Building Your Toolbox for Maximizing Student Engagement in Tier 2 Groups

Emily Barry, Ph.D., BCBA

Sarah Fefer, Ph.D., BCBA

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Shannon Suldo, Ph.D.

University of South Florida

Our Team

Emily Barry, PhD BCBA

Former Postdoctoral Fellow
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Sarah Fefer, PhD BCBA

Co-Principal Investigator
Associate Professor
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Shannon Suldo, PhD

Principal Investigator
Professor
**University of South Florida**

Many thanks to Drs. Kai Zhuang Shum, Sarah Kiefer, John Ferron, and Kristen Mahony as well as Jacqueline Blass who contributed greatly to this project!!

- 5-year, multi-site randomized controlled trial funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (*R305A200035*)

- 13 public middle schools in two states (FL and MA)

- Approx. 1170 students in grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 and their teachers and caregivers will participate

- Approx. 50 mental health providers will implement the intervention

- **Well-Being Promotion Program (WBPP; Suldo, 2016),** a Tier 2, small group intervention to increase students' subjective well-being

- Purpose: to examine efficacy, feasibility, acceptability, and cost of the Well-Being Promotion Program
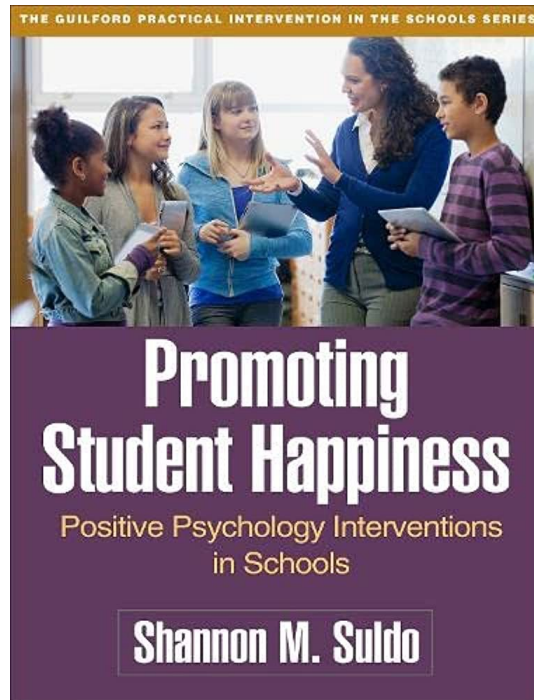
Session Objectives

1. Explain purpose of Tier 2 groups and their potential to promote positive student outcomes.

2. Describe strategies to maximize student engagement in small-group interventions.

3. Understand that interventions can use a variety of methods to improve group dynamics, and practitioners can start with areas that are more directly within their sphere of influence.

4. Model specific strategies to maximize engagement in skills-focused small groups.
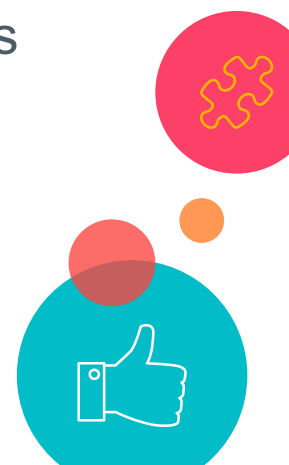
Session Norms

- Be present and attentive to the presentation.

- Everyone is a teacher and learner: keep your mind open.

- If you're talking too much, let someone speak. If you haven't contributed at all, speak up—your opinion is important!

- Ask questions for clarification to help avoid making assumptions. We will save time for questions at the end.

Any other norms to add?

Session Agenda

Tier 2 Groups
- Engagement → Outcomes

Building the Toolbox
- Leader strategies
- Group strategies
- Student strategies

Groups as Part of the Solution

Deliver services to groups of students with similar needs

- *Time is limited.*
  - Groups are an efficient & effective use of time and resources
- *Many students are in need.*
  - Groups maximize service delivery by allowing more students to be served at once
- *Evidence-based interventions are available.*
  - Resources for conducting effective group-based interventions are available

