
Empowering College Students Through Group Work: **An Evidence Based Framework**

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Check In



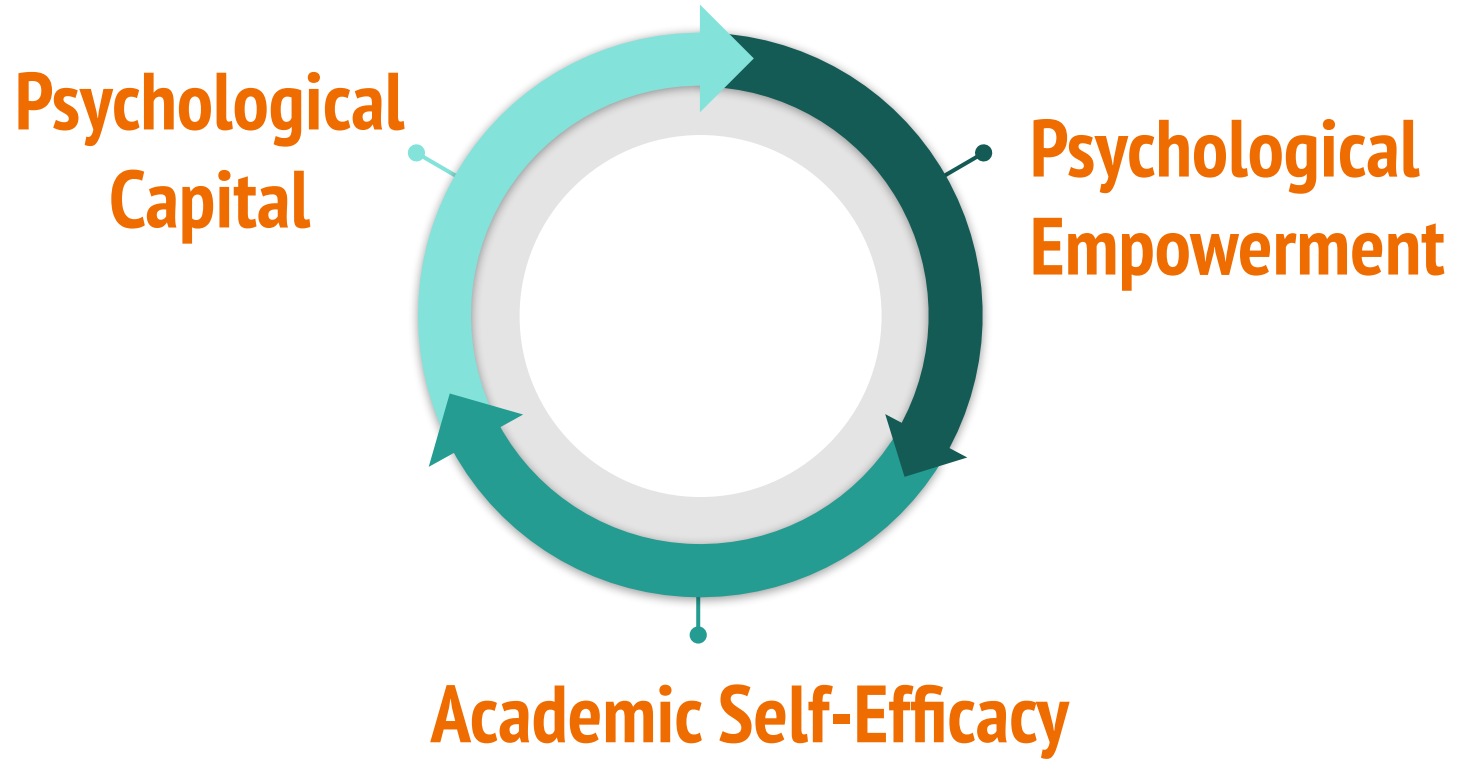
Objectives

1. Explain the importance of fostering a sense of empowerment among college students
2. Identify the unique challenges of marginalized college students that require empowerment
3. Describe a framework for a 3 session group intervention designed to support college students in improving their sense of empowerment
4. Discuss evidence based practices that can be used by clinicians to empower college students

