in youth, and its maladaptive effects on wellbeing. As stated by Coie and Dodge (1998), aggression is defined as any action done with the intention to harm another and is a set of behaviors typically present throughout the lifespan. However, the distinction between different types of aggressive behaviors is relatively recent, having only emerged within the last 25 years. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) were among the first to distinguish between and define overt aggression and relational aggression. Whereas overt aggression is defined by behaviors such as physical fighting or verbal threats intended to harm another, relational aggression includes a set of behaviors that have the intent of harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of peer relationships, such as through the use of ostracism, manipulation of social relationships, rumors, or gossip (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006).

The distinction between types of aggressive behavior was of particular interest to many researchers in the 1990s and early 2000s. Previous studies on aggression among school-aged children demonstrated strong gender differences in aggressive behavior, with males exhibiting more aggression than females (Block, 1983; Kendrick 1987). However, Crick & Grotpeter (1995) speculated that females exhibit similar levels of aggressive behavior, but that it is expressed differently in their peer groups. Specifically, they hypothesized that “when attempting to inflict harm on peers, children do so in ways that best thwart or damage the goals that are valued by their respective gender groups” (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Indeed, results from their research suggested that boys are more likely to exhibit physical aggression because physical dominance and instrumentality are more valued in their social groups, whereas females rely on relational aggression because of the importance of forming meaningful, intimate social

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connections with peers (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). In conclusion, there were significant gender differences in type of aggressive tactics used (overt versus relational) but no overall difference in overall levels of aggression, which contradicted previous research.

Crick, Bigbee, and Howes (1996) further contributed to this area of burgeoning research by investigating children's beliefs about the nature of relationally aggressive behaviors. When surveyed, 9-12-year-old children associated relationally aggressive behaviors, especially manipulation, with "meanness" and anger. This study also demonstrated significant gender and age differences in the use of relational aggression. Whereas physical aggression and verbal insults were described as the most common harmful behaviors used by boys, relational aggression was the more commonly utilized by girls in order to harm their peers (Crick et al., 1996). Furthermore, the results indicated that for girls, the use of relational aggression increases with age, as such behaviors were rated as more normative within female peer groups in fifth and sixth graders as compared to third graders. These findings provided further support for gender and developmental differences in the use of aggressive behaviors.

Crick (1996) further contributed to research on relational aggression by examining the stability of such behaviors over time, as well as their impact on future social adjustment. She discovered that, when assessed at three different time points, relationally aggressive behaviors remained stable over the course of the academic year, and that current use of relationally aggressive behaviors predicted future use. Crick interpreted such results as a caveat for students, parents and teachers, stating that "without intervention, relationally aggressive children are likely to remain aggressive over time." In addition, Crick's research suggested that relational aggression was more correlated with negative changes in social adjustment for females (i.e. becoming less accepted, more rejected), than for males. This further supported the idea that

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relational aggression is particularly damaging for females, for whom forming meaningful interpersonal relationships is more salient.

However, there is an emerging body of evidence suggesting that there are no gender differences in utilization of relational aggression. Card, Stucky and Little (2008)'s meta-analysis of 148 studies on aggression in childhood found that males are significantly more likely than females to engage in direct aggression, but there was no significant difference in the use of relational aggression between gender groups. Similarly, Lansford and colleagues (2012) examined the nature of gender differences in relational and physical aggression across nine countries. They found that whereas males were significantly more physically aggressive across all nine countries, there was no consistent gender difference in the use of relational aggression.

Taken together, these studies provided a new lens with which to view the full spectrum of aggressive behaviors occurring in childhood. Relational aggression is conceptually distinct from overt aggression, and whereas males tend to utilize more physical aggression, gender differences in relational aggression merit additional investigation (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick & Nelson, 2002; Lehman, 2018). Furthermore, relational aggression may remain stable over the course of an academic year, but also has the potential to increase with age without sufficient intervention (Crick, 1996; Crick et al., 1996).

### **Gender and Development**

Examining the intersection between gender and development helps to elucidate the reasons why relational aggression may be more prevalent among females of certain ages. Specifically, females and males have different social goals which become especially salient in pre-adolescence when same-sex peer groups begin to emerge (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Gavin & Furman, 1989). Whereas boys tend to value dominance and competition, females place more

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value on forming intimate, meaningful peer relationships in order to become part of a stable peer group (Gavin & Furman, 1989).

Gavin and Furman's (1989) research also focused on investigating the importance of peer groups for adolescents. They demonstrated that the importance of being in a peer group peaked during early and middle adolescence (7<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> grades). These results replicated Crocket et al.'s (1984) findings demonstrating that the importance of the peer group increased between sixth and eighth grade. Specifically, girls reported achieving greater relationship intimacy and emotional investment than boys and that they were more bothered by negative peer group events or antagonistic interactions than their same-aged male counterparts (Gavin & Furman, 1989). If girls are primarily motivated by establishing close friendships, then it is logical that they would be more negatively influenced by interactions that undermine their relationships or status in a social group.

However, Lehman's (2018) study on the association between gender, academics and aggression demonstrated that males can, and do, utilize relational aggression in alignment with their more salient social goals of dominance and masculinity. His research suggests that academically successful boys may be bullied through physical or verbal means, but relational aggression is a previously overlooked way in which boys are "punished by their peers for failing to display masculinity" (Lehman, 2018). In other words, boys will engage in relationally aggressive behavior (e.g. through rejection or exclusion) to avoid damaging their own reputation by socializing with less masculine or dominant peers.

### **Social and Psychological Impact**

As aggressive behaviors are among the most commonly reported behaviors associated with 'meanness' in children and adolescents (Crick et al., 1996), it is important to understand their potential for negative psychological and emotional impact.

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Crick et al. (2001) demonstrated that throughout the lifespan, relational victimization is associated with social maladjustment. Specifically, such victimization confers increased risk for development of internalizing disorders (i.e. depression, anxiety), externalizing disorders (i.e. oppositional defiant or conduct disorders), or difficulty establishing peer relationships (Crick et al., 2001). Relational victimization is also thought to predict future social difficulties, including increased peer rejection. However, Card et al. (2008) posit that each distinct form of aggression conveys risks for different types of maladjustment; whereas direct aggression was more strongly associated with the development of externalizing problems, poor peer relations and low prosocial behavior, indirect aggression was more related to the development of internalizing problems. (Card et al., 2008). These findings were further supported by Yoon, Barton and Taiariol's (2004) study on relational aggression amongst middle school students. They discovered that victims of relational aggression were more likely to exhibit depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem than same-aged peers who did not experience relational aggression. In addition, they purported that children who are victims of relational aggression are less likely to be accepted into peer friendship groups, and that over time, they begin to blame themselves for their mistreatment by peers (Yoon et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Remillard & Lamb (2005) conducted research about the ways in which females cope with relational aggression. They discovered that the more hurt girls experienced when victims of relationally aggressive behavior, the more likely they were to engage in wishful thinking, blame themselves for being the victim, or engage in social withdrawal. In addition, the majority of girls reported still feeling "close" to a peer after being victimized by them (Remillard & Lamb, 2005), an outcome that can be interpreted in two ways. It is possible that these girls possessed adequate problem-solving abilities and were able to forgive their aggressor, but on the other hand, it may be that these victims so highly prioritized these friendships that they were

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willing to suffer through them even at the expense of themselves (Remillard & Lamb, 2005). The latter explanation is supported by Card et al. (2008) who found that girls experiencing relational aggression engaged in higher prosocial behavior than those who had not experienced relational aggression, in an attempt to regain a sense of acceptance by their peers. Taken together, this body of literature suggests aggression has the potential to create short and long-term negative consequences for the emotional, psychological and social well-being of adolescents.

### **Aggression in School**

Relational aggression is commonplace in the school environment. Unlike physical aggression, which is more easily detected by adults and thus more likely to be punished, relational aggression is more covert and thus often goes unnoticed without negative consequences for the perpetrator (Yoon & Kerber, 2003).

Certain characteristics of a school's environment may facilitate relational aggression. For example, Yoon and Kerber (2003) found that when teachers were presented with scenarios depicting relational aggression or more overt forms of aggression, they were more likely to view the former as more normative and less harmful. Thus, they were less likely to intervene on behalf of the victims of relational aggression by using strategies such as ignoring the incident altogether or suggesting that the students talk about their problems (Yoon and Kerber, 2003). These passive styles of intervention also meant that the perpetrators were not given negative consequences for their behaviors, and nothing to deter them from utilizing them in the future to obtain similar social goals or status. Lastly, Yoon and Kerber discovered that when victims did not receive helpful responses from their teachers or other staff members in the school, they were more likely to view their school environment as unsafe. Teachers' responses (or lack of response) in these situations, however, may be partially explained by the predominant belief that such behaviors

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amongst middle school-aged children are normative (e.g. “all kids that age are mean”) and only a phase (e.g. “they will grow out of it.”) (Yoon et al., 2004).

When a child views their school environment as unsafe or unsupportive, they are likely to suffer academically. Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006) investigated the relationship between peer rejection and decreased academic achievement, which included the variables of classroom participation and school refusal. Whereas peer abuse (defined as overt physical or verbal aggression) was more strongly associated with school exclusion, peer exclusion (defined by the presence of relational aggression) was more strongly associated with decreased classroom participation (Buhs et al., 2006). Decreased classroom participation, however, was more predictive of decreases in academic achievement than school refusal; thus, relationally aggressive behaviors that create peer exclusion merit more attention.

### **School-Based Aggression Programs**

To date, there has been substantial research on the design and implementation of programs to address forms of overt aggression (e.g. verbal, physical) within the school context (Yoon et al., 2004). However, preventative interventions targeting relational aggression have only recently emerged and few have garnered empirical support (Ostrov et al., 2009). Given the strong research support for a relationship between physical and relational aggression, some researchers some researchers have built relational aggression prevention programs upon those targeting physical aggression (Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). To date, most of the scholarly work on relational aggression prevention has been descriptive or predictive in nature, so prevention programs specifically targeting relational aggression are far from being widely implemented (Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015).

Some of the existing programs are universal prevention programs targeting all students in a particular grade or classroom setting. For example, the Early Childhood Friendship Program



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(Ostrov et al., 2009) is a classroom-based preventative intervention for children three to five years old that focuses on decreasing physical aggression, relational aggression and peer victimization while simultaneously increasing prosocial behavior through various participatory activities such as puppet shows. Systematic observations of children's behavior pre- and post-intervention produced large effect sizes in terms of reduction of relational aggression, and moderate effect sizes for decreases in physical aggression and increases in prosocial behavior (Ostrov et al., 2009). However, it is worth noting that raters (the classroom teachers) were not blind to the study hypothesis and such data were only observational in nature.

“You Can’t Say You Can’t Play” is another classroom-based universal prevention program designed for Kindergarten classrooms. Unlike the ECFP, this program focuses on eliminating social exclusion by changing the peer and classroom climate. A preliminary study of the program's efficacy found mixed results for the program's effectiveness. While there were no statistically significant changes in children's social exclusion behaviors and children actually reported more dissatisfaction with their peer relationships, they also reported liking their peers more (Harrist & Bradley, 2003).

Other school-based intervention programs target students in elementary or middle school. Friend 2 Friend (F2F) is an indicated intervention for relationally aggressive females from 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades (Leff et al., 2009). Designed for a group of urban, African American females, the program includes culturally-relevant social problem-solving scenarios with the goal of teaching new, prosocial behaviors, as well as decreasing relational and physical aggression, and helping students identify physiological signs of arousal that may precede aggressive behavior. Results suggested that relationally aggressive girls who were randomly assigned to the F2F program had large reductions in relational aggression and significant improvements in teacher likability (Leff et al., 2009). Furthermore, Cappella and Weinstein's (2006) Social Aggression

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Prevention Program (SAPP) is a universal prevention program for utilizing a small-group format for ethnically diverse 5<sup>th</sup> grade girls. The program is designed to reduce social aggression through increasing empathy, social problem-solving skills and prosocial behaviors. However, its impact was limited as it resulted in no differences in social aggression pre- and post-intervention and only moderate effect sizes in terms of social problem-solving abilities. Taken together, it seems that future relational aggression prevention would benefit from more rigorous empirical methods when assessing interventions effectiveness. In addition, the option of designing programs to fit the needs of a certain gender or cultural group merits further exploration.

### **Mindfulness**

The term “mindfulness”, itself, was not coined until the 1960s, and was previously spoken of using words from the language *Pali*, in which the sacred texts of Buddhism were originally written (Dryden & Still, 2006). Although there are many variations in translation, “mindfulness” is considered a combination of the words *sati* and *sampajanna* (Dryden & Still, 2006). Whereas *sati* has connotations of the words “memory,” “attention,” “self-possession” and “mind development” in English, *sampajanna* roughly translates to “awareness” (Dryden & Still, 2006).

Although mindfulness practices have clear origins in Buddhism, these practices became far more secularized in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In modern society, elements of mindfulness can be found in many religions and also practiced entirely independent of religion. Although others who have developed their own mindfulness practices will continue to make a more explicit connection with Buddhism, these practices all share one important thing in common which is described in the following quote: “Instead of attacking symptoms as essentially negative and undesirable, the emphasis is on nonjudgmental acceptance of symptoms, and a focus on more positive alternatives” (Dryden & Still, 2006). What underlies this idea is the

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subjectivist turn towards ways of knowing that are based in bodily experience and what it means to be human.

The most prominent example of mindfulness-based psychology in the United States is Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Unsurprisingly, Kabat-Zinn was highly influenced by Buddhism but he makes it abundantly clear that he has isolated this practice from its original religious context (Dryden & Still, 2006). Although Kabat-Zinn initially developed MBSR for the treatment of chronic pain, its use has now expanded and garnered empirical support in the treatment of many psychological issues, including mood and anxiety disorders (Dryden & Still, 2006). Kabat-Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness as "the awareness that arises when you pay attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally." MBSR departs from the original focus of mindfulness as decreasing suffering, to an emphasis on managing stress. Kabat-Zinn would argue that by focusing in on the present moment, we are able to tap into our inner resources that are always available to us and that can be used as tools to regulate emotion (i.e. coming back to the breath). In the 8-week MBSR program, participants develop increased awareness of what it means to be alive by becoming more fully in touch with their own bodies and five senses. There are several meditations included in his program that increase these capacities, including the Body Scan, Walking Meditation, Mindful Eating Meditation, and meditations that focus on mindful awareness of everyday activities (Dryden & Still, 2006).

### **Mindfulness and Aggression**

An extensive body of literature touts the many physical and emotional benefits of engaging in mindfulness practices, including improved life satisfaction, decreased stress, and improved mood (Shapiro et al., 2008). In addition, recent MRI studies have suggested that

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mindfulness, when practiced consistently over time, produces structural changes in areas of the brain responsible for emotion modulation (Leung et. al 2013).

Recently, the negative correlation between mindfulness-related practices and aggression has received more empirical attention. Specifically, research has focused on identifying what psychological factors lead individuals to utilize aggressive behaviors and the ways in which mindfulness interventions can attenuate such processes. For example, rumination, defined by “repetitive, uncontrollable thoughts about negative internal or external experiences” (Martin & Tesser, 1996) is a mental process that significantly contributes to aggressive behavior. In other words, when individuals harp on their experiences of negative emotions, unfortunate life situations or interpersonal difficulties (e.g. when someone has wronged them), they are more likely to aggress. Measures of rumination have been found to correlate with vengefulness, particularly after suffering hurt or betrayal on an interpersonal level (Barber et al., 2005), particularly because rumination “facilitates the formation of negatively distorted interpretations of ambiguous events” (Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998). In addition, hostile rumination is a predictor of self-reported aggressive behavior in adolescents (Caprara et al., 2007). Miller et al. (2003) proposed a mechanism behind this link, stating the rumination maintains the activation of anger-associated brain networks over time, which makes subsequent aggressive behavior more likely.