- Keperling et al., 2017
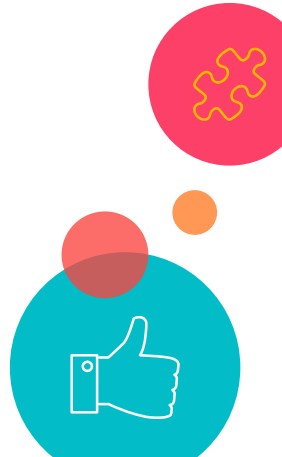
Benefits and Challenges of Small Group Counseling

Benefits

- Reduces barriers to accessing mental health services
- Gives counselor a glimpse into typical social interactions
- Opportunities to practice social skills
- Feedback and support by peers in group
- Normalizes the problems the student is working on
- Instills hope due to peers' successes with similar challenges
- Gives student a fresh look at personal circumstances
- Opportunity to work through conflict in a safe/supportive setting

Challenges

- Scheduling during the school day
- Parent/caregiver permission for targeted intervention
- Intervention materials (e.g., manual, student handouts, incentives)
- Access to private space for group
- Severe emotional or behavioral problems disrupt the group's learning

- Committee on School Health, 2004; Keperling et al., 2017
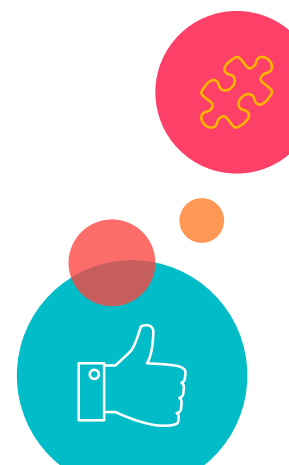
Engagement is a prerequisite for learning

Lewis et al., 2011

Goal for leading small groups:
Maximize <u>student</u> engagement!

During sessions

Relationships with peers and leaders

Between sessions (e.g., with homework)

What does engagement look like?

Engaged

Active
- Writing
- Reading aloud
- Talking to peer about assigned material
- Answering a discussion prompt

Passive
- Listening to the leader
- Looking at the handout
- Listening to a peer respond

Off-Task (Not Engaged)

Motor
- Playing with objects
- Out of seat without permission

Verbal
- Calling out
- Talking to a peer about unrelated materials

Passive
- Looking around the room
- Listening to a peer discuss an unassigned topic

Let's chat:
How do we know when students are engaged during small groups?

Shapiro (2011)

Goal for leading small groups:
Maximize <u>adult</u> engagement!

In requesting permission for student participation

In initial information session

In weekly communication and activities

Maximizing Adult Engagement

No demands on time and resources ⟷ **Intervention** ⟷ **High demands on time and resources**
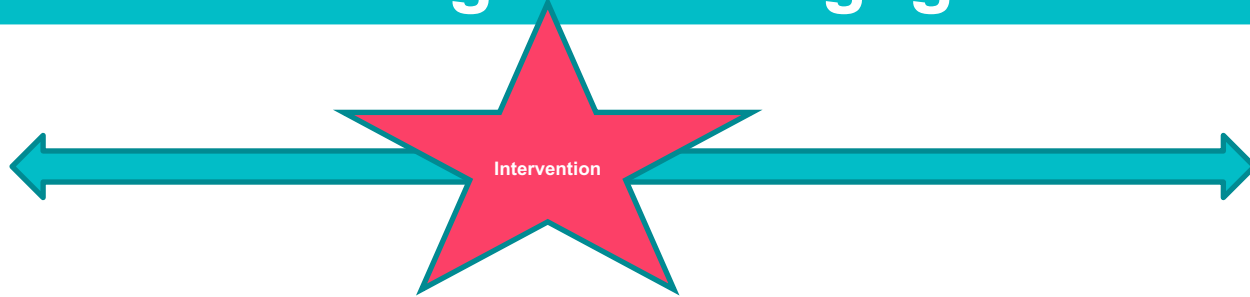
No engagement ⟷ **Intervention** ⟷ **Significant engagement**