Empowerment

“the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights”





Psychological Empowerment



- The process of feeling capable, confident, and motivated to take control of one's life
- Increases willingness to share knowledge
- Increases drive to acquire and apply knowledge
- Increases cognitive engagement and utilization of resources
- Boosts confidence, autonomy, and academic self-efficacy

Self-Efficacy

A person's belief in his or her capabilities for dealing with a specific task or course of action in a certain situation

Academic Self-Efficacy

The subjective evaluation of the ability to succeed in academic pursuits

Academic Self-Efficacy

- **Mastery Experience**

- A person's own experience and individual judgement on the success or failure of a task

- **Vicarious Experience**

- Learning by observing a model's actions and behaviors

- **Verbal or social persuasion**

- Verbal or social reassurance
- Given by others or themselves

- **Physiological and emotional states**

- Physiological arousal influencing a person's judgement

Psychological Capital

- An individual's positive psychological state -
 - Efficacy
 - Hope
 - Optimism
 - Resilience
- Fosters motivation and the use of learning strategies
- Find value and feel competent

Psychological Empowerment, Academic Self-Efficacy, Psychological Capital

- Integral pieces of clinical practice with college students
- Tightly interconnected
- Promotes learning
- Enhances student engagement
- Beyond grades -
 - Relationships
 - Finances
 - Skills/hobbies

Empowering College Students - Erikson's Stages of Development:

- **Adolescence (12 - 18 years old)**: *Identity vs. Identity confusion*
 - "Finding Oneself" - exploring values, beliefs, and view of the world
 - "Who do I want to be?" - identifying goals and plans for the future
 - "How do I fit with my world?" - reflecting upon roles in society
- **Young Adulthood (18 - 40 years old)**: *Intimacy vs. Isolation*
 - "Who do I want to be with?" - forming social connections
 - "How does intimacy feel?" - exploring close relationships
 - "What do I want in social settings?" - identifying needs in relationships

What are we empowering students to do?

“controlling one's life and claiming one's rights”

- Positive self-reflection and sense of self
- Effective decision making skills
- Foster healthy interpersonal relationships
- Improve assertiveness
- Build skills to advocate for oneself and others



Empowerment in Marginalized Communities



Inequity vs inequality

Inequality

unequal distribution of
resources

Inequity

unequal distribution of
resources due to an
unjust power imbalance

Empowerment can be a tool in managing inequity

Equality



It is assumed that everyone benefits from the same equal conditions.

Equity



Some people are given accommodations to allow them to have equal access. All are treated equitably.

Justice



All inequities have been eliminated and all individuals are equal with no additional accommodations.

Inequity vs. Inequality



Challenges in Marginalized Communities Requiring Empowerment

- “How do I fit into my world” - navigating a world that isn't build for marginalized people
- Different goals to meet different needs
- Relationships can vary
- Lack of resources resulting in the need for advocacy

***Planning and Facilitating a Group to
Empower College Students***

Group Framework

- Three group sessions
- Session length is 1 hour
- Open/Closed group to meet the needs of your students
 - Some factors to consider:
 - Scheduling of the group (timing in the semester)
 - Student population (commuters vs on campus)
 - Size of your college (smaller community college vs. large university)
- Psychoeducation/Process group

Referral Process

- Formal referral process through the campus counseling center
- Referred by yourself or other clinicians



Screening Process - Phone Screening

Inclusion Criteria

- Current student
- Interest in empowerment
- 18 years or older
- Suitable for a group setting

Exclusion Criteria

- Active suicidal ideation or homicidal ideation with plan and intent
- Psychotic symptoms
- Severe social anxiety

Session 1 - Coping Strategies

Evidence Based Practice: Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

1. Introduce the group and clarify the purpose of the group
 - **Purpose:** to foster a sense of empowerment amongst group members
2. Clarify group norms and expectations, allowing group members to contribute
3. Mindfulness exercise
4. Emotional Regulation
5. Connecting mindfulness and emotional regulation to empowerment
6. Questions/further discussion