There is accumulating evidence to suggest that mindfulness-based interventions may decrease aggressive behavior through decreasing rumination. In developing their Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), Brown and Ryan (2003) discovered a negative correlation between trait mindfulness and rumination. In addition, other research has demonstrated that angry rumination accounts for the majority of the relationship between anger and aggressive behavior, and that certain aspects of the mindfulness approach are more likely to attenuate angry

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rumination than others (Peters et. al 2015). Specifically, Peters et al. (2015) found that nonjudgment of inner experiences and present-centered awareness are most likely to reduce aggressive behavior via decreased rumination. Recent experimental studies have also examined the effects of mindfulness practices for novice meditators on rumination. Those who engaged in a 10-day mindfulness retreat experienced a decrease in rumination, as well as decreases in symptoms of depression and anxiety (Chambers et al., 2008). Similarly, Shapiro et al. (2008) found that those who participated in an 8-week mindfulness meditation program reported decreases in rumination, a change which further accounted for decreases in anxiety and depression symptoms.

Baer et al. (2003) suggest that mindfulness practices can serve as a form of attentional control, in that individuals are able to consciously direct their attention towards current sensations and away from past negative events. Specifically, by learning to accept the existence of unpleasant emotions or experiences in life, individuals are freed from continuing to harp on them (Teasdale et al., 2003). It is important to note that the goal of mindfulness is not to change the content of one's thoughts, however, but rather to change one's relationship to such thoughts (Borders, Earleywine & Jajodia, 2010).

### **Chapter III: Method**

The needs assessment for this investigation follows Maher's (2012) model for program design and evaluation. As this investigation involves program design only, two phases of Maher's model were utilized: the Clarification Phase, and the Design Phase. The following section will describe the outcome of the Clarification Phase, which includes the specification of a target population of interest, identification of that population's needs, and the context in which the program will take place once implemented.

#### **Target Population**

The target population for this investigation is sixth-grade students (n=130) at a suburban, public middle school. The students are from a wide range of socio-economic levels and are racially and ethnically diverse. As of the 2017-2018 academic year, 38% of students identified as Caucasian/White, 22% identified as Asian, 21% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 12% identified as Black, and 6% identified as biracial (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In addition, 37% of the students were eligible to receive either free or reduced lunch (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

#### **Needs Assessment**

According to Maher's (2012) model, the next step of the Clarification Phase is to determine the needs of the target population. Needs for any target population can fall under a variety of domains, so it is important to first identify the domains on which the needs assessment must focus. According to both quantitative and qualitative data about the nature of peer interactions amongst these 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, their needs fall under both the Affective and Socialization domains. The former is defined as "functions having to do with feelings, emotions, emotional control and related affective dimensions," whereas the latter "reflects functions of relating to individuals and groups in social contexts, including social discourses and leadership

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dimensions.” Both domains are relevant to the needs of the target population because students engage in aggressive behaviors when socializing with their peers, and aggressive behaviors are related to elements of emotion regulation, which would fall under the umbrella of the Affective Domain.

Maier (2012) states that after psychological domains are identified, needs assessment questions must be generated in order to guide program planning. For the purposes of program design, a need can be defined as “a discrepancy between a current state of affairs (CSA) having to do with psychological or educational functioning of the target population and a desired state of affairs (DSA) pertinent to it” (Maier, 2012). Three needs assessment questions have been identified for this target population.

1. To what extent are 6<sup>th</sup> grade students experiencing aggression at school?

CSA: 6<sup>th</sup> grade students experience aggression (e.g. relational, overt) at school.

DSA: 6<sup>th</sup> grade students do not experience aggression (e.g. relational, overt) at school.

2. To what extent do 6<sup>th</sup> grade students utilize aggressive behaviors at school?

CSA: 6<sup>th</sup> grade students utilize aggressive behaviors (e.g. relational, overt) at school.

DSA: 6<sup>th</sup> grade girls do not utilize aggressive behaviors (e.g. relational, overt) at school.

3. To what degree do 6<sup>th</sup> grade students effectively manage their emotions when experiencing aggression at school?

CSA: 6<sup>th</sup> grade students do not effectively manage their emotions when experiencing aggression at school.

DSA: 6<sup>th</sup> grade students effectively manage their emotions when experiencing aggression at school.

The final step is to identify the data collection variables that will address each needs assessment question (Maier, 2012). The data collection points to address Question 1 include

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students' experiences of relational aggression, overt aggression, or being the recipient of prosocial behaviors from others. Variables that will address Question 2 include students engaging in relational aggression, overt aggression, or prosocial behaviors with their classmates. Finally, data collection variables pertaining to Question 3 include students' behavioral responses when witnessing or personally experiencing relational aggression that reflect their ability to self-regulate.

### Measures

**Self-report questionnaires.** The students were asked to fill out two self-report questionnaires: the Children's Social Experience Questionnaire- Self Report (CSEQ-SR) (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996) and the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Questionnaire (Furnari, 2011) for use in a needs assessment of a similar nature.

The Children's Social Experience Questionnaire- Self-Report (CSEQ-SR) is a 15-item Likert-style questionnaire rating questionnaire with each item requiring a rating such as how often certain experiences occur for them at school on a 1(Never) to 5 (All the time) scale. The questionnaire contains three subscales (overt aggression, relational aggression, and prosocial behavior), each consisting of five items. The Overt Victimization subscale assesses the frequency with which other students have harmed or threatened to harm the students' physical well-being. The Relational subscale assesses how often students have attempted to harm a student's peer relationships and the Prosocial Receipt scale measures how often a student has been the recipient of supportive acts by peers. Responses within each subscale are summed to yield a composite score for overt victimization, relational victimization, and receipt of prosocial acts, ranging from 5 to 25. Cronbach's alpha for the three scales are .78, .80 and .77, respectively (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996).



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The 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Questionnaire (Furnari, 2011) is also a 10-item Likert-type scale in which students are asked how often they have used certain behaviors in the previous two weeks. Ratings are given on a 1(Never) to 5(Always) scale. At the end of the questionnaire, there is also a space for students to describe, if they want to, anything else about these problems at their school. This questionnaire was developed to provide more information about relational aggression behaviors.

If a student reported suicidal or homicidal ideation, as well as any other potential threats to the safety of themselves or another, the student was referred to the school-based mental health services program for a thorough risk assessment.

### **Procedure**

After IRB approval, the PI, the middle school principal and the school district's superintendent agreed upon a method for distributing consent and assent forms. To initiate the consent and assent process, an administrator from the school district emailed a link to the consent forms (via Google Forms) to all families of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. A PDF copy of the consent form, in both English and Mandarin, was also attached to this email. A second follow-up email was sent out to families approximately 10 days following the initial contact. Afterwards, the PI visited the middle school to introduce herself to students and explain the nature of the study. During this visit, the PI introduced herself and the purpose of the study and provided each student with a paper copy of the consent and assent forms to return to their parents and guardians. After the holiday break, a final reminder email was sent out directly from the school superintendent in order to increase participation, due to a low consent form return rate. Any child who did not return a consent form was considered ineligible to participate in the study.

After consent forms were collected, the PI and physical education teachers at the middle school agreed upon a date for data collection in which the PI would administer the questionnaires

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during the two 6th grade physical education classes. The PI began with an introduction about what the study entailed and explained that students' parents had given permission for them to participate. Afterwards, students were asked to carefully read through the assent forms before deciding to participate. The PI also encouraged students to ask questions and provided additional information for those students who were unsure of their desire to participate. Afterwards, both questionnaires were administered via pen and paper. Students were asked not to not share their responses with other students at their tables and to avoid engaging in side conversation. After students finished completing their questionnaires, the PI checked each students' responses to determine if there was imminent risk to their health or well-being (e.g. suicidal statements). No such responses were identified; thus, the school's counseling center was not contacted. Afterwards, students and teachers were thanked for their participation and cooperation. This concluded data collection.

All student questionnaires were stored in a sealed folder until being opened again for data analysis, which was conducted within a week of data collection. A document linking students' names and participant numbers was separate from any documents containing their responses. Only students' participant numbers were used from this point forward; students' responses were in no way associated with their names or any other identifying information.

### **Data Analysis**

All students' data were included in the analyses. Descriptive statistics were calculated for both the CSEQ-S and the 6<sup>th</sup> grade student questionnaire.

The purpose of this data analysis was twofold. First, the results of the data analysis were utilized to answer the needs assessments questions outlined above and to help determine whether or not a need exists for an aggression prevention program for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students attending this middle school. Secondly, students' responses to the questionnaires served to inform the content

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and structure of the program to be designed. For example, if students reported higher levels of talking behind one another's backs but did not report as many issues with giving others "the silent treatment" (e.g. isolating and excluding others), the intended program would focus on skills that address the former. In addition, any notable strengths in students' prosocial behavior could also be harnessed in the designed program.

## Chapter IV: Results

### Context Assessment

**Ability to commit resources.** The Middle School has many resources that could be dedicated to this program. First and foremost, the human resources available to implement this program may be considered a strength of this organization. As previously mentioned, there is a school-based mental health services program that is already in existence and embedded in the hallway between the middle school and high school. Students from both schools regularly visit this space and take advantage of its many programs, including individual and group therapy, extracurricular clubs, and other school-wide events. Within the school-based mental health services program, there are four part-time externs, who are doctoral or masters-level students from social work, clinical or school psychology programs who typically lead other group activities offered by the Center. In addition, there are three other full-time staff members, including a family services coordinator, a program director and a supervising psychologist who oversee the externs' clinical and are also involved in leading groups and providing other services. Finally, the school-based mental health services program has a full-time secretary who helps other staff members listed above to schedule events and book rooms or spaces within the Middle School.

The Middle School and school-based mental health program also have ample technological resources to commit to the program. These resources include, but are not limited to computers, smartboards, and televisions that are currently set up in several spaces in the school or can be requested for use on a particular date and time. The school and its youth services program also have paper, writing instruments, and printer-copiers available as needed. Informational resources will be available in the form of a designed curriculum used to implement the intended program, and there are also physical resources that can be allotted to the program.

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The school-based mental health program has one group room that could accommodate a group of approximately 10-12 individuals, and other larger rooms within the Middle School (e.g. cafeteria side lounges) can be allocated upon request.

In terms of financial resources, the school-based mental health services program already in existence is funded by New Jersey's Department of Children and Families (DCF). Under this department, the Family and Community Partnerships' (FCP) Office of School-Linked Services (OSLS) contracts with school districts to provide prevention and support services for students in elementary, middle and high schools throughout the state. Once designed, this aggression prevention program would be one additional group therapy offering available to students through this school-based program. Finally, sufficient temporal resources exist within the school day in order to offer this program. Staff within the school-based youth services program regularly offer extracurricular or psychotherapy-driven groups during study hall periods, lunchtime or after school. Thus, this program is not the first of its kind or nature, so it could be incorporated into the existing school framework without major incident.

**Values the organization ascribes to the target population and its needs.** One of the values held by this organization is the importance of celebrating and embracing diversity. They demonstrate commitment to this value through holding annual events that are designed to increase awareness and celebration of cultures and traditions represented by students and their families. For example, the Community Teen Center and schools join together to host annual events such as the Chinese Lunar New Year Celebration, Hispanic Heritage Night, Black History Month event, and Men's and Women's Empowerment groups. Furthermore, the school district was recently recognized by District Administration Magazine for its forward-thinking gender identity protections policy.

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In addition, this organization highly values students' social and emotional wellbeing. The Community Teen Center, a school-based youth services program adopted by the school district in 1989, provides individual, family and group counseling services to students and families free of charge. Teachers and other school administrators often recognize those who are having academic, emotional and behavioral difficulties and readily refer these students to the Community Teen Center. Other opportunities for enhancing students' extracurricular involvement, and leadership skills, are available through participation in various clubs and activities offered through the Community Teen Center, such as the Women's Issues Club, Philosophy Club, and DECA. Furthermore, the school district regularly integrates lessons on substance use and bullying prevention, as well as safe sexual practices, into class curricula, and has focused on utilizing restorative practices within the classroom environment and embedding such practices in the discipline code.

Recently, the school district has been very receptive to meeting the needs of its students and families. In June of 2016, it developed a strategic plan named Pathways to Excellence, with input from over 60 students, school personnel and parents. Two of the goals identified by the key stakeholders fall within the Affective and Socialization domains targeted by this needs assessment: (i) that the district's curriculum and instruction support the "whole" child (i.e. academic, social, emotional and mental wellness of every student), and (ii) that the district will "ensure the inclusion and support of students, of all abilities, races, cultures, religions, belief systems, sexual orientations, genders/gender identities, and socio-economic backgrounds."

Prior to the delineation and implementation of Pathways to Excellence, incidents of physical and/or relational aggression were typically responded to in a traditional disciplinary manner. For example, when exhibiting such behaviors, students may have been verbally reprimanded in class or sent out of the classroom if the behavior became severe. However, the

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amount of attention directed toward such behaviors may have served to reinforce them, rather than eliminate them. However, in the past, teachers have been open to programs that would address issues of aggression. For example, when the Principal Investigator was a student counselor at the Community Teen Center during the 2016-2017 academic year, she identified the need for a program to address relational aggression amongst female students in the Middle School. Teachers were supportive of a series of “Friendship Workshops” in which female high school students provided advice and mentorship about cultivating healthy friendships.

**Beliefs stakeholders have about the current state of affairs.** Currently, the Middle School principal and the District Superintendent are aware of the program to be designed. Through in-person meetings and phone/email communication, the PI has explained her objective of conducting a needs assessment in order to design an aggression prevention program for 6th grade students. The PI also sought feedback from these stakeholders, as well as the Middle School’s physical education teachers and the supervising psychologist of the Community Teen Center, about best practices for implementing a needs assessment and program design.

Since the passage of the NJ Anti-Bullying legislation in 2011, the school district has made a concerted effort to educate its students on harassment, intimidation and bullying in order to decrease aggressive behaviors. Such education typically occurs through health class, but the Community Teen Center also offers anger management and emotion regulation psychotherapy groups specifically targeted at Middle School students. As previously mentioned, students also can receive individual or family-based services through the Community Teen Center in order to address these issues. Despite these efforts, however, correspondence with Middle School teachers suggests that students’ aggressive behaviors interfere with their educational agendas and negatively contribute to the overall climate of safety in the school. As teachers were open to the idea of the “Friendship Workshops” mentioned above, it is likely that they would be supportive

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of a longer-term group program specifically targeting prevention of aggressive behaviors. In addition, students themselves often arrive at the Community Teen Center in crisis when experiencing relational or overt aggression from peers in order to seek support or counseling.

**Circumstances within the organization.** The school district's superintendent, who is the biggest proponent of the proposed program, is very likely to remain in his current role for several years to come. He was hired as the district's superintendent in 2015, but he has also lived in the area for over 20 years and was recently named his county's Superintendent of the Year for the 2017-2018 academic year. The superintendent is also very motivated to continue progressing toward the goals outlined in the Pathways to Excellence strategic plan. One of these goals, as previously discussed, involves supporting students' mental wellness, which directly aligns with the objectives of the proposed aggression prevention program. While teacher turnover is unlikely to be significantly different from state averages, the Middle School has had four different principals and four different assistant principals since 2012. This is likely a higher rate of administrative turnover than would be expected.