Goal =

High Reinforcement

Low Demand
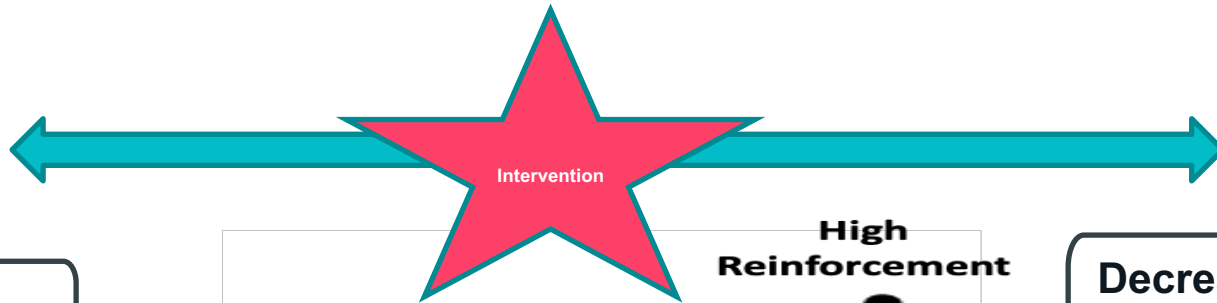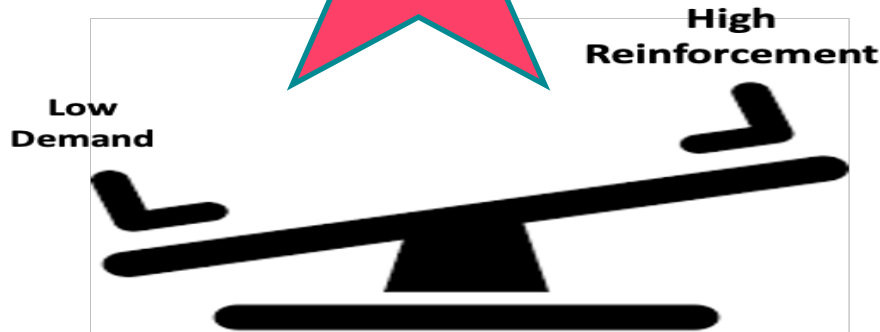
Decreasing demands and increasing reinforcement increases the likelihood of engagement!

(Reynolds et al., 2012; Fefer et al., 2020)

Building a Toolbox to Maximize Engagement

More control ←————————————————————→ **Less control**

Leader

- Establishing routines and structure
- Opportunities to respond
- Showing care
- Meet students where they are

Group

- Establish norms
- Arrange the environment
- Seek student input
- Revisiting the "why"

Student

- 1:1 conversation
- Consider "why" of behavior
- Provide choices

Building a Toolbox to Maximize Engagement

More control

Less control

Leader

- Establishing routines and structure
- Opportunities to respond
- Showing care
- Meet students where they are

Group

- Establish norms
- Arrange the environment
- Seek student input
- Revisiting the "why"

Student

- 1:1 conversation
- Consider "why" of behavior
- Provide choices

Tools for Facilitating Sessions

Leader

- **Establishing routines and structure**
- **Opportunities to respond**
- **Positive regard**
- **Meet students where they are**

Establishing Routines and Structure

First few sessions are like the first 6 weeks of school

- Plan and prepare! Discuss roles and expectations with co-leaders.

- Establish structures and routines (e.g., opening ice breaker, closing routine)

- Set a session agenda

- Communicate and model high expectations for participation

- Preview frequently (next activity, next session)

Tools for Facilitating Sessions

Leader

Establishing routines and structure

Opportunities to respond

Positive regard

Meet students where they are

Establishing Routines and Structure

Example Session Agenda from WBPP

Today's Activity: Gratitude Journals

1. Take Home Challenge Review (Me at My Best)
2. What is gratitude? Discussion
3. Decorate your journal
4. 1st journal entry
5. Take Home Challenge

Tools for Facilitating Sessions

Leader

- **Establishing routines and structure**
- **Opportunities to respond**
- **Positive regard**
- **Meet students where they are**

Opportunities to Respond

Lots of and varied opportunities presented at quick pace = higher engagement!

Thumbs up or down	Think/pair/share	Write the answer
Show of hands	Go around the circle	Respond at the same time
Tell someone next to you	Move to a labeled area of the room	Others?

Tools for Facilitating Sessions

Leader

Establishing routines and structure

Opportunities to respond

Showing care

Meet students where they are

Showing Care

5 positive statements for each 1 redirection

- Intentionally connecting with each student (e.g., positive greetings at the door)

- Creating space for students to get to know each other

- Catching students being good by letting them know what they did well (name the behavior!)