Dialectical Behavior Therapy

- Two seemingly conflicting things can coexist
- Used to manage intense emotions
- Utilized in the treatment of:
 - Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)
 - Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
 - Substance Use Disorder
 - Phobias
- Individual therapy, group therapy, telephone coaching, clinician consultation
- Mindfulness, Emotional Regulation, Distress Tolerance, Interpersonal Effectiveness

Mindfulness

- Focusing attention on the present moment
- Slowing down the thought train - time and space between the trigger and the emotional reaction
- Non-judgement and curiosity
- Personalized to the individual
- Specific to the circumstance

3. Mindfulness Exercise

- Deep Breathing
- Body Scan
- Mindful Eating
- Appealing to the Senses
- Four Finger Affirmation Exercise



3. Mindfulness Exercise Discussion

Questions to ask:

- “What was that experience like?”
- “Did you find your mind wandering? If so, how did you come back to the mindfulness exercise?”
- “If you feel comfortable sharing, how do you envision yourself using mindfulness?”

Emotional Regulation

- Used when an emotional response is disproportionate to the trigger
- Slowing down a seesaw
- Can be proactive and reactive



4. Emotional Regulation - PLEASED

| | |
|-----------|---------------------------|
| PL | Treat Physical Illness |
| E | Eat Healthy |
| A | Avoid Mood Altering Drugs |
| S | Sleep Well |
| E | Exercise Regularly |
| D | Daily |

4. Emotional Regulation

- Act Opposite:
 - Emotions can lead to actions. Actions can lead to emotions.
 - If we know that an emotion leads to a specific action, we can “act opposite” to bring up another emotion
- Check the Facts
 - “What triggered my emotion?”
 - “What are the objective facts of the situation”
 - “What assumptions am I making? What assumptions can I let go of?”
 - “What can I problem solve?”

5. Connecting mindfulness and emotional regulation to empowerment

- Coping strategies
- When we believe that we can manage our emotions, we are more likely to feel empowered to take on challenges
- “I can handle difficult things so I will do difficult things”

6. Questions/Further discussion

- Allow for an open space to share questions and/or experiences during this session

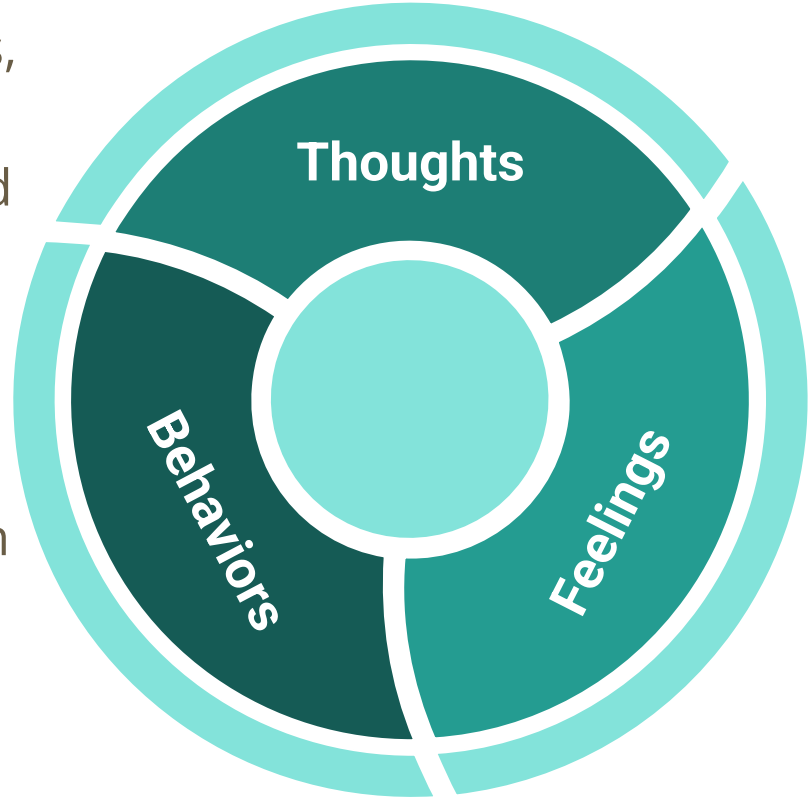
Session 2 - Self-talk

Evidence Based Practice: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

1. Revist the purpose of the group and the group norms
2. Identifying values and strengths exercise
3. Developing personalized affirmations
4. Connecting self-talk to empowerment
5. Questions/further discussion