**Timing.** The individuals that would implement this program through the Community Teen Center receive stipends for their volunteer work as part of their graduate school externship experience. New Jersey's Department of Children and Families provides funding for the Community Teen Center, which is a designated school-based youth services program. The Community Teen Center applies for grant funding from the state every five years and has been successful in each attempt since its inception. However, one main challenge is that employment costs have increased (e.g. salaries, benefits) without the requisite increase in grant funding from the state. This has resulted in program cuts, and it is expected that 100% of grant funding will soon be allocated to personnel. In general, the supervising psychologist and director of the



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Community Teen Center are supportive of this proposed project, as is the school district superintendent.

Furthermore, recent incidents within the school district may make this program more desirable to school personnel, students and families. Although physical aggression, overall, seems to have decreased within the Middle School, the school district is now dealing with a pervasive issue with cyberbullying, as well as the use of white nationalist/hateful rhetoric by students.

**Obligation to assist the target population.** Several stakeholders within the organization can be identified as active supporters of a programmatic approach with the target population. As previously mentioned, the school superintendent has expressed his strong interest in the creation of such a program. In his professional work in education, he demonstrates a strong commitment to developing and implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) programs in schools, and the proposed program would fall under this category. Teachers and administrators in the Middle School are also aware of aggression-related issues and have previously demonstrated interest in programs that address them. Finally, the staff at the Community Teen Center have also expressed interest and support for the program design, and its eventual implementation. It is not anticipated that any groups would oppose this program.

**Resistance.** It is unlikely that the program would encounter any significant resistance in the Middle School. As previously mentioned, the teachers and administrators are aware of the issues with aggression that are present in the student body and have previously expressed support of programs that would address such issues. In addition, the program is planned to be offered during lunch or study hall, which are times during the day that many other programs (e.g. psychology-based groups, extracurriculars) are already offered. Thus, students are unlikely to be singled out or isolated by other students due to attending this group. However, there is always the

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possibility of resistance from the target population. Lunch hour and study hall are popular times for socialization, play and completion of homework, so students may prefer spending their free time doing these activities rather than participating in the proposed group. In addition, they may genuinely lack interest in mindfulness or its application to aggressive behavior and may feel uncomfortable participating in the group.

**Yield.** Such a program, if implemented as designed, is likely to produce system-wide benefits. Firstly, the proposed program aims to decrease aggressive behaviors and improve emotion regulation skills, which is in line with the school district's goal of attending to students' social and emotional needs as per their *Pathways to Excellence* strategic plan. Thus, the program may be one step toward achieving this goal. Furthermore, the opportunity for practicum students at the Community Teen Center to facilitate this group would contribute to their professional development in mindfulness-based interventions and conducting group psychotherapy in general. Finally, although the program does not specifically target students' academic performance, their academic performance may indirectly benefit. If aggressive behavior decreases as a result of the program, teachers may experience fewer disruptions during the school day (e.g. needing to manage behavioral issues resulting from aggressive behavior), enabling them to focus more on teaching. Students may also experience improved emotional well being and an enhanced ability to prioritize academics as a result of participating in the proposed program.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Parental consent forms were provided both electronically and in paper form. Out of the 130 sixth grade students enrolled, 15 consent forms were returned, a 12% response rate. Data were collected from 14 students due to one student's absence from school on the date of data collection. All students who were present on the date of data collection received and signed child assent forms. The PI explained the purpose of the study and gave students the opportunity to ask

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questions. Directions were read out-loud and each student received the same set of instructions for completion of the questionnaires. Students were instructed to sit one seat apart from one another in order to protect confidentiality of responses, and they were discouraged from discussing their answers out loud in order to minimize response bias.

**Experience of aggression.** The first needs assessment question, “To what extent are 6<sup>th</sup> grade students experiencing aggression at school?” was measured by the Children’s Social Experience Questionnaire - Self Report (CSEQ-S). This 15-item Likert-type questionnaire measures students’ experiences of relational and overt aggression, as well as prosocial behavior, on a 1 (never) to 5 (always) scale. Means, medians and standard deviations were calculated for each item and for the three subscales (relational aggression, overt aggression and prosocial behavior). See Table 1 below for means, medians and standard deviations.

There are no reference points for the data collected, as they were not included by the authors who developed this questionnaire. In addition, the high variability of individuals’ responses is important in understanding why the measures of central tendency do not reflect a more prominent need for this program. Thus, the results are also discussed in percentages.

*Relational aggression.* Fifty percent of students indicated that at some point, they have been left out, on purpose, by another peer. Similarly, fifty-three percent of students reported that at some point in time, a peer “got back at them” by excluding them from their group. Two-thirds of those students reported that this occurs anywhere from “sometimes” to “all of the time.” Furthermore, fifty percent of students reported that at some point, a peer has told them that they will not like them unless they do what they want them to. Finally, forty-three percent of students indicated that at some point, a peer has told lies about them so that they are disliked by others, and fifty percent indicated that a peer has said mean things about them so that they are disliked by others.

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*Overt aggression.* Seventy-one percent of students indicated that, at some point, they have been yelled at by a peer or called names. Within this group, fifty percent reported that this happens anywhere from “sometimes” to “almost all of the time.” Sixty-four percent of students indicated that, at some point, they have been pushed or shoved by a peer, and fifty percent reported that they have been threatened to be beaten up by a peer if they did not do what that peer wanted. Finally, students’ free responses to the final item of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade student questionnaire indicated issues with overt aggression within the student body. Excerpts from responses include the following: “Kids fight (not verbally) about sports,” “There are a lot of fighting threats,” “Kids get in fights a lot,” and “Some people make fun of someone just because their family does not have the money to get them a smartphone or a phone at all.”

*Table 1*

## Means/Medians

Item/Scale	Mean	SD	Median
RA total	1.97	1.16	2
R3	1.76	0.92	2
R6	2.21	1.18	2
R9	1.85	1.29	1
R11	1.93	1.27	1.5
R13	2.07	1.21	2
OA total	1.88	1.14	2
O2	1.64	0.84	1.5
O4	2.29	1.14	2
O7	2	1.11	2
O10	1.71	1.14	1
O14	1.79	1.42	1
PS total	3.5	1.07	3.5
P1	3.5	0.76	3.5
P5	3.79	1.05	4
P8	3.79	1.12	4
P12	3.71	0.73	4
P15	2.71	1.32	3

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**Utilization of aggressive behaviors.** The second needs assessment question, “To what extent do 6<sup>th</sup> grade students utilize aggressive behaviors at school?” was measured by items from the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Questionnaire. On this scale, students answered questions about their engagement in aggressive behaviors with their peers, which was rated on a 1(never) to 5(always) Likert-style scale. Eighty-six percent of students indicated that, at some point, they have gossiped or spread rumors about their peers and seventy-one percent reported leaving a peer out of an activity on purpose.

**Ability to regulate emotions when experiencing aggression.** The third needs assessment question, “To what degree do 6<sup>th</sup> grade students effectively manage their emotions when experiencing aggression at school?”, was also measured through select items from the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Questionnaire described above. These items assessed whether students are able to respond assertively to others, rather than passively or passive-aggressively, when they are the victims of aggressive behavior. In addition, select items from this questionnaire also measured students’ tendency to intervene when witnessing their peers experiencing aggression from others. As previously noted, the decision to intervene when witnessing aggressive behavior is dictated by emotion regulation processes on the part of the witness, so this is another way of measuring students’ ability to self-regulate and act effectively in these situations.

All students who took part in the study indicated some degree of difficulty with standing up for themselves without being mean or aggressive. Sixty-four percent reported that they only do this “sometimes” or “almost never.” In addition, students’ responses indicated difficulty communicating with someone who is aggressive towards them without talking behind their backs. Only twenty-eight percent indicated that they were able to communicate assertively “almost all of the time” or “always.” Finally, eighty-six percent of students indicated that, at some point, they did not get involved in situations where they witnessed aggression taking place

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between their peers, with sixty-four percent indicating that they get involved “sometimes,” “almost never,” or “never.”

## Chapter V: Program Design

### Purpose and Goals

**Statement of purpose.** All sixth-grade students meeting the eligibility criteria outlined below are welcome to participate in this program. Over the course of 12 weekly sessions, students will be provided psychoeducation about different forms of aggressive behavior and the utility of mindfulness exercises in improving emotion regulation when experiencing aggression. Students will also learn social problem-solving skills, such as assertive communication, through modeling, guided group discussions and roleplays, with the goal of decreasing the amount of bystander behavior in situations involving aggression. Overall, the designed program aims to decrease both overt and relationally aggressive behaviors through improving emotion regulation skills by way of mindfulness exercises. A second aim is to decrease bystander behaviors through teaching students skills to appropriately manage aggression amongst their peers, thereby improving the quality of the social climate at school.

**Goals.** *Goal 1:* At the conclusion of the program, students will be able to define and identify aggressive behavior.

1. It is anticipated that 90% of students will be able to correctly answer the question, “What is aggression?” according to definitions in the psychoeducational material provided.
2. 80% of students will also be able to correctly define each of the four types of aggressive behavior (e.g. verbal, physical, relational and cyberbullying).
3. Finally, it is expected that 80% or more of students will be able to provide a real-life example of each of the four types of aggressive behavior or identify their occurrence in roleplays or scenarios presented through written or video material.
4. At the end of the program, the group facilitator will ask the group of students to answer these questions.

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*Goal 2:* By the end of the program, 80% of students will:

1. Report decreases in aggressive behavior. Specifically, they will report decreases due to improved:
  - a. Ability to identify bodily cues and thoughts associated with their experiences of anger or other negative emotions related to aggression. It is anticipated that students will rate the identification of bodily cues and thoughts preceding aggressive behavior (or when they are victims of it) more frequently at the end of the program than during session 1.
  - b. Use of social emotional learning (SEL) skills, including but not limited to: 3-minute breathing space meditation, assertiveness skills and “I” statements. It is expected that students will rate their use of these skills more highly (frequently) at the conclusion of the program than during session 1.
  - c. Students will rate their awareness of bodily and cognitive cues of anger, as well as their use of aggressive behavior and social emotional learning skills, at the beginning of session one and at the conclusion of the program.

### **Eligibility Standards and Criteria**

Students are eligible to participate if they meet the following criteria:

1. The student is enrolled in the sixth grade.
2. The student has parent permission to participate (receipt of a signed consent form).
3. The student provides assent to participate and attend 12 sessions during lunch time.

Research demonstrates that relationally aggressive behavior tends to peak during the Middle School years (Crick, 1996; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000). Therefore, offering this



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program to sixth grade students may be preventative in nature, decreasing the likelihood of relational aggression increasing throughout development. In addition, although physical and verbal aggression usually peak during early childhood and then plateau during middle childhood and adolescence (Dodge, Coie and Lynam, 2006), various factors influence this trajectory. For example, low parental involvement, low parental warmth, affiliation with a deviant peer group, poor academic achievement, low socioeconomic status and exposure to adverse life events at a young age are all risk factors for increases in physical aggression into adolescence (Dodge, Greenberg and Malone, 2008). Thus, receiving instruction in emotion regulation and assertiveness skills may prevent some of these behaviors from exacerbating over time. Parental permission is also included because this is an ethical requirement for minors and an institutional requirement according to the Community Teen Center's policies. Finally, students and their parents must agree to attend the majority of the 12 weekly sessions. The curriculum is cumulative in nature, so students with inconsistent attendance are unlikely to benefit from the social emotional learning skills taught throughout. In addition, consistent attendance is important for forming and maintaining group cohesion.

### **Policies and Procedures**

#### *Policies*

1. Only students meeting the eligibility criteria can participate.
2. Students should demonstrate active engagement in the activities involved in the group.
3. Students must uphold the group rules of confidentiality and respect. Violations of these rules will be addressed by the group leader on a case-by-case basis. Two or more violations may necessitate a student's removal from the group.

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4. Students must regularly attend group sessions. Two missed sessions will lead to that student's removal from the group.

These policies provide the group leader and other administrative staff with clear guidelines for how the program should operate. It also delineates how to manage violations of group rules.

### *Procedures*

1. All sixth-grade students will receive permission slips and an introductory letter during physical education class. The group leader will briefly introduce the purpose of the group.
2. An electronic version of the permission slips and introductory letters will also be distributed to students and their families through email or the school portal.
3. Students will also be required to give assent to participate in the program. They will fill out an assent form at the beginning of the first session.
4. Enrollment will close after the second session, at which point no new members will be allowed to join the group in order to preserve group dynamics.
5. At the beginning of each session, students will be reminded of the group rules and attendance policy.
6. Each session will be held during the lunch period and will last for approximately 40 minutes. Lesson plans are built based on material to be covered within a 35-minute period.
7. Lesson plans should be followed sequentially because each lesson builds upon the previous lessons. This format maximizes the opportunity for students to acquire and practice new skills.

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8. Items in lesson plans that are designated with an asterisk (\*) can be flexibly applied depending on the group leader's clinical judgment.

These procedures provide the group leader and other administrative staff with guidance in recruiting students, obtaining informed consent and assent, emphasizing group rules and guidelines, and implementing lesson plans.

### **Methods and Techniques**

Four methods will be utilized in this program: (1) guided group discussion, (2) psychoeducation, (3) roleplay, and (4) mindfulness exercises.

Guided discussion is a method that enables students to reflect on the topics presented in the group lessons and connect them to their own life experiences. The technique involves the group leader asking group members questions pertaining to that day's topic. The procedure involves presenting the group topic, asking the group a question and allowing group members time to reflect on their responses. Afterwards, the group leader synthesizes and summarizes the responses while encouraging students to respond to one another. This procedure can be used for many discussion questions in the program.

The psychoeducational component of this program involves providing students with information about topics such as aggression, mindfulness-based approaches to emotion regulation, and the bystander effect. The technique involves presenting this information to students through means of handouts and visuals (e.g. videos or diagrams). The procedure involves selecting information relevant to these topics and to the scope of the program, organizing it in the form of handouts or other audio-visual material, presenting the information to students and then using it as a point of departure for other instructional methods. In other words, psychoeducation can be considered a foundation for students' development of social emotional learning skills in this program.

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A third method that will be implemented in this program is roleplaying. Roleplaying will provide students with hands-on practice in confronting real-life issues, allowing them to become proficient in skills taught during the group. The technique involves asking for student volunteers to enact the roleplay and encouraging group members to provide feedback about the volunteers' use of skills. The procedure involves the group leader introducing a hypothetical scenario, selecting volunteers to enact the roleplay, and then encouraging the student observers to discuss the outcome of the roleplay and provide feedback about the volunteers' use of skills.

Finally, another primary method utilized in this program is mindfulness exercises, which are intended to increase students' capacity for emotion regulation. The technique involves asking students to attend to the guided meditation exercises (either audioguided or read out loud) and the instructions provided. Lastly, the procedure involves introducing the guided meditation, playing it or reading it out loud, encouraging students to discuss their reactions to the practice (e.g. awareness of thoughts, bodily sensations and emotions), and asking them to commit to practicing these exercises outside of group sessions.

### **Materials**

In general, the methods described above require few materials because they are based upon discussion and group participation. However, some essential materials are listed below:

1. *Handouts.* A handout will be provided at the beginning of each session that will summarize the learning objectives for that particular lesson and provide key psychoeducational information. These handouts will also contain a short note to parents about the material covered and suggestions for helping their child to maximize the benefits from the program.
2. *Roleplay Scenario Sheets.* When a lesson plan includes a roleplay, the group facilitators will hand out a description of the scenario to be re-enacted to all

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students. Students will use these sheets to understand the details of the roleplays and reflect on the skills utilized by themselves and their peers. They will also be encouraged to keep the sheets in their group binder for future reference.