- Validate and redirect

- Be aware of how your limited attention is used (goal is to celebrate 5 good things for each redirection)

Tools for Facilitating Sessions

Leader

- **Establishing routines and structure**
- **Opportunities to respond**
- **Showing care**
- **Meet students where they are**

Showing Care

Start with a mood check in

Which dog are you today?

How are you feeling?

www.feelingswheel.com

Catching being good with tickets or tokens

PRIDE
NAME:
MIDDLE SCHOOL
003525

Getting to know you survey

- Name and correct pronunciation?
- How do you like to be addressed?
- Tell us about yourself. What would you like your leaders to know about you?
- Is there anything that would make you feel more comfortable when contributing to the discussions during class?

Icebreakers

We will share an icebreakers guide

Tools for Facilitating Sessions

Leader

- **Establishing routines and structure**
- **Opportunities to respond**
- **Positive regard**
- **Meet students where they are**

Meeting Students Where They Are

Practice cultural humility by conveying openness and supportive interactions

- Examine your own beliefs and cultural identify to recognize how they might influence how you facilitate the intervention and group

- Invite and appreciate students' diverse lived experiences

- Use examples relevant to students in your group

- Align session content with students' values and goals

Building a Toolbox to Maximize Engagement

More control ← | **Leader** | **Group** | **Student** | → **Less control**

Leader	Group	Student
Establishing routines and structure	Establish norms	1:1 conversation
Opportunities to respond	Arrange the environment	Consider "why" of behavior
Showing care	Seek student input	Provide choices
Meet students where they are	Revisiting the "why"	

Tools for Managing Groups

Group

Establish norms

Arrange the environment

Seek student input

Revisiting the "why"

Establish Group Norms

Co-creating norms facilitates feelings of emotional and physical safety

1. Decide what norms are important to you and your co-leader for creating a safe environment.

2. Come prepared with ~3 norms to present to the group (including maintain confidentiality)

3. When presenting norms to be students, be specific about what upholding this norm does and does not look like.

4. Invite students to propose additional norms.

Tools for Managing Groups

Group

- Establish norms
- Arrange the environment
- Seek student input
- Revisiting the "why"

Establish Group Norms

Post norms and routinely revisit throughout the intervention

Sample Norms:

- Maintain confidentiality. What is said in the group, stays in the group.

- Everyone is a teacher and learner: keep your mind open.

- If you're talking too much, let someone speak. If you haven't contributed at all, speak up—your opinion is important!

Consider aligning with schoolwide expectations

What other norms may be helpful for groups?

Tools for Managing Groups

Group

- Establish norms
- Arrange the environment
- Seek student input
- Revisiting the "why"

Arrange the Physical Environment

Thoughtfully use the physical layout of the space

- Consider the physical layout of the room to ensure that it allows all group members to meaningfully interact.

- Use your physical presence to encourage or discourage specific behaviors (proximity control).

- Plan how to distribute needed materials to minimize transition time (e.g., have handouts ready in students' spots, pass out materials quickly).

- Utilize visuals to teach concepts, communicate expectations, and outline activities.

Tools for Managing Groups

Group

Establish norms

Arrange the environment

Seek student input

Revisiting the "why"

Seek student input

Promotes autonomy and increases motivation to engage

- Many interventions allow for flexibility in the way they are implemented – lots of opportunity for student input!

- Present group with two choices as a "choose your own adventure" for the session (e.g., for an ice breaker)

- Consider seeking input about:

  o *Incentives for take home challenges*

  o *Ice breakers – Talking or movement?*

  o *Discussion format - In pairs or all together?*

Tools for Managing Groups

Group

Establish norms

Arrange the environment

Seek student input

Revisiting the "why"

Revisiting the "why"

Students, especially adolescents, seek competence promotion

- Students seek competence promotion, or feeling like they are experts, so revisiting the "why" (benefits; what's in it for them?) can fulfill this need

- Emphasizing the "why" empowers students to make their own decisions about how concepts and activities fit or do not fit with their developing values.

- Helps students be able to engage their caregivers, friends, teachers, etc. with the concepts and positive activities.

"I'm concerned that [Student] is not maximally engaged"

Most control

Least control

Reflect on your facilitation

- Am I facilitating content at a **brisk pace**?
- Are the sessions **structured and predictable**?
- Do I have a **connection** with each student?
- Am I **meeting students where they are** and acknowledging their unique perspectives?