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Clinicians work to identify, process, and modify ineffective thought patterns which in turn produces change in behavior
- Individuals who are psychologically healthy demonstrate relationships with themselves that were self-accepting, nurturing and self-helping
- Use of coping statements (affirmations)



2. Values and Strengths Exercise

- Used to identify who we are and what we like about ourselves
 - Phone or paper
1. Define values - “things that are important to us”
 2. Allow space for students to make a list of values. Offer examples and encourage sharing amongst students
 3. Define strengths - “things about us that are positive; what do we bring to the table?”
 4. Allow space for students to make a list of strengths. Offer examples and encourage sharing amongst students
 5. Clarify the purpose of this exercise - We can construct a life for ourselves, by building on our strengths, that aligns with what we find important.
 6. Allow for a brief discussion - “what was this exercise like?”

3. Personalized Affirmations Exercise

- Use to identify statements that improve our self-talk
 - Phone or paper
1. Define affirmations - "Brief statements that make us feel good; Compliments or statements of encouragement. Statements that someone kind and compassionate may say to us."
 2. Stress that by identifying our values and strengths it may be easier for us to identify what we need to hear
 3. Allow space for students to make a list of personalized affirmations. Stress that these affirmations are personalized - "they are what YOU need to hear"
 4. Offer examples and encourage sharing amongst students.
 5. Clarify the purpose of this exercise - We can use these affirmations when we notice that we need to improve our self-talk.
 6. Allow for a brief discussion - "what was this exercise like?"

Affirmations and Self-talk

- Can be used proactively and reactively
- Rewiring of the brain
- Takes time
- “Fake it till you make”



5. Connecting self-talk to empowerment

- Changes the way we talk to ourselves
- Being our biggest critic vs. being our biggest supporter
- Self-talk is personalized
- “I empower myself to do hard things”

6. Questions/Further discussion

- Allow for an open space to share questions and/or experiences during this session

Session 3 - Goal Setting

Evidence Based Practice: Visualization

1. Revist the purpose of the group and the group norms
2. SMART goals exercise
3. Guided visualization exercise
4. Connecting goal setting to empowerment
5. Questions/further discussion
6. Group reflection/termination

SMART Goals

- Used to create a path towards achieving a goal
- Helps to conceptualize a goal more effectively
- Requires reflective thought of oneself
- Improves self-efficacy and psychological capital leading to increased feelings of empowerment

S

Specific

Be specific about what you want to achieve

Ask yourself questions about your goals following the five W's - Who, What, When, Where, and Why



M

Measurable

Make sure that you can measure your success

You'll be able to track your progress by answering questions like how will you know when your goal is complete?



A

Achievable

Ensure your goal is realistic and achievable - don't set yourself a goal that's too easy or too difficult to complete

Look at your current situation and make sure you have what you need to achieve



R

Relevant

Set yourself a goal that's relevant to you

Is your goal worthwhile to you?
Are you the right person to achieve it?

Is your goal applicable to your current situation, or is it unrealistic?