3. *Yoga Mats*. A substantial part of the group curriculum includes mindfulness meditation practices. These can be obtained from the physical education teachers in the high school. Using these mats allows students to maximize the benefits associated with the exercises (e.g. increased relaxation or body-centered awareness).
4. *Posterboard, Easel and/or Whiteboard*. These materials would be used to present important material during groups and enhance student engagement with the topic. In addition, they would be used to keep the group rules on display, with the goal of reminding students of the importance of following such rules.
5. *Crayons, Colored Pencils and/or Markers*. These writing implements will be used during various activities involving identification of anger cues in the body, as well as potentially used in the “Spread the Word” project at the conclusion of the group.
6. *Glitter (or Sand) Jar* - This is an integral part of the lesson where mindfulness is introduced and serves as a metaphor for the mind being “cloudy” or “calm.”
7. Additional supplies may be needed depending on what students choose for their “Spread the Word” project.

### Equipment

The only equipment needed for this program is a device that will play audio-visual material. This could include a laptop and/or smartphone that is hooked up to a speaker. These devices would be used to play guided mindfulness exercises, and also present video clips (e.g.

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from YouTube) that depict examples of different types of aggressive behavior in popular culture. These experiences will improve students' ability to fully engage in mindfulness exercises and connect definitions of aggressive behavior with real-world examples.

### **Facilities**

One classroom, or another common area (e.g. lounge spaces in the high school cafeteria) will provide sufficient space for this program to take place. The Community Teen Center often reserves classrooms or other common spaces for use in implementing programs during lunch time or study hall. Thus, this should not be problematic as it is common practice in the school. Ideally, the classroom space would have ample room for students to lay down their yoga mats in order to engage in the mindfulness exercises. In addition, a room with access to internet or Wi-Fi would be preferable.

### **Components, Phases and Activities**

There are three phases to this program: (i) Understanding; (ii) Awareness of Self and Other; and (iii) Spreading the Word. The first three sessions encompass the Understanding phase, in which the primary goal is to provide students with psychoeducation about pertinent topics and stimulate meaningful discussion. These topics include the different types of aggression, myths and facts about aggression, the function and importance of anger, and an introduction to mindfulness. Elements of Phase II (Awareness of Self and Other) will take place between sessions 4-10. This phase will be more experiential in nature, as students practice identifying bodily cues of emotions such as anger and anxiety, participate in mindfulness exercises to improve emotion regulation skills, engage in perspective-taking exercises, and learn methods for asserting themselves in situations where aggressive behavior is taking place. In Phase III, group members will have an opportunity to emerge as leaders in their school community with their newfound knowledge about aggression, mindfulness and assertiveness

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skills. During this phase, students will design and execute a project that will disseminate some aspect of the concepts they learned during group to their peers.

### **Personnel**

**Roles.** There are three roles necessary for the implementation of the proposed program. The first role is that of the direct service provider (also referred to as “group leader” or “group facilitator”). The other roles are that of supervisor, who is the licensed clinical psychologist in the Community Teen Center and will provide clinical supervision for the direct service provider, and consultant, who will provide informational support for the direct service provider.

**Responsibilities.** The direct service provider will oversee recruiting students to participate in the proposed group, including holding any necessary information sessions and communicating with students’ parents about obtaining consent and assent. The individual in this role will also be expected to familiarize himself/herself with background information in the areas of aggressive behavior, emotion regulation and mindfulness meditation as related to the lesson plans. Finally, he or she must gather the necessary materials to hold groups, present the lesson topics, monitor the groups, and discuss any issues in supervision or consultation. The supervisor is responsible for providing clinical supervision of the direct service provider, who will likely be a PsyD student. Finally, the consultant is tasked with helping the direct service provider and supervisor to troubleshoot any issues that arise in implementation of the program.

**Relationships.** The direct service provider and supervisor will maintain a close relationship throughout implementation of the program. As is standard procedure among practicum students at the Community Teen Center, the direct service provider will meet with the supervisor for one hour of individual supervision per week, and one hour of group supervision per week, which is ample opportunity for the direct service provider to reflect on and process his/her experiences facilitating the group. As the individual responsible for facilitating the group,

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the direct service provider will have a relationship with group members as well as any relevant school personnel such as teachers or administrators. The consultant will schedule regular check-ins with the direct service provider (once every two weeks) and on an as-needed basis should the need arise. The consultant will also openly communicate with the supervisor and the school superintendent about the implementation of the program.

### **Incentives**

Monetary incentives are not included in the design of this program. However, there are nonmonetary incentives for several parties involved in the design, implementation or participation in this program.

As discussed in Chapter IV, the school district's *Pathways to Excellence* strategic plan includes the goal of educating the “whole” child, which includes meeting their social and emotional needs. Thus, the implementation of a program focused on improving students' emotion regulation and assertiveness skills would provide evidence to support the school's progress toward accomplishing this goal. In addition, the Community Teen Center itself may stand to benefit from offering this program. This will increase the program's number of contact hours with students, which is monitored in order to continue to receive funding. Also, a doctoral or masters-level practicum student administering this program would likely gain clinical experience following a curriculum-based group psychotherapy program. Finally, if the program were to have the intended effects of improving students' emotion regulation and assertiveness skills while decreasing bystander behavior, one might expect the school's social climate to improve as well. As a result, teachers may be in a position to better focus on their educational goals for students rather than taking time out of lessons to manage behavioral incidents occurring in the classroom. Students would also undoubtedly benefit from participating in such a program. A healthier, safer social climate would likely increase the quality of students' friendships, as well



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as their ability to focus on educational goals. Also, on a more individual note, students may benefit from improved self-efficacy with regards to managing difficult social situations involving aggressive behavior and regulating their emotions.

## **Chapter VI: Curriculum**

### **Introduction**

This program was developed according to the outcome of the needs assessment with sixth grade students, as well as relevant research on the prevalence of aggression in Middle School aged students and how assertiveness skills and mindfulness exercises may attenuate the relationship between anger and aggressive behavior. The needs assessment suggests that sixth grade students are regularly experiencing several types of verbal, physical and relational aggression. This is line with current literature that suggests that aggressive behavior steadily increases throughout elementary school and peak in sixth grade (Horne, Stoddard & Bell, 2007). These behaviors warrant intervention because research demonstrates that children who are victims of aggression are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, or low self-esteem (Yoon et al., 2004), have poorer academic achievement (Buhs et al., 2006; Yoon et al., 2004), and exhibit increased difficulty in forming new social relationships (Crick et al., 2001).

The first phase of the program (“Understanding”) provides psychoeducation about different types of aggressive behavior and instructs students to identify these behaviors in real-life scenarios. This phase also aims to increase students’ ability to identify the purpose and importance of anger, bodily symptoms of anger, and situations that cause them to feel angry or act aggressively. Previous research on school-based psychotherapy groups using psychoeducational methodology such as didactics, worksheets and roleplay exercises (e.g. Bully Busters, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program) demonstrates their effectiveness in reduction of the number of incidents of aggressive behavior and increased satisfaction with school climate (Newman-Carlson and Horne, 2004; Olweus and Limber, 2002). In addition, research suggests that difficulties with labelling and identifying emotions leads to deficits in regulating these

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emotions (Vine & Aldao, 2014), thus underscoring the importance of psychoeducation in this area.

The second phase of the program, “Awareness of Self and Others,” includes the acquisition of social-emotional learning (SEL) skills and mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques. Both strategies are associated with positive outcomes in youth, such as increased well-being and academic achievement, as well as better relationships with teachers and peers (Lantieri & Zakrzewski, 2015). However, their mechanisms of change are distinct. Mindfulness-based strategies decrease aggressive behavior through decreasing rumination, which has been demonstrated to account for a significant proportion of the relationship between anger and aggressive behavior (Peters et al., 2015). Many individuals erroneously perceive rumination, or repeatedly contemplating the details of a thought or problem, as an effective problem solving strategy (Papageorgiou & Wells, 2003); however, this behavior typically results in increased emotional dysregulation (Selby, Anestis, & Joiner, 2008). In general, research suggests that mindfulness-based stress reduction, when practiced regularly, enhances neural structures associated with affective regulation (Leung et al., 2013).

The SEL component of this program will also provide students with more effective, healthy alternatives for handling situations in which they witness or experience aggression. For example, a recent meta-analysis of school-based cognitive-behavioral interventions addressing aggressive behavior demonstrated that skill enhancement alone, through activities such as self-instruction and relaxation training, was significantly related to the magnitude of the effect size for such interventions (Lavenberg, 2007). In addition, Hortensius and de Gelder (2018) demonstrated that exercises in perspective-taking help to activate the neural network associated with helping behavior, thus decreasing the likelihood of bystander behavior. With mindfulness

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and SEL targeting aggression from the inside-out and outside-in, respectively, students will receive many opportunities for skill acquisition.

This program was designed for the sixth-grade population but could be used with students in grades five through seven because the content is developmentally appropriate for children in late elementary school and middle school students. The curriculum was specifically designed for this age group because research demonstrates that aggressive behavior peaks in sixth grade (Horne et al., 2007). In addition, this program was designed to be held during the students' lunch time at school in order to minimize disruptions to academically based lessons. However, the program could realistically be implemented during another class period (e.g. study hall). In either circumstance, it is important to understand and effectively address any resistance from students, teachers or administrators surrounding the scheduling of the program.

The sessions are designed to be followed in the order that they are presented. The order is crucial because students must first develop an understanding of aggression, its importance and function and their personal triggers or bodily cues before being able to effectively implement the coping strategies discussed in the “Awareness of Self and Other” component of the program. Although the group facilitator(s) should make every effort to follow the curriculum, the needs and characteristics of the students should take precedence. For example, if students are particularly invested in learning a particular skill or need more time to process their experiences, one and a half sessions may be allotted for this. On the other hand, if students are able to understand a topic quickly and do not generate much group discussion, then material from the following lesson may be presented in that session. Finally, the first two phases of the program, “Understanding” and “Awareness of Self and Other” are the most essential and clinically meaningful pieces of the program. Thus, content from these sessions should be prioritized and the “Spread the Word” phase should not take more than the two allotted sessions.

## **Chapter VII: Discussion**

The purpose of the dissertation was to design a group psychotherapy program that aims to decrease aggressive behavior amongst sixth grade students. Current research supports the notion that mindfulness-based, perspective-taking and assertiveness skills can decrease or prevent aggressive behavior. The program is designed with the goal of promoting increased awareness of environmental, emotional and bodily cues that precipitate aggressive behavior as well as enhancing students' emotion regulation and problem-solving abilities. The results of the needs assessment and a review of relevant literature on several topics (e.g. aggression, mindfulness, school-based group approaches) informed the program design.

Overt aggression, relational aggression and prosocial behaviors were measured using two scales: the Children's Social Experience Questionnaire - Self Report (CSEQ-S; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996) and the 6th Grade Student Questionnaire (Furnari, 2011). With regards to experiences of overt aggression, seventy-one percent of students indicated that they had been yelled at or called names by a peer, with fifty percent of those students indicating that this happens anywhere from "sometimes" to "all of the time." This suggests that verbal aggression is widespread throughout the 6th grade student body. Experiences of physical aggression were somewhat less prevalent. Sixty-four percent of students reported that they have been pushed or shoved by a peer on purpose. Many students also reported experiencing relational aggression. Between forty-three and fifty percent of students indicated that they had experienced each of the following forms of relational aggression: being excluded from an activity on purpose, having lies or mean things said about them so that they are disliked by others, or having a peer tell them that they would not like them unless they did what they were told. This is in line with recent research from Bradshaw, Sawyer and O'Brennan (2007) who found that about 49% of children in grades 4–12 reported being bullied by other students at school at least once during the past month. More

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specifically, Bradshaw et al. (2007) documented the following percentages of students experiencing different types of overt and relational aggression: name calling (44.2 %); teasing (43.3 %); spreading rumors or lies (36.3%); pushing or shoving (32.4%); hitting, slapping, or kicking (29.2%); leaving out (28.5%); threatening (27.4%); stealing belongings (27.3%); sexual comments or gestures (23.7%); e-mail or blogging (9.9%). Furthermore, data from the School Crime Supplement from the National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice (2017) indicated that about twenty percent of students ages 12-18 experienced bullying.

In terms of utilizing aggressive behaviors, eighty-six percent of students indicated that, at some point, they have gossiped or spread rumors about their peers. Seventy-one percent also reported that at some point, they left a peer out of an activity on purpose. These percentages appear to be higher than what is reported in other studies. For example, Bradshaw et al. (2007) found that approximately thirty percent of students reported bullying others and eight percent reported frequently bullying others. Furthermore, eighty-six percent of students indicated that, at some point, they did not get involved in situations where they witnessed aggression taking place between their peers, with sixty-four percent indicating that they get involved “sometimes,” “almost never,” or “never.” This is higher than the numbers reported by the American Society for the Positive Care of Children (2018), whose report states that although ninety percent of students do not like to others being bullied, less than twenty percent try to intervene.

Although the data collected are in line with current research on prevalence of aggression among Middle School students, there are several characteristics of the data collection process that may have contributed to underreporting of aggressive behavior. Before students were given their questionnaires, they were reminded to keep their responses private and to not discuss their responses with other students. These instructions were repeated several times, especially when students began engaging in side conversations about their answers. However, these reminders did

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not always produce the desired change in behavior. In addition, Crowne and Marlowe's (1960) concept of social desirability response bias, or the need to obtain approval by responding in a culturally or socially acceptable manner, may have also contributed to the underreporting of aggressive behavior. Specifically, they discovered that individuals were vulnerable to this bias when completing self-report measures and would present themselves in a desirable manner regardless of their actual feelings or experiences. This bias, coupled with any peer pressure present during the data collection process, likely served to inflate reported estimates of prosocial behavior while minimizing reported experiences as a victim or perpetrator of aggression.

Taken together, the aforementioned factors suggest that the CSEQ-S was not used as intended by some participants, which renders the means not useful or accurately descriptive. Despite the strong possibilities for underreporting, some of the percentages were higher than those reported in larger studies, some of which collected data on a national level. Even with these factors in consideration, the data clearly suggest that forms of overt and relational aggression are prevalent among the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and warrant intervention.

### **Limitations**

One important limitation is the low number of students who participated in the study. Although approximately 130 students were enrolled in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class, consent forms were only received from 15 students, and data were only collected from 14 due one student being absent from school. A small sample size is more vulnerable to high variability, being affected by outliers in the data, and is unlikely to accurately represent the population. In addition, most students were male (n=12) whereas only two females participated in the survey. Thus, it is possible that levels of overt aggression were inflated due to the overrepresentation of males in the sample, with the low number of females potentially causing experiences of relational aggression to seem less prevalent.

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Furthermore, despite the diverse student body in the Middle School and the fact that consent forms were available in different languages, the majority of students who received consent to participate in the study were English-speaking and Caucasian. Thus, the needs assessment does not represent the experiences or needs of sixth grade students from other backgrounds. However, existing research strongly supports the idea that both overt and relational forms of aggression are universal phenomena. Lansford et al. (2012) examined the prevalence of overt and relational aggression in nine different countries as well as their association with gender. Their results demonstrated that overt and relational aggression are cross-culturally present. In addition, some countries favored one type of aggression over another. For example, children from China, Italy and Thailand reported utilizing more relational aggression than physical aggression, children from Jordan and Kenya reported utilizing more physical aggression than relational aggression, and children from the United States, Colombia, the Philippines, and Sweden did not demonstrate significant differences in their use of one aggressive strategy over another (Lansford et al., 2012).

Furthermore, in examining inner city African American students' use of aggressive behavior, Xie, Farmer and Cairns (2003) found that physical aggression was more common than relational aggression in female-female conflicts. A similar pattern was described by Talbott, Celinska, Simpson, and Coe (2002), whose data suggested that African American and Latino youth utilize relational aggression, but that physical aggression continues to predominate through adolescence. Taken together, these results demonstrate the importance of considering the complexities of students' cultural identities when designing aggression prevention programs.