Utilize your group management toolbox

- Have the **group norms** modeled, practiced, and agree upon?
- Does the **physical environment** maximize engagement?
- Are students given the chance to **provide input**?
- Is the **"why"** explained in **developmentally appropriate** language?

If yes to above, now what?

- **Check in with the student individually**
  - *Provide opportunity for the student to share their perspective*
  - *Students know what they need to be successful – just ask!*
  - *Strengthen relationship with the student and provide encouragement*
  - *Provides opportunity for additional teaching around expectations*

Tools for Working with Individuals

Student

- 1:1 conversation
- Consider "why" of behavior
- Provide choices

One-on-one check in

Promotes competence promotion, relatedness, and autonomy

- Goals:
  - *Enhance relationship with student*
  - *Gain insight into the student's experience*
  - *Learn from the student about what supports they need*

Tools for Working with Individuals

Student

- **1:1 conversation**
- **Consider "why" of behavior**
- **Provide choices**

Consider the "why" of behavior

Match your tool to the "why" for an individualized approach

WBPP Group Environment

Before	*Behavior*	*After*
Determines likelihood of behavior happening		Determines likelihood of the behavior happening <u>again</u>

Leaders' Unique Life Experience

Student's Unique Life Experience

Tools for Working with Individuals

Student

- 1:1 conversation
- Consider "why" of behavior
- Provide choices

Consider the "why" of behavior and match your approach

Function = why of the behavior
Aka what the student gets or gets out of by doing the behavior

Get

Get Out

Catch them being good – a lot!

1:1 Conversation

Choices

Choosing your tool based on the "why" provides the opportunity for a student to achieve the same "why" through engaged behaviors.

Tools for Working with Individuals

Student

1:1 conversation

Consider "why" of behavior

Provide choices

One-on-one conversation

Show care by checking in and collaborating to co-create an environment that maximizes engagement for the student

1. Start with specific feedback.

2. State high expectations.

3. Express confidence in the student's ability to meet the expectations.

4. Offer your support to make a plan for the future.

Tools for Working with Individuals

Consider the "why" of behavior

For students who need individualized support **to get**

Student

1:1 conversation

Consider "why" of behavior

Provide choices

1:1 Conversation

- Specific feedback
- State high expectations
- Express confidence in ability to meet the expectations
- Make a plan

Catch them being good - a lot!

- Acknowledge each time the student displays the desired behavior
- Use variety of acknowledgments (e.g., public praise, private praise, tangibles, non-verbals)
- Avoid attending to or quietly and selectively redirect off-task behaviors

Tools for Working with Individuals

Student

- **1:1 conversation**
- **Consider "why" of behavior**
- **Provide choices**

Consider the "why" of behavior

For students who need individualized support **to get out**

1:1 Conversation

- Specific feedback
- State high expectations
- Express confidence in ability to meet the expectations
- Make a plan

Provide choices

- Give student choices to avoid or escape non-preferred tasks (e.g., do you want to stay in this session or attend make up group on Thursday?)
- Do you want to draw or write?
- Would you prefer to work alone or with a peer?
- Reduce task demand (e.g., fill out 2 examples instead of 5)

Checklists for Group Leaders

Date: _____
WBPP Session: _____
Leaders: _____

Group Process Check-In

Please consider the Well-Being Promotion Program (WBPP) session(s) you led/co-led this past week. Rate each domain on a scale from 1 to 5, where: 1 = *Not at all*, 2 = *A Little*, 3 = *Somewhat*, 4 = Quite a bit, to 5 = *Totally*.

Student Engagement					
To what extent did the session <u>facilitate student engagement</u>? *Did you....* 1. *Ask open-ended questions as much as you can?* 2. *Provide multiple opportunities to respond using a variety of methods?* 3. *Affirm students' effort in engaging in positive activities, whether it was planned or unplanned?* 4. *Reflect on students' sentiments to make sure you understand them?*	1	2	3	4	5
Relationship Enhancement					
To what extent did the session <u>enhance relationships</u>? *Did you....* 5. *Convey a positive, accepting demeanor?* 6. *Make a personal connection with each student?* 7. *Encourage students to interact with each other?* 8. *Reinforce students' efforts and plans to include caregivers in positive activities?*	1	2	3	4	5
Session Flow					
To what extent did the session <u>flow</u>? *Did you....* 9. *Deliver the manualized content seamlessly (e.g., move between topics and activities smoothly)?* 10. *Readily provide personal examples to illustrate ideas and content in the manual?* 11. *Monitor when to adjust pacing (moving through more quickly or slow down)?* 12. *Provide individualized assistance for students who appeared disengaged or confused?*	1	2	3	4	5
Cultural Humility					
To what extent did the session <u>reflect practicing cultural humility</u>? *Did you....* 13. *Examine how your own beliefs and cultural identity influenced how you facilitated the session?* 14. *Invite and appreciate students' diverse lived experiences?* 15. *Use examples that were relevant to students in the group?* 16. *Align session content with the goals and values of students in the group?*	1	2	3	4	5