T

Time-bound

Assign a start and end date to your goal to encourage yourself to reach it with a deadline

Think about what you can do today, tomorrow, months from now to achieve your goal



2. SMART Goals Group Exercise

- Worksheet
- Brief discussion allowing group members to share their experience with the worksheet



Visualization

- Mental imagery/mental rehearsal
- “representations of sensory information”
- Imagine a object, process, or event
- Specific vs general
- Can evoke responses such as a physical reaction or an emotional reaction
- Multiple applications in clinical practice
 - EMDR
 - Exposure Therapy

Visualization - Alex Honnold



3. Guided Visualization Exercise - Script

"Take a deep breath and find a comfortable position in your chair. Put both feet on the floor to feel a sense of groundedness. You may close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so. If not, and that is okay, find a point in the room that you can gently gaze at. Continue to maintain steady breathing throughout this exercise. If you find your mind wandering, that is normal. Gently notice it and come back to your visualization. Now I want you to think of a goal that you want to achieve. It can be any goal, short term or long term, big or small. Maybe one that we've discussed in group or maybe one that has just come to your mind now. Now imagine yourself working towards achieving this goal. Visualize yourself completing the small steps needed to accomplish this goal. Now leaning into your senses imagine the physical sensations that may come up for you when working towards your goal. Maybe you'll feel soreness in your muscles. Maybe you'll feel a soft texture. Maybe you'll smell freshly cut grass. Maybe you'll hear ocean waves crashing on the shore. Maybe you'll taste a delicious meal. Whatever it is take a moment to imagine those sensations. Next, imagine the feelings that may come up for you when you complete each smaller task when working towards your goal. Maybe you'll feel a sense of accomplishment and pride. Maybe you'll feel tired. Maybe you'll feel excited. Whatever it is take a moment to sit in those emotions. Now imagine completing your goal. Imagine achieving what you've set out to accomplish. Imagine all of that work paying off. What are the physical sensations you're feeling now? What are the emotions that you're feeling now? Take a moment to sit in this experience. When you're ready take three deep breaths and bring yourself back to the present moment. Open your eyes and refocus your gaze."

3. Guided Visualization Exercise - Discussion

Questions to ask:

- “What goal did you imagine? What were some of those smaller, achievable tasks that you identified?”
- “What did you imagine it to be like when completing these smaller, achievable tasks?”
- “What was it like when you achieved your goal?”
- “What do you think it would have been like if you did not achieve your goal?”
- “What are some coping strategies that can be utilized to manage what it would have been like to not achieve your goal?”

4. Connecting goal setting to empowerment

- Goals are a road map to empowerment
- Encourages self-reflection and self-awareness
- Improves confidence and self-esteem
- “If I know how to I’m much more likely to do”

5. Questions/further discussion

- Allow for an open space to share questions

6. Group reflection/termination

- Normalize and model healthy endings
- Allow for an open space to share experiences during the group
- Discuss other resources if group members are interested in continuing to work on empowerment

Considerations during group facilitation

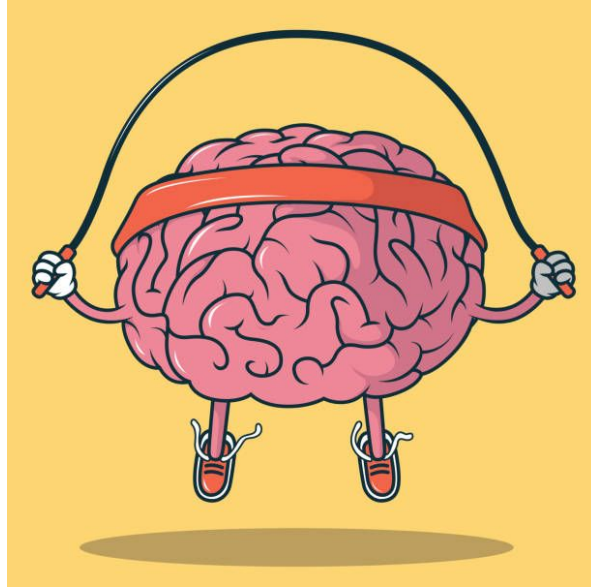
- Student population
- Language
- Facilitator style
- Single facilitator vs. co-facilitators
- Location/setting



Applications in Individual Counseling

- DBT, CBT, and Visualization
- Utilizing exercises in session
- Meet your client where they're at
- Identify your client's strengths and utilize interventions accordingly

Questions



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