An additional limitation to the needs assessment was the fact that the investigator did not interview teachers directly about their perceptions of aggressive behavior among sixth grade students. Including additional qualitative (e.g. interviews) or quantitative (teacher report



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questionnaires) on aggression would have provided another perspective to consider in the needs assessment and program design. However, the investigator indirectly obtained such information through frequent conversations with teachers regarding these issues when she was employed in the school's school-based mental health services program.

### **Further Directions and Practical Implications**

Staff or students in psychology-related disciplines are encouraged to implement this program and utilize Maher's (2001) program evaluation framework in order to assess the extent to which the designed program addressed this population's needs. Afterwards, steps could be taken to modify the existing program, including adding more sessions on a particular topic, introducing a new topic or eliminating a topic that was not as effective. This would be particularly useful in contributing to the current research on aggression prevention programs in schools, with particular focus on mindfulness as a different way of targeting the emotional dysregulation precipitating both overt and relational aggression.

Future researchers may also opt to create a variation of this program based on needs present in other grades or age ranges. Although research suggests that aggression (particularly, relational aggression) peaks around 6<sup>th</sup> grade, aggression behaviors of many kinds are present in elementary school and they are likely to persist into high school and beyond if not effectively addressed. Many of the components of this program's curriculum could be modified to become more developmentally appropriate and socially relevant for younger or older students.

If implemented, this program would likely benefit students and the overall school climate. However, it would also be tangible proof of the school district's progress toward goals outlined in its June 2016 strategic plan, *Pathways to Excellence*. This plan includes the specific goal of educating the "whole" child. The proposed program would work towards meeting students' social and emotional needs through increased knowledge about bullying, bodily cues of

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anger and urges to act aggressively, as well as coping strategies to deal with angry rumination or when students themselves are victims of aggressive behavior. In addition, as required by the NJ Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights, school staff are required to intervene in all types of bullying incidents. This program would likely qualify as one type of intervention for decreasing or preventing bullying that is low-cost, short-term, and accessible to many students at a time due to being in a group-based format.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Despite being universally present from the beginning of humankind, aggression continues to be a widespread problem throughout the lifespan. In recent years, the harmful effects of aggressive behavior have received copious media attention through television series such as *13 Reasons Why* and many suicides of children and adolescents who can no longer bear the pain of being a victim. With technological devices dominating the social lives of today's youth, they now can engage in aggressive behavior with anyone, from anywhere, and for an infinite amount of time without immediate consequences. Considering these factors, it becomes even more important to supply children with the awareness, resources and skills to face these harsh realities. With this need in mind, this dissertation aims to provide a clear, structured curriculum for a group-based aggression prevention program that can be implemented in schools without detracting from academic time. After all, we cannot always control others' behavior, but we can control how we choose to respond to it.

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# MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

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## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

## APPENDIX A

Children's Social Experience Questionnaire- Self Report (CSEQ-SR)  
Crick & Grotpeter, 1996

## THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO ME

Gender (CIRCLE ONE)    Boy    Girl    ID Number \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's Name \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECTIONS: Here is a list of things that sometimes happen to kids your age at school. How often do they happen to you at school?

## EXAMPLE:

A. How often do you eat lunch at school?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

B. How often does your class go outside to play?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

1. How often does another kid give you help when you need it?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

2. How often do you get hit by another kid at school?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

3. How often do other kids leave you out on purpose when it is time to play or do an activity?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

4. How often does another kid yell at you and call you mean names?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

5. How often does another kid try to cheer you up when you feel sad or upset?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

6. How often does a kid who is mad at you try to get back at you by not letting you be in their group anymore?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

7. How often do you get pushed or shoved by another kid at school?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

8. How often does another kid do something that makes you feel happy?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

9. How often does a classmate tell lies about you to make other kids not like you anymore?

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

10. How often does another kid kick you or pull your hair?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

11. How often does another kid say they won't like you unless you do what they want you to do?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

12. How often does another kid say something nice to you?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

13. How often does a kid try to keep others from liking you by saying mean things about you?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

14. How often does another kid say they will beat you up if you don't do what they want you to do?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

15. How often do other kids let you know that they care about you?

1 NEVER	2 ALMOST NEVER	3 SOMETIMES	4 ALMOST ALL THE TIME	5 ALL THE TIME
------------	----------------------	----------------	-----------------------------	----------------------

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

## APPENDIX B

6<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Questionnaire

Please rate how often YOU have used these behaviors in the past 2 weeks. Choose (1) if you Never used it, (3) if you Sometimes used it, and (5) if you Always used it in the last 2 weeks. If you used the behavior somewhere between Never and Sometimes, choose (2). If you used it more than Sometimes but less than Always, choose (4).

1. Gossiped by spreading rumors or talking about someone behind his/her back.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always

2. Stuck up for someone by stopping others when someone is being targeted, teased, or made fun of.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always

3. Not allowed someone to join your group or activity.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always

4. Stood up for yourself without being mean when someone was being mean to you.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always

5. Didn't get involved when you saw someone being mean to another student.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always

6. Chose to communicate with someone by saying how you felt or going straight to a person instead of talking behind their backs.

1	2	3	4	5
Never		Sometimes		Always

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

10. Even if you don't often use these behaviors, how often do you think other people use these behaviors?

1  
Never

2

3  
Sometimes

4

5  
Always

Use this space if there is anything else you would like to tell us about these problems in the 6th grade at your school:

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## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

APPENDIX C  
CONSENT FORM (ENGLISH)  
(adapted from Google Forms)

Dear Highland Park Parents,

I am a student in the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University completing my doctoral degree requirements. I have become interested in the topic of relational aggression, which may include but is not limited to behaviors such as purposely excluding others, making friends with a peer as a form of revenge, gossiping about others, or spreading rumors about others. Highland Park Middle School has allowed me to contact you to request your permission for your child to participate in the study. If you agree, I will also briefly explain the study to the children who have received permission from parents and/or guardians, and also ask for their agreement to participate. Eventually, I plan to design a program, to be held in school, to teach sixth grade students about coping with relational aggression and being a better friend.

**Study Purpose**

The overall purpose of the study is to learn more about students' experiences with relational aggression in school. Relational aggression may include but is not limited to behaviors such as purposely excluding others, making friends with a peer as a form of revenge, gossiping about others, or spreading rumors about others. This often occurs in face--to--face interaction but also through types of social media such as Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. All 6th grade students will be eligible to participate in the study, and each student's participation will last approximately 20--30 minutes, or the time that it takes them to complete two questionnaires.

**Study Procedures**

The subject of my research project is: Needs Assessment for a Relational Aggression Prevention Program for 6th Grade Students. Children who participate will be asked to complete two questionnaires about their experiences with aggression on Google Chromebooks provided by the school. Both questionnaires will be about their experiences of physical and relational aggression in school. For example, one item asks, "How often do other kids leave you out on purpose when it is time to play or do an activity?" Their names will not be written on the questionnaires, but they will be asked for their gender and an ID number linked to their name. The questionnaires will take about 30 minutes to complete and will be given during an agreed upon time by the 6th grade teachers. Your child, at any time, may choose to stop completing the questions without any penalty and will return to their deskwork.

**Access to Research Data**

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated.

### **General Risks**

The use of technology can present risk(s) as part of this research project:

Generally, it is possible that private data from a mobile device may be intercepted during transmission. However, Google Forms protects data with multiple layers of security, including leading encryption technology such as HTTPS and Transport Layer Security.

It is also possible that this form could be accessed by others should you lose your mobile device.

There is some possibility that others may see your child's open webpage when they are filling out the questionnaires, although measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality throughout the process.

### **Confidentiality and Data Protections**

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you/your child and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your/your child's identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you/your child includes: email addresses, responses to study questionnaires, names and ages. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. All data will be stored on DropBox which is HIPAA--compliant.

### **Data Storage and Transmission**

Research data will be sent from your electronic device [or mobile app] to the research team via Google Forms. As mentioned above, Google Forms utilizes encryption software to protect the confidentiality of data. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. The research data will be stored until the end of the study and then wiped immediately following its finish.

### **Risks and Benefits**

The data collected may lead to increased understanding about the use of relational aggression in 6th graders at Highland Park Middle School and the opportunity for your child to participate in a program that will teach students how to cope with relational aggression and be a better friend to others.

There are no known risks to your child for participating in this study. However, if your child becomes upset at any point during the process they will be offered school counseling services. Their grades will not be affected in any way, whether they participate in the study or not.



## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

If you would like to have a report of the study when it is completed, please indicate this at the bottom of this form.

### **Voluntary Nature of Study**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose for your child not to participate, and you may withdraw your child from participating at any time during the study activities without any penalty to your child. In addition, you/your child may choose not to answer any questions with which you/your child are not comfortable. You should be aware that the researchers may continue to use data that was provided before you withdrew your authorization, if necessary to maintain integrity of the research or if the data had already been stripped of all identifiers.

If you wish to withdraw your permission for the research use or disclosure of your data and/or health information in this study, you may do so in writing by contacting Alicia Hurford (contact details provided below).

### **Questions about Research**

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me by email at [alicia.hurford@gsapp.rutgers.edu](mailto:alicia.hurford@gsapp.rutgers.edu) or phone at (862) 801- 2326.

You may also contact my faculty advisor,  
Dr. Kenneth Schneider, at [schneid@gsapp.rutgers.edu](mailto:schneid@gsapp.rutgers.edu).

If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at:

Institutional Review Board  
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey  
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200  
335 George Street, 3rd Floor  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
Phone: 732-235-2866  
Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

### **2. Informed Consent \***

Mark only one oval.

I DO AGREE for my child to participate

I DO NOT AGREE for my child to participate.

### **3. Child Assent \***

Mark only one oval.

I AGREE to take part in this study.

**MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM**

I DO NOT agree to take part in this study.

**4. Child's name \***

**5. Child's grade in school \***

**6. Your name \***

**7. I would like a copy of the research report once data collection has been completed.**

Yes

No

APPENDIX D  
 CONSENT FORM (CHINESE)  
 (adapted from Google Forms)

### 家长审批表

亲爱的高地公园的家长们，

我是罗格斯大学的应用和心理专业的研究生院的学生，现在正在完成我的博士学位要求。我对关系侵略的话题产生了兴趣，这个话题包括但不限于一些行为，诸如故意排除其他人的行为，与同伴交朋友作为复仇形式，闲聊别人，或散布关于他人的谣言等行为。

高地公园中学已经批准让我与您联系，请求您允许您的孩子参与这项研究。如果您同意，我会简单的给收到了父母/或监护人的同意而参与这项研究的孩子们介绍一下这项研究，并征求他们本人的同意参与。我的最终意图是设计一个在学校举行的程序，用于教六年级的学生们如何应对关系侵略，从而能够和同学们成为更好的朋友。

\*为必填

#### 1.电子邮件地址 \*

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#### 学习目的

这项研究的总体目的是更多地了解学生们在学校里对关系攻击的一些体验。关系攻击可能包括但不限于如故意不包括别人，交朋友与对等报复的一些方式，议论他人，或散布别人的谣言的一些行为。这些行为通常发生在面对面的互动中，也会通过各类社交媒体如 **Snapchat**, **Instagram**和**Facebook**发生。

所有6年级的学生将有资格参加学习，每个学生的参与将大约需要**20-30**分钟，具体要看学生完成两份调查问卷的需要多长时间。

#### 研究过程

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

我的研究项目的主题是：对于6年级学生对关系攻击行为预防计划的需求评估。参与的儿童将要求完成自己对关系侵略的两份调查问卷。学校会提供用来完成调查问卷的电脑（**Google的Chromebooks**）。

两份调查是调查孩子们在学校经历的身体和关系攻击的一些体验。例如，其中的一项问题，“在学校自由玩耍的时间或者是大家一起做活动的时间，你感觉其他孩子故意排除你的行为发生的频率有多高？”学生们的名字不会写在问卷上，但他们会要求写上他们的性别和跟他们的名字相关的**ID**号。问卷将需要大约**30**分钟完成，并将会在由六年级的老师们指定的时间内完成。

您的孩子，在任何时间都可以选择停止完成问题答卷返回他们的学习，没有任何处罚。

### 获得研究数据

罗格斯大学伦理委员会的研究小组是唯一允许看到这些研究数据的组织，除非法律要求需要递交这些数据。如果这项研究的报告发布出来，或者研究结果在一个专业的会议上呈现出来，只有小组的研究结果会予以说明，个人的数据不会透露。

### 一般风险

电脑技术的使用会为该研究项目呈现一些风险：

一般地，移动设备的私有数据在传输过程中有可能被截获。然而，**Google**表单有保护数据安全的多层保护，包括领先的加密技术，如**HTTPS**和传输层安全性。

还也可能，如果你遗失您的移动设备，别人有可能接触到这些表格从而访问到表格里的信息。

还有一些可能性，尽管为确保整个过程的保密性会有一些保护措施，但当您的孩子在填写问卷调查时，其他人有可能会看到您的孩子填表时打开的网页。

### 保密性和数据保护功能

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

这项研究是保密的。机密意味着该研究记录将包括你/你的孩子的一些信息。这些信息的存储方式之间会将你/你的孩子的身份和研究结果联系起来。这项研究收集的有关你/你的孩子的信息包括：电子邮件地址，研究问卷的填写答案，姓名和年龄。

请注意，我们会将这些信息保密，我们会限制研究个体的访问调查数据，并将数据保存在一个安全的位置。所有数据将被存储在投递箱 **(Drop Box)**，这个投递箱是符合**HIPAA**的。

### 数据存储和传输

研究数据将从您的电子设备[或移动应用设备]通过**Google**表单发送给研究团队。如上所述，**Google**表单利用加密软件来保护机密数据。请注意，我们会将这些信息保密，会限制个别访问研究数据并将其保存在一个安全的位置。该研究的数据将被保存到研究结束，并在研究结束之后立即删除。

### 风险与收益

收集的数据可能会加深高地公园中学**6**年级学生对关系侵略的理解，参加这项调查也能教会学生如何应对关系攻击行为，并跟他人成为更好的朋友。

您的孩子参与这项研究没有任何已知的风险。然而，如果你的孩子在任何调查的过程中感觉不安，学校会将为他们提供心理辅导服务。他们是否参加这项调查不会影响到他们的学习成绩。

如果你想要一份这项研究完成以后的报告，请在这封信的尾部注明。

### 研究的自愿性质

参与这项研究是自愿的。您可以选择您的孩子不参加，你也可以选择把您的孩子从参加研究活动的任何时候撤回，没有任何处罚。此外，你/你的孩子可以选择不回答任何让你/你的孩子感觉不舒服的问题。

你应该知道的是，如果有必要保持研究的完整性或者如果数据已经被剥夺了所有标识符，研究人员可以在您撤回您的授权之前继续使用你原先提供的数据。如果你想撤回您对这项

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

研究中的数据 and/或健康信息的许可，可以通过书面方式联系 **Alicia Hurford**（联系的细节在下面提供）。

相有关研究问题

如果您对这项研究有任何疑问，您可以通过电子邮件与我联系

**alicia.hurford@gsapp.rutgers.edu** 或致电 **(862) 801 2326** 您也可以联系我的指导老师，

**Dr. Kenneth Schneider** 肯尼斯·施耐德博士 **schneid@gsapp.rutgers.edu**。如果您对您的孩子作为研究的参与者的权利有任何疑问，您可以联系 **IRB** 管理员：

罗格斯大学伦理委员会保护人类受试者

研究和赞助项目办公室

**3 Rutgers Plaza**

**New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559**

联系电话：**7329320150** 转 **2104**

电子邮件：**humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu**

### 2. 知情同意\*

请只填一个椭圆形。

我同意我的孩子参加

我不同意我的孩子参加。

### 3. 儿童同意\*

请只填一个椭圆形。

我同意参加本研究。

我不同意参与这项研究。

### 4. 孩子的名字\*

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### 5. 儿童在学校的年级\*

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### 6. 您的姓名\*

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## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

研究报告的副本

7. 等数据收集工作完成后，我想要一份研究报告的副本。

请给所有适用的选项打勾。

是

没有

给我的回复的副本

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

APPENDIX E  
ASSENT FORM  
(adapted from Google Forms)

## ASSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

## TITLE OF STUDY: RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN 6TH GRADE

**Who am I and why am I meeting with you?**

I am Alicia Hurford and I am a doctoral student at the Rutgers University in the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP). I would like to tell you about my research study and see if you would like to participate in this study. It would be very helpful for my research!