Tools in Your Toolbox

Leader Tools	Group Tools	Student Tools
Establish routines and structure	Establish norms	1:1 conversation
Opportunities to respond	Arrange the environment	Consider "why" of behavior
Showing care	Seek student input	Provide choices
Meet students where they are	Revisit the "why"	Catch them being good – a lot

Intervention Integrity Checklist
Core Session 1

Date: _____

Leader(s): _____

	Session Activity	Completed?	
1.	You at your best activity: students write their personal stories.	Yes	No
2.	Students share their you at your best stories.	Yes	No
3.	Discuss strengths students' displayed in their stories.	Yes	No
4.	Discuss perceived importance of happiness.	Yes	No
5.	Discuss purpose of group (to increase students' happiness).	Yes	No
6.	Discuss what determines happiness.	Yes	No
7.	Comprehension check: *Overview of Program Activities* handout (complete *What Determines Happiness?* and *Purpose of Group*).	Yes	No
8.	Discuss confidentiality.	Yes	No
9.	Comprehension check: definition of confidentiality.	Yes	No
10.	Develop rules for appropriate behavior in group.	Yes	No
11.	Discuss incentives available for completing group homework.	Yes	No
12.	Assign homework (read and reflect on you at your best stories).	Yes	No

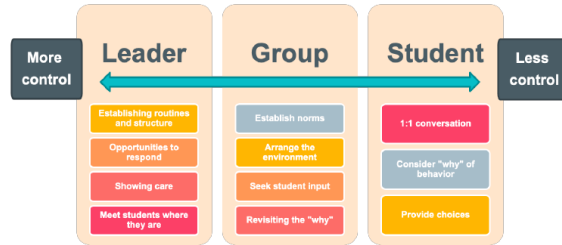Session Integrity Level:

A. Number of session activities completed (circled "Yes"):	A. _____
B. Number of session activities expected:	B. 12
Percentage of activities implemented this session (box A/box B):	_____ %

Checklists for Group Leaders

Building Your Toolbox for Maximizing Student Engagement in Tier 2 Groups

| More control | **Leader** | **Group** | **Student** | Less control |

Leader	Group	Student
Establishing routines and structure	Establish norms	1:1 conversation
Opportunities to respond	Arrange the environment	Consider "why" of behavior
Showing care	Seek student input	Provide choices
Meet students where they are	Revisiting the "why"	

Post-Group Session Reflection Guide

		Yes	No
First, reflect on your facilitation	Am I facilitating content at a **brisk pace**?		
	Are the sessions **structured and predictable**?		
	Do I have a **connection** with each student?		
	Am I **meeting students where they are** and acknowledging their unique perspectives?		
If no to any of the above, consider implementing a leader strategy. If yes to all, consider the below questions.			
Then, utilize your group management toolbox.	Have the **group norms** modeled, practiced, and agreed upon?		
	Does the **physical environment** maximize engagement?		
	Are students given the chance to **provide input**?		
	Is the **"why"** explained in developmentally appropriate language?		
If no to any of the above, consider implementing a group strategy. If yes to all, consider checking in with the disengaged student individually.			
If yes to all of the above, then check in with the student individually.	**Check in with the student individually** *Provide opportunity for the student to share their perspective Students know what they need to be successful – just ask! Strengthen relationship with the student and provide encouragement Provides opportunity for additional teaching around expectations*		

Barry, E.C., Fefer, S.A., & Suldo, S.M. (2023, March 29-31). *Building Your Toolbox for Maximizing Student Engagement in Tier 2 Groups* [Conference Presentation]. International Conference on Positive Behavior Support, Jacksonville, FL.

Available on ABPS conference website

Review of
Key Points
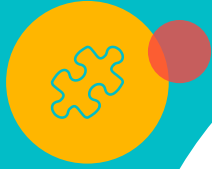
Engagement is a prerequisite for learning.

Goal in leading small groups:
Maximize engagement!

For students	For caregivers
During sessions	In requesting permission for student participation
Relationships with peers and leaders	In initial information session
Between sessions with take home challenges	In weekly communications and activities

Building a Toolbox to Maximize Engagement

Leader
- Establishing routines and structure
- Opportunities to respond
- Showing care
- Meeting students where they are

Group
- Establish norms
- Arrange the environment
- Seek student input
- Revisit the "why"

Student
- 1:1 conversation
- Consider the "why" of behavior
- Provide choices
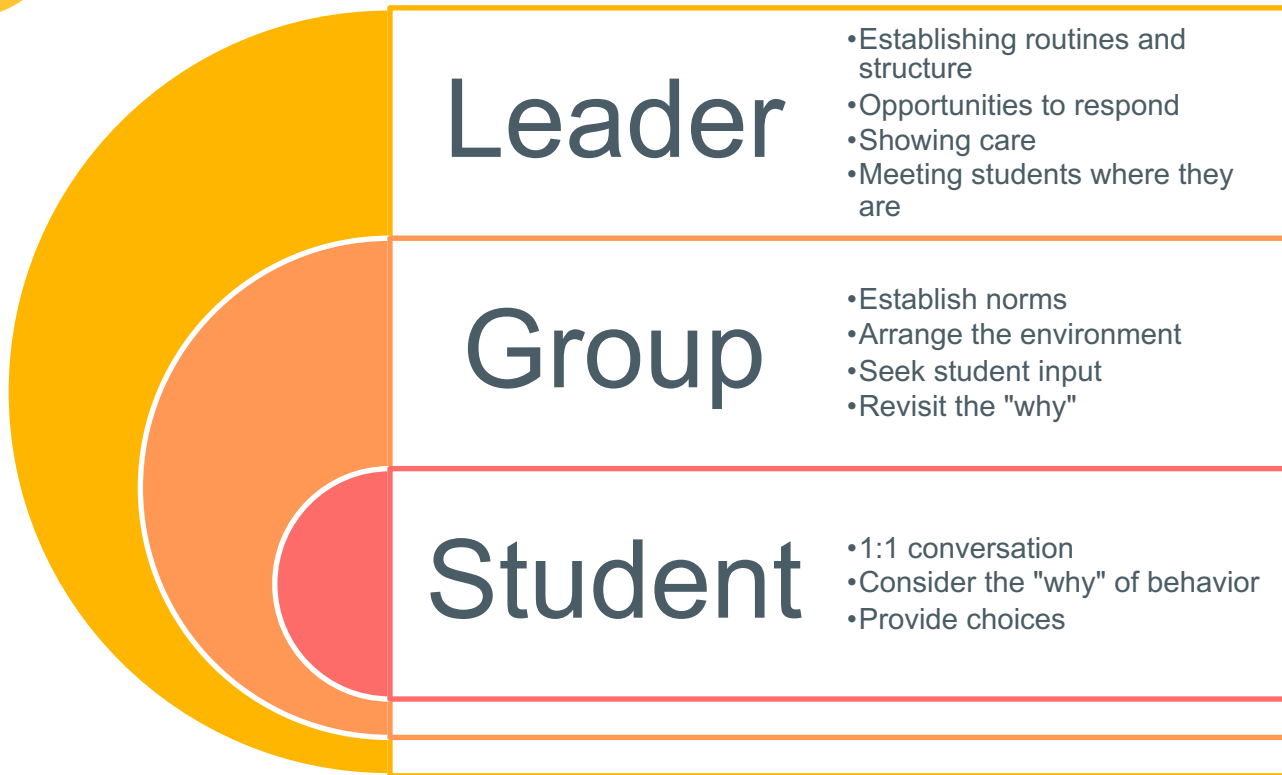
References