**What is this research study about?**

I am interested in learning more about your experiences with "relational aggression" in school. You might ask, what does relational aggression mean? This includes behaviors like leaving others out on purpose, making friends with someone as a form of revenge, gossiping about others, or spreading rumors about others. This can happen in- person but also on Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. I want to find out more about how often this goes on in school, and how I can best help students like yourselves to deal with these situations.

**Why have I been asked to take part in this study?**

I worked at the Teen Center last year and I know that many 6th grade students came to me (and other counselors at the Teen Center) with similar problems. With your help, I can better understand what 6th grade students are experiencing and how I can best help them.

**Who can be in this study? And who may not? How long will the study take?**

All 6th grade students at Highland Park Middle School can be in the study. The study will take approximately 20 minutes.

**What will happen to me if I choose to be in this study?**

First, you will fill out this form and click "YES" if you wish to participate. Next, you will answer some questions about experiences that you have in school, such as being left out by others, being gossiped about, or having rumors spread about you. For example, one item asks, "How often do other kids leave you out on purpose when it is time to play or do an activity?" This should not take more than 15 minutes.



## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

### **Can something bad happen to me or will I feel uncomfortable if I take part in this study?**

Your responses will be completely confidential. This means that you don't need to write your name on your questionnaire and I will be the only one to see your answers. I will not discuss your answers with ANY of your peers or anyone at your school.

While answering the questions you might remember situations where peers or friends treated you unkindly. If you become upset at any time, you can let me know and I will direct you to a guidance counselor or member of the Teen Center staff.

### **What if I don't want to take part in this study?**

You don't have to be in this study if you don't want to. No one will get angry or upset if you don't want to be in the study. Just tell me. And remember, you can change your mind later if you decide you don't want to be in the study anymore.

### **Will I be given anything to take part in this study?**

Unfortunately you won't be given anything to take part in this study at this time. However you may have the opportunity, in the future, to take part in a group therapy program to help cope with bullying, gossiping, and other difficult social situations, if you so choose.

### **What if I have questions?**

You can ask questions at any time. You can ask now, or you can ask later!

### **If I have questions about the research study, I can contact:**

Alicia Hurford

(862) 801-- 2326

[alicia.hurford@rutgers.edu](mailto:alicia.hurford@rutgers.edu)

Kenneth Schneider, Ph.D.

[schneid@gsapp.rutgers.edu](mailto:schneid@gsapp.rutgers.edu)

### **If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can contact:**

Institutional Review Board

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey

Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200

335 George Street, 3rd Floor

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Phone: 732-235-2866

Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

### **What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

I understand that I have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time.

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

I understand that I should not sign this form unless I have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of my questions.

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been talked about. All of my questions about this form and this study have been answered.

**1. I AGREE to take part in this research study. \***

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

**Signature of Investigator or Responsible Individual:**

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study, including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subjects and those of his/her parent(s) or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

\_\_\_\_\_ Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

## APPENDIX F

**General Guidelines for Group Facilitator(s)****In preparation:**

- Prior to beginning the program, it is strongly recommended that you thoroughly review background on mindfulness meditation if you have not done so already.
- It is strongly recommended that you obtain a copy of Debra Burdick's book on mindfulness for children and adolescents in order to access the resources associated with the mindfulness modules of the program:  
**Burdick, D. (2014). Mindfulness Skills for Kids and Teens. Eau Claire: PESI Publishing and Media.**
- It may also be helpful to provide students with folders or small binders at the beginning of the group so that they have one central place to keep their handouts from group.
- Take adequate time (at least 10-15 minutes) to review your lesson plans on your own, or with your co-facilitator between each session to facilitate smooth transitions between activities.
- Each lunch period (the time when this group is likely to be held) is 42 minutes. Given students' potential late arrival to group for various reasons (e.g. purchasing lunch), allow for 30-35 minutes of actual group time.
- After each session, allow ~10 minutes for post-group debriefing with your co-leader to consider topics including but not limited to the following: if the session objectives were achieved, any necessary modifications to the group curriculum and behavioral issues arising during sessions.

**Group Facilitation:**

- Arrange chairs or desks in a circular pattern to facilitate group cohesion and discussion. If certain students engage in side conversations, group facilitators can seat themselves amongst them to minimize disruptions to the group process.
- Some lessons have optional material that can be included if time permits.
- There are examples of discussion questions provided in each session outline, but you can add or detract from the list as is clinically indicated.
- Guided meditations can be read from the handouts provided or you may create an audio recording(s).
- Whenever possible, you are encouraged to provide real-life examples of the concepts taught in group through media such as youtube clips, excerpts movies or TV shows, etc. This may be particularly powerful in building rapport with young adolescent students and getting their buy-in.
- Actively encourage students to respond to one another's comments in group discussion, rather than having them directly respond to the group leader(s) at all times. In this way, group discussion should look more like a "spiderweb", where all group members interact with one another, than a "wheel" in which all discussion goes through the group leader at the center of the wheel.

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

### Session 1: Welcome and Intro to Aggression

**Objectives:** To understand the group rules (confidentiality and respect)  
 To identify three types of aggressive behavior  
 To understand common myths and facts about aggression

**Materials:** Confidentiality Agreements  
 Handout : Psychoeducation about types of aggression  
 Handout : Aggression myths and facts  
 “Myth” and “Fact” cards  
 Whiteboard or poster/easel

#### Lesson

##### I: Introductions

Each student will introduce themselves and name one quality they look for in a friendship.

##### II: Review of Group Rules

The facilitator will introduce the group rules of confidentiality and respect. Explain that confidentiality means that what is said in the group stays in the group, with a few important exceptions (note these on the Teen Center confidentiality form and have students sign the form). Ask students how they would feel if they knew others were sharing their personal information outside of group - would they still feel comfortable sharing? You can provide a few examples of confidentiality if students still seem unclear as to what it means. Also, remind students to ask one another's permission about discussing topics from group outside of group. Finally, explain that if a student is discovered to have broken confidentiality, that student will no longer be allowed to continue in group due to making that environment emotionally unsafe. Next, explain that the rule of respect involves not engaging in side conversations, raising your hand to speak and using nonjudgmental language when addressing one another.

Also, ask students if there are additional rules they would like to be included in the group. Write down all the rules on the whiteboard/poster and explain that these will be on display during each session to remind students of the rules and their importance.

##### III. What is aggression (bullying)?

- A. Ask students what they think of when they hear the term “aggression/bullying”  
 Provide handout with definitions and examples of each type of aggression (relational, physical and verbal).
- B. Potential Discussion Questions:
  - Ask students if they have experienced these behaviors lately
  - Can you think of examples of these types of aggression in TV shows or movies?

##### IV. Aggression: Myth or Fact?

Provide each student with a notecard that reads “myth” and another that reads “fact.” The facilitator will read statements about aggression and bullying and ask students to raise the card corresponding to their answer. Encourage students to give rationale for their answers and to respectfully discuss any disagreements.

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## Session 2: Anger and Aggression

**Objectives:** To identify examples of aggressive behavior in social situations  
 To define anger and understand its importance and function  
 To identify barriers against expressing anger in a healthy way

**Materials:** Whiteboard/Easel  
 Handout: “Anger’s Jobs”

### Lesson

- I. Check In**
  - A. Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on. Relate this to the day’s topic, or a previous group’s topic, if possible.
- II. Review** key points from the previous session. Ask each student to give an example of a time they experienced aggression or were aggressive toward someone else (no names, please!)
- III. What is anger and why is it important? (Large Group Discussion)**
  - A. Tell the group that we will spend the next few sessions talking a lot about anger, and aggression. Ask them to name other words that they associate with anger, and write these on the whiteboard/easel. Remind students that anger comes in many shapes and sizes.
  - B. Ask the group the following questions to stimulate discussion:
    1. Do you think it is bad to feel angry? Is anger a “bad” emotion? Have you ever had the thought, “Ugh, why am I so angry about this?”
    2. Why might it be important to feel angry sometimes?
  - C. **Provide psychoeducation** about why anger is important (**distribute handout: “Anger’s Jobs”**). Anger, like other emotions, has two important jobs that they do for us:
    1. It helps us to communicate with others.
      - a) Examples: We may feel angry if our needs are not being met, if we don’t get what we want, if we are unhappy with the outcome of a situation
      - b) Ask students to come up with examples of nonverbal signs of anger
    2. It helps motivate us and encourage us to act.
      - a) Ask students to think of a time when they became angry, and it was important to take action to change the situation.
      - b) **It is how we act on our anger, however, that could be viewed as good or bad, positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy.**
- IV. Small group discussion:** Divide group members into groups of 3-4 and provide them with sheets of paper with the following questions: (**Afterwards, reconvene in a larger group to share and process**).

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

1. How do you respond when you feel angry and hurt? What kinds of reactions do you get?
2. Why is it so hard to tell someone that you are hurt and that is why you are angry?
3. What could happen if you tell someone that you are angry with them?

**\*\*Reiterate: the more that we get to know our anger, the more likely we can recognize it and take steps to calm ourselves down. If we can get to a calmer place, we are less likely to become aggressive toward others.**

**\*\*Encourage students to take note of times that they feel angry in the coming week.**

**\*\*Encourage them to notice when they are angry, and why that anger could be helpful.**

# MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

## Session 3: Exploring Anger

**Objectives:** To review the purpose and importance of anger  
To identify precipitants of anger or aggressive behavior  
To recognize bodily symptoms of anger

**Materials:** **3 Handouts:** Anger Thermometer, Anger Triggers, Anger Warning Signs  
Crayons, colored pencils or markers

### Lesson

#### I. Check In

- A. Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on. Relate this to the day's topic, or a previous group's topic, if possible.

#### II. Briefly review the previous group's topic. Potential discussion questions include:

- A. What is anger, why do we experience it and why is it important? (**Emphasize that anger itself is not "bad" or "unhealthy," but how we choose to act on it can have bad consequences**).
- B. What are anger's two jobs?
- C. Why is it so hard for us to tell others that we are hurt or angry?

#### III. Introduce today's topic. Ask students to raise their hands if they have a fire alarm system in their homes or at school. What is the purpose of having a fire alarm in your house, or school?

- A. Just as a fire alarm tells us when there is danger in our homes, anger is our body's own "alarm" system. It can tell us when there is something going on in our lives that feels dangerous or threatening, and makes us want to act to change it.
- B. Everybody has a different alarm system - something that might make me angry may not bother you at all (give example). Today we are going to explore what your anger alarm systems look like and what sets them off.

#### IV. Anger Triggers/Thermometer exercise

- A. Distribute "Anger Thermometer"/ "Anger Triggers" double-sided worksheet. Looking at the "Triggers" side, ask students if they have heard of the word "trigger" before, and review the definition. Afterwards, have them independently go through the list of triggers and circle which ones set off their personal "anger alarms."
- B. Potential discussion questions:
  1. What was it like to take note of your triggers?
  2. Which triggers made you "furious" versus "angry" or "frustrated"? (**emphasize that there are different levels of anger**)
  3. Which ones make you verbally aggressive? Relationally or physically aggressive?

#### V. Anger Warning Signs exercise

- A. Distribute "Anger Warning Signs" worksheet. Explain to students that it is just as important to recognize the situations, people or things that make us angry or aggressive as what goes on in our bodies and minds. Ask students to recall a time they were angry, and how it felt in their bodies. Encourage them to share with the group.

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- B. Ask students to circle their personal “warning signs” which tell them that their “anger alarm” may go off...meaning that they may engage in aggressive behavior towards someone else.
- C. Potential discussion questions:
  - 1. How aware were you of your “warning signs” before doing this exercise?  
Are there some that you only just noticed?
  - 2. Do you have different “warning signs” depending on who, or what, is making you feel angry or aggressive?
  - 3. Why is it important to recognize what goes on in our bodies and minds when we feel angry or aggressive?
- D. Encourage students to get to know their “alarm systems” better for homework. Encourage them to practice becoming aware of their triggers and warning signs at times when they feel angry or aggressive over the upcoming week.**



# MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

## Session 4 - Introduction to Mindfulness

**Objectives:** To understand the basic definition of mindfulness  
 To understand the concept of “busy versus calm mind”  
 To learn and practice belly breathing

### Materials:

Yoga mats

Whiteboard/Easel

Three handouts: “Mindfulness Definitions,” “Belly Breathing,” and “Basic Relaxation Breathing”

Facilitator Guide/Worksheet for “Busy Versus Calm Mind” activity.

Glitter/Sand Jar

### Lesson

“Now that you have explored the different types of aggression, how anger feels in your bodies and what types of aggressive behavior you use or see occurring in your school, it is time that we do something about it!”

#### I. Check In

- A. Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on. Relate this to the day’s topic, or a previous group’s topic, if possible.

#### II. Introduce concept of mindfulness

- A. Has anyone heard of mindfulness before? What do you think this might mean?
- B. Distribute “**Mindfulness Definitions**” handout. Ask students to read definitions out loud. (*example discussion questions below*):
  1. What were your reactions listening to these definitions?
  2. What prevents us from living in the present moment?
  3. Have you ever judged yourself, or someone else? How did that affect your/their emotions?
  4. **Summarize:** mindfulness= awareness + acceptance/non judgment

#### III. Busy Versus Calm Mind Activity (use glitter/sand jar)

- A. Ask students, “How many thoughts do you think you have in a day?” Explain that we have more than 60,000 per day, many of which are related to emotions such as anxiety, anger or stress. No wonder we become overwhelmed and act in ways that are harmful to ourselves and others.
- B. Use “**Busy Versus Calm Mind**” guide to engage students in this activity. Explain that the activity represents how mindfulness, when practiced, can “turn down the volume” on anger, or anxiety, etc. so that our minds are calm, and clear.
  1. Tell me about a time when your brain was “cloudy.” Was it angry, anxious or stressed? How did you act towards others? Were you able to get to “calm” mind?

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**IV. Belly Breathing**

- A. Introduce the exercise by explaining that **this is the first step for us to get to “calm mind”** (so that we are less likely to be aggressive toward others.)
- B. **Distribute “How to Belly Breathe” and “Basic Relaxation Breathing” handouts** (should be double-sided).
- C. Take students through the steps involved in belly breathing while modeling it. Remind students that a “chest” breath is what happens when we are angry or anxious, and belly breathing allows our body to tell our brain “we are relaxed.”
  - 1. Discussion questions (after practicing)
    - a) What did it feel like as the air went in and out?
    - b) Do you notice any differences in your body now as compared to before you started the exercise?
- D. **\*\*Engage in and process “Basic Relaxation Breathing” exercise if time. Encourage students to practice this exercise for homework.**

# MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

## Session 5 - Mindfulness of the Five Senses

**Objectives:** Review the concept of mindfulness  
Continue to practice deep breathing (belly breathing)  
Explore mindfulness of surroundings using the five senses

**Materials:** Yoga Mats

**Handout:** Mindfulness of the Five Senses: 5-4-3-2-1 Exercise

### Lesson

#### I. Check In

Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on. If possible, relate this to the day's topic, or a previous topic.