- Agazzi, H., Adams, C., Ferron, E., Ferron, J., Shaffer-Hudkins, E., & Salloum, A. (2019). Trauma-Informed Behavioral Parenting for Early Intervention. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, *28*(8), 2172–2186. https://doi-org.silk.library.umass.edu/10.1007/s10826-019-01435-3
- Clarke, A., Marshall, S., Mautone, J., Soffer, S., Jones, H., Costigan, T., Patterson, A., Jawad, A., & Power, T. (2015). Parent Attendance and Homework Adherence Predict Response to a Family–School Intervention for Children With ADHD. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, *44*(1), 58–67.
- Committee on School Health. (2004). School-based mental health services. *Pediatrics, 113(*6), 1839-1845.
- Friedrich, A., Thalji, A., Suldo, S. M., Chappel, A., & Fefer, S. (2010). Increasing thirteen yearolds' happiness through a manualized group intervention. In National Association of School Psychologists Annual Convention.
- Fisher, E. S. (2020). Cultural humility as a form of social justice: Promising practices for global school psychology training. *School Psychology International*, *41*(1), 53–66.
- Fisher-Borne, M., Montana Cain, J., & Martin, S. L. (2015). From mastery to accountability: Cultural humility as an alternative to cultural competence. *Social Work Education, 34*(2), 165–181. doi:10.1080/02615479.2014.977244
- Foronda, C., Baptiste, D., Reinholdt, M. M., & Ousman, K. (2016). Cultural humility: A concept analysis. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 27*(3), 210–217.
- Hoy, B. D., Suldo, S. M., & Mendez, L. R. (2013). Links between parents' and children's levels of gratitude, life satisfaction, and hope. Journal of Happiness Studies, 14(4), 1343-1361.
- Keperling, J. P., Reinke, W. M., Marchese, D., & Ialongo, N. (2017). *Group Interventions in Schools: A Guide for Practitioners*. Guilford Publications.
- Lewis, A. D., Huebner, E. S., Malone, P. S., & Valois, R. F. (2011). Life satisfaction and student engagement in adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *40*, 249-262.
- Malekoff, A. (2015). *Group work with adolescents: Principles and practice*. Guilford Publications.
- Reynolds, S., Wilson, C., Austin, J., & Hooper, L. (2012). Effects of psychotherapy for anxiety in children and adolescents: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *32*, 251–262.
- Roth, R. A., Suldo, S. M., & Ferron, J. M. (2017). Improving middle school students' subjective well-being: Efficacy of a multicomponent positive psychology intervention targeting small groups of youth. School Psychology Review, 46(1), 21-41.
- Fefer, S. A., Hieneman, M., Virga, C., Thoma, A., & Donnelly, M. (2020). Evaluating the Effect of Positive Parent Contact on Elementary Students' On-Task Behavior. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 1098300720908009.
- Weisenmuller, C., & Hilton, D. (2020, March 5). Barriers to Access, Implementation, and Utilization of Parenting Interventions: Considerations for Research and Clinical Application*s. American Psychologist.* Advance online publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000613
- Marques, S., Lopez, S., & Pais-Ribeiro, J. (2011). "Building Hope for the Future": A Program to Foster Strengths in Middle-School Students. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *12*(1), 139–152. https://doi-org.silk.library.umass.edu/10.1007/s10902-009-9180-3
- Lester, L. J., Pearce, N., Waters, S., Barnes, A., Beatty, S., & Cross, D. (2017). Family Involvement in a Whole-School Bullying Intervention: Mothers' and Fathers' Communication and Influence with Children. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, *26*(10), 2716–2727. https://doi-org.silk.library.umass.edu/10.1007/s10826-017
- Sheridan, S. M., Knoche, L. L., Kupzyk, K. A., Edwards, C. P., & Marvin, C. A. (2011). A randomized trial examining the effects of parent engagement on early language and literacy: The Getting Ready intervention. Journal of School Psychology, 49, 361–383. http://dx.doi.org/10 .1016/j.jsp.2011.03.001
- Sheridan, S. M., Smith, T., E., Kim, E. M., Beretvas, S. N., & Park, S. (2019). A meta-analysis of family-school interventions and children's social-emotional functioning: Moderators and components of efficacy. *Review of Educational Research, 89* (2), 296-332. doi: 10.3102/0034654318825437
- Suldo, S. M., Savage, J. A., & Mercer, S. H. (2014). Increasing middle school students' life satisfaction: Efficacy of a positive psychology group intervention. Journal of happiness studies, 15(1), 19-42.

Thank you!

Contact Information:
Emily Barry – emilybarryphd@gmail.com
Sarah Fefer – sfefer@umass.edu