#### II. Review the concept of mindfulness

- A. **Ask group members** what they remember about mindfulness from the previous group. Make sure to emphasize that mindfulness is about awareness and acceptance (non judgment) of what happens in the present moment.
- B. **Also ask group members** about their takeaway message from the glitter jar activity. (Mindfulness can help us when we are feeling angry or aggressive by getting us closer to "calm mind.")

#### III. Practice Belly Breathing

- A. **Review the concept of belly breathing.** Ask students if they were able to practice this at home in the past week and what they noticed about the experience - was it difficult? Easy? Was it easy to get distracted? What did you do if you became distracted?
- B. Engage group members in a **5 minute belly breathing exercise** (encourage them to lay on their yoga mats). Process afterwards via group discussion.

#### IV. 5-4-3-2-1 Exercise (give out handout Mindfulness of the Five Senses: 5-4-3-2-1 Exercise to group members).

- A. **Introduce the exercise** as a way for group members to move towards "calm mind" when they experience anger or distress, and have the urge to act aggressively towards others.
  1. **Explain how it works:** if you are focusing on your immediate environment using your five senses, you will not be as focused on your intense emotion or urge to act aggressively. It may help to use a metaphor to explain this (e.g. changing channels on a TV or radio).
- B. **Lead the exercise** and process with the group.
  1. Do you notice any changes in your mind or body from doing this exercise?
  2. Were some senses more powerful than others?
  3. Did you find yourself becoming distracted and if so, how did you manage this?

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4. How could you incorporate this into your daily routine? Is there a time that you usually feel more angry than usual, or a time when you tend to be aggressive towards peers?

**C. HOMEWORK: Encourage group members to practice this when they experience anger or the urge to act aggressively.**

# MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

## Session 6: Mindfulness of the Physical Body

**Objectives:** Review previous mindfulness skills/exercises

Understand the link between awareness of body sensations and emotions

Explore mindfulness of the body (Body Scan Meditation)

**Materials:** Yoga Mats

Handout: Body Scan Meditation Script (\*\*can add YouTube links as well\*\*)

### Lesson

#### I. Check In

- A. Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on. If possible, relate this to the day's topic, or a previous topic.

#### II. Review 5-4-3-2-1 exercise from previous group.

- A. What was the purpose of this exercise?
- B. Was anyone able to practice it at home? What did you notice?

#### III. Introduce the body scan

- A. The body scan is another way for us to move toward "calm mind." **By noticing what is going on in our bodies, we can become more aware of feelings we have.**

1. **Example:** face feels hot, clenching jaw → anger. Ask students for other examples.

- B. Has anyone ever noticed something uncomfortable going on in their body, and had the thought, "I want this to go away so badly!" ?

1. This increases stress, frustration and anxiety. If we can pay attention without judging ourselves, we will feel less distress.

- C. The goal is to pause and pay attention to each part of your body, one area at a time. Remember, the goal is to pay attention without judging your experience.

#### IV. Practice the body scan and process with the group → you can choose to read the script from Handout 16-3 or to play a youtube video (no more than 8-10 mins long) with calming music and instructions.

- A. Were you able to pay attention to your body?
- B. What did you notice about how your body felt?
- C. Did you get distracted? If so, how did you return your attention back to your body?
- D. When might it be important to pay attention to your body? Any particular times or day or situations that happen during your day?

#### V. Reiterate that our body helps us understand what emotions we are feeling. When we recognize our emotions, we can choose how we act on them. Encourage students to practice the body scan for homework.

## Session 7: Mindfulness of Thoughts

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

### Objectives:

Review previous mindfulness skills/exercises

Explore mindfulness of thoughts

Understand the importance of noticing thoughts without judging or acting on them.

Understand the link between getting “stuck” or past or future thoughts and emotional distress

### Materials:

Whiteboard/ Easel

Yoga Mats

Facilitator Guide for “Past, Present, Future” game

**Handouts:** “Changing the Channel” and “Lazy River” exercises

### Lesson

#### I. Check In

- A. Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on. If possible, relate this to the day’s topic, or a previous topic.

#### II. Review the body scan exercise from the previous session

- A. Why is it important to become aware of what’s going on in our bodies?  
(*Emphasize the link between awareness of our bodies and emotions. If we are more aware of our emotions we can more easily move to “calm mind” so that we are not aggressive toward others.*)
- B. Was anyone able to practice this at home? What did you notice?
- C. What has been your favorite/most helpful mindfulness exercise learned so far?  
(*list them on the whiteboard/easel to jog group members’ memories.*)

#### III. “Past, Present, Future” Game

- A. Introduce the game by telling group members we will be practicing becoming mindful of our thoughts in today’s group.
- B. Explain that at any given time, we have thoughts about the past, present moment, or the future.
- C. Read statements from “**Past, Present, Future**” handout. Ask students if the statements are about the past, present or future.
- D. Ask students how they would feel if they were “stuck” on the thoughts in each example.
  - 1. **Emphasize:** when we focus on the present, rather than people who have hurt us in the past or worrying about the future, we are more likely to stay in “calm mind.”

#### IV. “Changing the Channel” Exercise

- A. **Ask students:** Do you think we can choose what we think about? (Allow for brief discussion)....As it turns out, we can deliberately choose.
- B. *Here, we want to pretend that the current content of our thoughts is like a TV channel that we are watching. For example, we may be watching our worried, angry, or stressed channel. We can change the channel to a happy, calm, or*

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*relaxed channel, which will then change our feelings. In other words, we can choose a thought, or channel, that feels better!*

**C. Distribute the “Changing the Channel” Handout. Lead students in the exercise and process with them afterwards.** Potential discussion questions:

1. What came up for you during this exercise?
2. What channel were you turned into at first? Worried, angry, happy, painful, good, bad? Etc.
3. What did you put on your happy/peaceful/relaxed channel?
4. What did you notice about your mood when you changed the channel?

**D. Encourage group members to practice this and other mindfulness exercises for homework.**

**V. \*\*IF TIME\*\* (allow 5-8 minutes) → “Lazy River” Exercise. If no time, just point out to group members that this is another exercise similar to “changing the channel” that they can practice at home.**

**A.** *We are going to pretend that thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations are riding in rafts or boats on a lazy river. The goal is to notice them, but to just let them float by without getting in the boat or raft (engaging with them).*

**B. Distribute the Lazy River handout. Lead students in the exercise and process afterwards.** Potential discussion questions:

1. What came up for you during this exercise?
2. Were you able to imagine the boats and rafts on the river?
3. Did you notice any thoughts, emotions, or body sensations riding in the rafts?
4. Were you able to let the rafts float by, or did you jump in (engage with the thought/emotion/sensation)? If so, which ones did you jump into?
  - a) **\*\*this is a good indication of what things we are holding onto that perhaps need to be let go\*\***

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## Session 8: Perspective-Taking / Mindfulness of Others

### Objectives:

To understand the term “perspective-taking”

To apply perspective-taking to understanding the mindset of perpetrators and victims of aggressive behavior.

To practice the “Friendly Wishes” meditation

### Materials:

Yoga Mats

Whiteboard/ Easel

Pens/Pencils (or other writing implement)

Optical Illusion Picture (Young Woman, or Old Lady?)

2 Handouts: “Walk in Their Shoes” and “Friendly Wishes” Meditation (guided audio: optional)

### Lesson

#### I. Check In

**A.** Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on. If possible, relate this to the day’s topic, or a previous topic.

**B.** Ask students about their experiences practicing mindfulness exercises.

#### II. “Young Woman, or Old Lady?” Activity

**A.** Display the optical illusion picture on the whiteboard. Ask students to quietly observe the picture for a few moments. Then, call on students one by one to share what they saw in the picture. *(Some will see a young woman, while others will disagree and say that they see an old lady.) If one of these perspectives are not brought up, you should bring it up and encourage students to see it from your perspective.*

#### **B. Process and discuss:**

1. Can you guess the purpose of this activity?
2. What was it like to see the image so differently than someone else?
3. How did you feel when you were able to see it their way?

**C. The take home point:** Two people can see the same situation differently. we need to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes to understand how they see the world→ their feelings and how they act.

#### III. Perspective-Taking Exercise

**A.** Today we are going to practice perspective-taking in two ways: imagining how others might feel when they are victims of aggression, and reasons why someone might behave aggressively. We are going to practice “putting on that person’s shoes” to try to understand what they might be thinking, or feeling.

**B.** Distribute “Walk in Their Shoes” handout and lead group members through each example. You can use the discussion questions on the handout and any others that seem applicable.

#### IV. “Friendly Wishes” Meditation

**A.** Distribute the “Friendly Wishes” meditation handout. Introduce the meditation by saying that the purpose is to send “friendly wishes” to ourselves



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and others in our lives. Share that research shows that if you practice this consistently, you are likely to feel less angry (again, it helps us get to “calm mind” by changing our channel.)

- B. Practice** the “friendly wishes” meditation with the group. You can choose to read it from the handout or use/make an audio recording.
- C. Process** afterwards. Potential discussion questions:
  - 1. What did you find easiest about this exercise? Or, most difficult?
  - 2. What was it like for you to send friendly wishes to someone in your life that you don’t get along with right now?
  - 3. Did you notice any unpleasant emotions coming up, and if so, were you able to accept them and continue focusing on the meditation?
- D. Encourage** group members to practice this meditation during the upcoming week. Tell them that from now on, we will finish each group session with this meditation for extra practice.

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## Session 9: Effective Communication

**Objectives:** To learn the difference between aggressive, assertive and passive communication  
To practice using I-statements as an effective communication strategy

### Materials:

Yoga Mats

Whiteboard/Easel

Handout: Types of Communication (double sided with Venn Diagram); I-Statements

Facilitator's Guide for "Friendly Wishes" meditation (handout or audioguide)

### Lesson

#### I. Check In

- A. Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on. If possible, relate this to the day's topic, or a previous topic.
- B. Ask students about their experiences practicing mindfulness exercises or noticing their "anger alarms" going off.

#### II. Briefly review the previous week's topic. Discussion questions can include:

- A. What does it mean to take someone else's perspective?
- B. What questions should we ask when we try to put ourselves in someone else's shoes (what might be going on in their lives, how they might feel, what they are thinking, etc.)
- C. *Now that we know how to get to "calm mind" and know how to "put on others' shoes," it's time that we figure out what to do when we ourselves, or our peers, are victims of aggression.*

#### III. Types of Communication

- A. **Distribute** the "Types of Communication" handout. Review the different types and ask group members to give specific examples of these as they occur at school and in their friend groups.
- B. **During discussion, weave in the point that if we are in "calm mind," we are more likely to be assertive. If our minds are filled with angry thoughts, we are more likely to be passive or aggressive.**
- C. *"Today we will be learning a strategy to help us become more assertive when others hurt us physically or emotionally, or when we see that happening to others."*

#### IV. I-Statements and Roleplay

- A. **Review** the I-Statement worksheet, including the 4 steps (in the bubbles) and situations where it is helpful to use I-statements.
- B. **Roleplay.** Choose three students (an aggressor, victim and bystander). Have the aggressor do something mean to the victim. Encourage both the victim and bystander to respond to the aggressor by using I-statements.
- C. Have the rest of the group critique the actors by sharing one thing they did well, one thing to work on, and another thing they did well.

#### V. "Friendly Wishes" Meditation

- A. **Practice** the "friendly wishes" meditation with the group.

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**B. Process** afterwards.

**C. Encourage** group members to practice this meditation during the upcoming week.

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## Session 10 - Putting It All Together

**Objectives:** To continue practicing effective communication via “I” Statements  
To review concepts learned in previous lessons

**Materials:**

Whiteboard/Easel

Yoga Mats

“What to Remember” handouts

Pens/Pencils or other writing implements

“Friendly Wishes” meditation (handout or audioguide)

### Lesson

#### I. Check In

- A. Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on.
- B. Ask students about their experiences practicing mindfulness exercises, noticing their “anger alarms” or using “I-statements.”

#### II. Review/Continued Practice with I-Statements

- A. **Review:** ask students if they can remember the four parts of an I-statement and to name situations in which I-statements can be helpful.
  1. Reiterate that mindfulness exercises help us to get to “calm” mind, and once we are there, we can more easily use I-statements to stand up to aggressive behavior.
- B. **Roleplay.** Organize group members into pairs and assign them to roleplay situations where either verbal, relational or physical aggression is happening, and how an “I” statement can be used in that situation.
  1. Have the rest of the group critique the actors by sharing one thing they did well, one thing to work on, and another thing they did well.

#### III. Putting it all Together activity

- A. Ask students to provide examples of the concepts learned throughout the group sessions (example questions below):
  1. What are the three types of aggression?
  2. Why is anger important/ what are it’s jobs?
  3. What sets off your “anger alarm?” How can you tell if you are getting angry?
  4. Mindfulness= nonjudgment and awareness of the present moment, this helps us to get to calm mind
  5. What are some different mindfulness exercises that we can use to get to “calm mind”? (belly breathing, body scan, 5-4-3-2-1, changing the channel, lazy river, friendly wishes)
  6. Why is it important to walk in others’ shoes? (if we understand what others are thinking and feeling, and why, it may help us to get to calm mind and problem-solve more effectively.)

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

7. What are the three types of communication? How do those fit in with our needs and others' needs?

**IV. “Friendly Wishes” Meditation**

- A. **Practice** the “friendly wishes” meditation with the group.
- B. **Process** afterwards.
- C. **Encourage** group members to practice this meditation during the upcoming week.

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

**Session 11- Spread the Word**

**Objectives:** Discuss what it means to be a leader  
Create a project to “spread the word”

**Materials:** Paper  
Pens/Pencils

**Lesson**

- I. Check In**
  - A. Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on.
  - B. Ask students about their experiences practicing mindfulness exercises, noticing their “anger alarms” or using “I-statements.”
- II. Leadership**
  - A. Tell students that as members of this group, they now have skills and/or knowledge that other students in their grade do not have.
  - B. Discuss what “leadership” means and what responsibilities it can involve.
- III. Introduce “Spread the Word” project**
  - A. Help group members brainstorm ideas for “spreading the word” to their classmates about what they have learned in this group. Have group members vote on the possible ideas or come up with their own.
  - B. Possible ideas include:
    1. Leading classmates in a mindfulness activity.
    2. Creating a skit to perform in front of classmates.
    3. Aggression Awareness Day - create a poster with a promise to not engage in aggressive behavior. Hang in the cafeteria and encourage other students to sign.
    4. “Friendly wishes” project - have students write brief notes to others in the school mimicking the meditation (a note to someone they are close to, a neutral person, and someone they are having difficulty with.) These would likely need to be proofread by you as the facilitator(s)!
- IV. “Friendly Wishes” Meditation**
  - A. **Practice** the “friendly wishes” meditation with the group.
  - B. **Process** afterwards.
  - C. **Encourage** group members to practice this meditation during the upcoming week.

## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

**Lesson 12: Spread the Word / Wrapping Up**

**Objectives:** Continue working on “Spread the Word” project  
Celebrate group members’ completion of the program!

**Materials:** Dependent on the project selected by group members  
Pizza party / other type of food provided to celebrate group members’ achievements

**Lesson**

- I. Check In**
  - A. Check in to see if group members have anything urgent that they would like to share or get feedback on.
  - B. Ask students about their experiences practicing mindfulness exercises, noticing their “anger alarms” or using “I-statements.”
- II. Work on the project**
  - A. Assist group members in organizing and preparing for their project, including communication with other administrative staff or teachers in the Middle School.
  - B. **\*\*Group members can ask permission to use available space in Teen Center or elsewhere in the Middle School during lunch time or study hall should they need additional time to prepare their project.**
- III. Closing Remarks**
  - A. Thank students for their hard work and participation in the group! Remind them that if they continue to practice these skills they can keep building a climate of respect in their school and achieve “calm mind.”

## Aggression: Myth or Fact ?

1. Bullying will make kids tougher, so they should just stick it out.
  - a. **MYTH:** Bullying does not make someone tougher. Research has shown it often has the opposite effect and lowers a child's sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Bullying often creates fear and increases anxiety for a child.
2. Bullying is difficult to recognize.
  - a. **FACT:** Physical bullying, such as hitting, kicking, and fighting, may be easy to recognize since this type of behavior is overt. However, it is the covert bullying such as shunning, alienating, and excluding that is much harder to detect.
3. Girls do not bully.
  - a. **MYTH:** Research shows that girls can and do bully. While they do not physically bully targets as often as boys, they will often use verbal and emotional bullying. Bullying for girls escalates during the middle school years.
4. Telling a teacher about bullying is tattling.
  - a. **MYTH:** Tattling is done to get someone in trouble, telling is done to protect someone. The secrecy of bullying only serves to protect the bully and perpetuate the behavior.
5. Cyberbullying can be as harmful as bullying that occurs in person.
  - a. **FACT:** Insulting others on social media, including making mean-spirited posts or sharing pictures without that person's consent are very harmful indeed. Some students have gone as far as to commit suicide due to not seeing a way out of the bullying experienced online.
6. Bullies are usually people who are popular, athletic, and attractive.
  - a. **MYTH:** Bullies come in all shapes and sizes and can exist in any social circle.



# **Aggression ABC's**

- ❖ **Physical aggression** involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical aggression includes:
  - Hitting/kicking/pinching/punching
  - Spitting
  - Tripping/pushing
  - Taking or breaking someone's things
  - Making mean or rude hand gestures
  
- ❖ **Verbal aggression** is saying or writing mean things. **This could happen in person or on the internet/social media** (e.g. instagram, snapchat) which is known as **cyberbullying**. Verbal bullying includes:
  - Teasing
  - Name-calling
  - Inappropriate sexual comments
  - Writing mean comments on someone's social media account or their photos.
  - Threatening to cause harm to another
  
- ❖ **Relational aggression** involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Relational aggression includes:
  - Leaving someone out on purpose
  - Telling other children not to be friends with someone
  - Spreading rumors about someone
  - Gossiping about someone
  - Embarrassing someone in public

# Anger's Jobs



**Anger is not a “bad” or “negative” emotion.** All human brains are wired so that we sometimes experience anger.

In fact, anger (and other emotions, too!) have three ways that they help us out:

## 1. Communication

Emotions are communicated by our faces, tone of voice, gestures and posture. Often times people can tell what we are feeling, even if we try to hide it.

We can communicate very quickly through facial expressions and tone of voice - so if we need to communicate alarm, we can do so quickly without a long explanation.

## 2. Motivation

Emotions tell us to “ACT NOW!” and “STAY FOCUSED!”

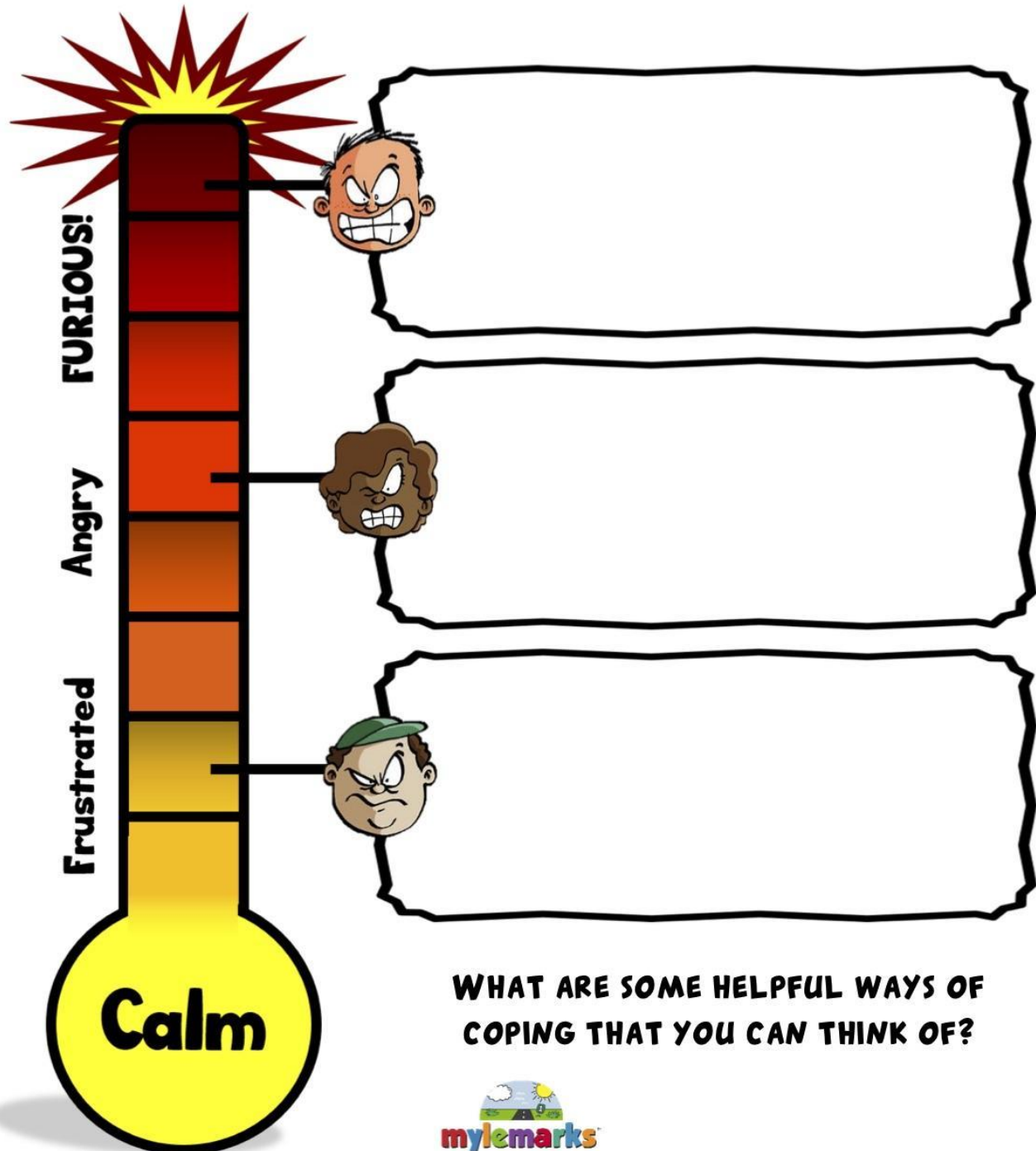
They give us motivation to change a situation, and to do so quickly to save us time in important situations.

## 3. Validation

Emotions give us information about a situation. They can be our “gut instinct,” or our SIGNALS or ALARMS.

# ANGER THERMOMETER

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS OR SITUATIONS THAT MAKE YOU FEEL  
FRUSTRATED, ANGRY, OR FURIOUS?



WHAT ARE SOME HELPFUL WAYS OF  
COPING THAT YOU CAN THINK OF?



## Anger triggers:



## What makes you angry?

Triggers are situations or things that make you feel make you feel frustrated, angry, or furious.

**Go through this list and circle which things set off your “anger alarm.” Then, write these down on your anger thermometer (see reverse side).**

Someone lies to me	I lose at a game, sport or competition.
My friends talk about my behind my back	Someone puts their hands on me
Someone calls me names	I get left out by my friends or family.
I get a bad grade on a test or assignment.	People get in my personal space
People don't like what I post on Instagram, Snapchat or social media.	Others tell me what to do
Someone gossips about me or spreads a rumor about me.	People leave mean comments on my social media
I'm bullied or picked on by others.	When I'm not good enough at something.
Someone cuts in front of me in the lunch line	I get blamed for something I didn't do.
I'm not invited to an event or party, or to hang out with friends.	Someone talks badly about my family member or friend.
I lose when playing a video game	Other people have what I want
I'm treated unfairly	Someone breaks their promise to me
My boyfriend or girlfriend breaks up with me.	People steal from me
I have too much work to do.	Someone gets me in trouble with a teacher or staff member at school.

## ANGER WARNING SIGNS

Sometimes anger can affect what you say or do before you even recognize how you're feeling!

You may become so used to the feeling of anger that you don't notice it, sort of like how you can hear the sound of an air conditioner, or the humming of a refrigerator, but block it from your mind.

How do you react when you feel angry? Some of these warning signs might start when you are only a little irritated, and others might start when you are very angry. **Circle the warning signs that apply to you:**

My face feels hot.	I want to yell or scream.
I clench my fists.	My head starts to hurt.
I start to shake or tremble.	My heart beats really fast.
My chest feels tight.	I have a stomach ache.
I feel like I could cry.	I roll my eyes or make an angry face.
I start to argue.	I start sweating.
My face turns red.	I want to hit someone.
I raise my voice	I say things like "whatever" or "I don't care."
It's hard to breathe.	I pace back and forth.
I go quiet and "shut down."	I can't stop thinking about what is making me mad.
I think about "getting back" at the person who made me angry.	My muscles feel tense and tight.

## “Walk in Their Shoes”

1. You are part of a group chat where you and your friends calling your other friend Melissa names such as “slut,” “ugly,” and a “loser.”

**Put on Melissa's shoes:** What will she think about herself when she reads these comments? How will she feel?



2. You are racing to the cafeteria for lunch, and Michael pushes you aside to cut in front of you in the lunch line. However, you happen to know that Michael's family is having trouble paying their bills. He has been going to bed hungry the past few nights and is having trouble getting to school in time for breakfast in the morning.

**Put on Michael's shoes:** How might he feel? Why might he have acted the way that he did?



3. You walk up to your friend, Tom, who looks like he is upset (he is crying and looking down). You ask him if he is okay, and he responds by saying “Get away from me!” Because you are his friend, you know that his parents have been fighting a lot and talking about getting a divorce. He is having trouble sleeping at night.

**Put on Tom's shoes:** How might he feel? Why might he have acted the way that he did?



## MINDFULNESS-BASED AGGRESSION PREVENTION PROGRAM

4. You are in math class, and your classmate Andrea raises her hand to answer a question, but gets it incorrect. She raises her hand a second time but also gives an incorrect answer. After class, you see other students calling her "an idiot" and laughing at her.

**Put on Andrea's shoes:** How might she feel when she hears others calling her names and laughing at her? What will she think about herself?



5. You facetimed your friend after school, which you had talked about doing during the school day. Your friend did not pick up on FaceTime, and did not respond to your text messages. However, you can tell that your friend "read" them. You want to text her again and tell her that you don't want to talk to her anymore, either.

**What are some potential reasons for your friend's behavior? Can you put yourself in your friend's shoes to figure it out? What should you do?**



## Mindfulness of the Five Senses: 5-4-3-2-1 Exercise



This technique will take you through your five senses to help remind you of the present. **This is a technique that can bring you closer to “calm mind” when you are are feeling angry or have an urge to become aggressive.**

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Take a deep belly breath to begin.

**5 - LOOK:** Look around for 5 things that you can see, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I see the computer, I see the cup, I see the picture frame.

**4 - FEEL:** Pay attention to your body and think of 4 things that you can feel, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I feel my feet warm in my socks, I feel the hair on the back of my neck, or I feel the pillow I am sitting on.

**3 - LISTEN:** Listen for 3 sounds. It could be the sound of traffic outside, the sound of typing or the sound of your tummy rumbling. Say the three things out loud.

**2 - SMELL:** Say two things you can smell. If you're allowed to, it's okay to move to another spot and sniff something. If you can't smell anything at the moment or you can't move, then name your 2 favorite smells.

**1 - TASTE:** Say one thing you can taste. It may be the toothpaste from brushing your teeth, or a mint from after lunch. If you can't taste anything, then say your favorite thing to taste.

Take another deep belly breath to end.



## **Facilitator Guide:**

### **Past, Present or Future? Exercise**

**Are these statements about the past, present or future?**

After each statement is read and students respond, ask students: *if you got “stuck” on this thought, how might you feel?”*

- Sophie is angry because Joe cut in front of her in the lunch line two days ago.
- John is thinking about how happy he feels today.
- Alex is trying to play soccer during recess but keeps thinking about how his girlfriend broke up with him.
- Jordan remembers how she caught two of her friends talking about her behind her back this morning.
- Tim is looking out the window, thinking about how it is a beautiful, Spring day.
- Henry is worried that his brother will get sick again this year, like he did last year.
- Preston is paying attention to his homework.
- Julia can't stop thinking about how her friend left a mean comment on her insta story.
- Mark is upset because his group of friends called him ugly and pushed him into his locker yesterday.

**Old Woman, or Young Lady?**



## Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Communication

### Passive Communication

During passive communication, a person prioritizes the needs, wants, and feelings of others, even at their own expense. The person does not express their own needs, or does not stand up for them. This can lead to being taken advantage of, even by well-meaning people who are unaware of the passive communicator's needs and wants.

- Soft spoken / quiet
- Allows others to take advantage
- Prioritizes needs of others
- Poor eye contact / looks down or away
- Does not express one's own needs or wants
- Lack of confidence

### Aggressive Communication

Through aggressive communication, a person expresses that only their own needs, wants, and feelings matter. The other person is bullied, and their needs are ignored.

- Easily frustrated
- Speaks in a loud or overbearing way
- Unwilling to compromise
- Use of criticism, humiliation, and domination
- Frequently interrupts or does not listen
- Disrespectful toward others

### Assertive Communication

Assertive communication emphasizes the importance of *both* peoples' needs. During assertive communication, a person stands up for their own needs, wants, and feelings, but also listens to and respects the needs of others. Assertive communication is defined by confidence, and a willingness to compromise.

- Listens without interruption
- Clearly states needs and wants
- Willing to compromise
- Stands up for own rights
- Confident tone / body language
- Good eye contact

### Examples

Scenario	A friend asks to borrow your car. This will be a big inconvenience for you.
Passive	Umm, yeah, I guess that's fine. Do you need me to fill the tank?
Aggressive	No way! Why would I let you borrow my car? You're crazy to even ask.
Assertive	I need my car that day, but I'll have time to drop you off.



### **When should we use them?**

When we need to confront others about their behavior

When we feel others are not treating us fairly

When we feel defensive or angry

When others are angry with us

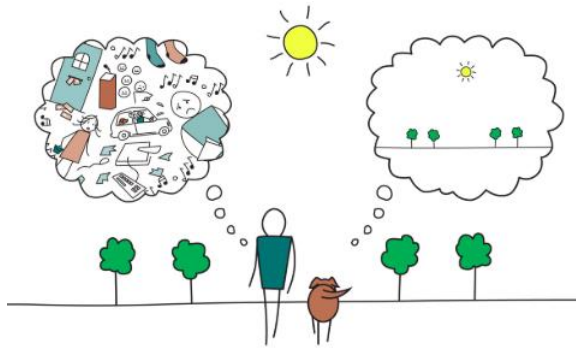
### **Examples**

"I feel upset when you don't invite Anna to hang out with us because it's a nicer thing to include others. How about we go invite her together?"

"I feel angry when you (hit/shove/push) me because I don't like people being in my space. Next time, if you are mad at me, please just tell me."

"It makes me embarrassed when you talk about me behind my back, because I don't want my business shared with people. Next time I would appreciate if you kept it to yourself."

## What to remember ???



Mind Full, or Mindful?



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