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Peer Counseling Training Curriculum

By

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### Abstract

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, an estimated 3.1 million adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 in the United States reported having at least one major depressive episode in 2016. With an increasing number of students reporting that they are depressed and stressed, the need for additional supports for these students to more important now than ever before. The best place to provide students with the necessary support is at school, where they spend on average 180 days a year. While there are already supports in place for students like counselors and psychologists, some students need a more informal option. The implementation of a peer counseling program on a high school campus can have significant impacts on the student body. This projects provides curriculum for the selecting and training of peer counselors as an additional support to adolescents in high school. The curriculum was created by reviewing relevant literature, collaborating with staff at different school sites running a similar program, and collaborating with administration, counselors, and other staff at my school site, as well as collaborating with peer counselors. Included in the curriculum is a peer counseling application, interview questions, two four-hour training sessions, student follow up, as well as recommendations for implementation, modifications, and a reflection of lessons learned.

*Keywords:* active listening, communication skills, emotional literacy, empathy, high school, mindfulness meditation, observation skills, peer counseling, training curriculum

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## Chapter One: Definition of Problem

In Chapter One, the idea of peer counseling and mediation will be introduced as a project. The background for the need of this program is discussed, the purpose of the project is defined, the literature and methodology are previewed, and the significance of the program is identified. At the end of the chapter all keywords are defined for reader comprehension.

### **Background**

Over the past couple years, the high school I teach at has had some rather traumatic events occur. One student died in a drunk driving accident where a few other students were injured. One student overdosed in the bathroom during school hours. One recent graduate was arrested for manslaughter in relation to the Penn State fraternity football player death. A student at our sister school committed suicide by cop. And many students were suspended or expelled for bullying. Such events may be the norm for some schools, but the students here were visibly shaken by these recent events. Administration stepped in and made sure that students were aware of the part-time campus therapist. Our superintendent sent an email home to parents communicating the events and providing suggestions on how to help their children. However, for many students, parent, and administrative support was too formal and intimidating.

As a Psychology teacher, I was provided the opportunity to discuss these events with students on a regular basis. Most of my students knew at least one of the students involved in one of the recent events and were having a hard time dealing with the reality that was setting in. We created a safe space in our classroom where students could

come and talk about what was going on and how they felt; appropriate for a class that studies human behavior and emotion. Towards the end of the year, some of my students found such comfort in our classroom environment that they wanted to provide all students at our school with the opportunity to be a part of it. It was then when we decided to bring a peer counseling and mediation group to our school.

### **Purpose of Project**

The purpose of this project is to implement a training protocol for our peer counseling and mediation program. The mediation program will include developing peer counseling skills in empathy, communication, time management, and stress relief. The guiding question for the project is: How can a peer mediation curriculum be designed for a Southern California High School? The sub questions for the project will include:

1. How can the curriculum be designed to help students develop empathy for others?
2. How can the curriculum be designed to help students develop emotional literacy?
3. How can the curriculum be designed to help student develop stronger communication skills?
4. How can the curriculum be designed to help students develop time management skills?
5. How can the curriculum be designed to help students manage their stress and seek stress relief?

### **Preview Literature**

The literature that will be covered in Chapter Two will cover the information needed to train peer counselors in a high school setting. The first theme presented is

the teaching of empathy (Davis, 1983). Perhaps the most important part of a peer counselor is conveying empathy to the students they will be meeting with. The second theme is emotional literacy and development of an emotionally literate team of peer counselors that can help their fellow students develop emotional literacy (Killick, 2006). Understanding emotional literacy can help our peer counselors identify harmful behaviors like drug and alcohol use, bullying, and suicidal behaviors. If peer counselors can identify such behaviors in students they counsel, then they can refer them to one of our staffed counselors and get them the real help they need. The third theme is effective skills and tools that students can implement in their sessions like active listening, observation skills, confidentiality, and stress management tools (Varenhorst, 2003).

### **Preview Methodology**

The product of this project is a peer mediation training curriculum program at La Costa Canyon High School in Carlsbad, California. The project will be completed with the help of my administration, counseling staff, and two co-president students on campus. The curriculum will be developed in ten steps. The first step is to review the literature on peer mediation, empathy building skills, emotional literacy, and stress relief strategies. The second step is to identify strategies that will be implemented based on the literature review. The third step is to visit other schools identified by my administration that run successful peer counseling programs and observe their programs. The fourth step is to review the backward planning process by McTighe and Wiggins (2011). The fifth step is to identify the desired end results for peer mediation. The sixth step is to conduct interviews with students applying to be peer counselors and select 15 students who demonstrate potential to be successful based on the desired

end results identified in step five. The seventh step is to determine the evidence of peer mediation process (McTighe & Wiggins, 2011). The eighth step is to plan the learning activities for the peer training. The ninth step is to conduct the training and the tenth and final step is conduct a follow-up meeting to reflect on trainings with peer counselors.

### **Significance of Project**

Our school has a high population of college bound students who participate in very competitive sports, are active in our theater and band, are involved in one or clubs on campus, take multiple AP and honors courses, hold jobs outside of school, are active in their community, have thriving social lives, and/or help take care of their siblings. These students suffer from stress and the lack of time management skills. Equipping our peer counselors and mediators with things like mindfulness practices, relaxing breathing techniques, time management skills, organization skills, and goal setting skills can help them pass those practices and skills on to their peers.

This project is going to help our school and communities in a variety of ways. First and foremost, it is going to help individual students cope with the day-to-day struggles of high school life. It is going to create a safe space on campus for students who are being bullied, contemplating self-harm, getting into drugs or other illegal behavior, having trouble at home, or simply those students who are stressed out with the pressure of school. This program is not only going to help students who are having a hard time, but it is going to create a group of well trained, empathetic students who are constantly helping other students create a better life. For teachers, administrators, and other staff, this program will open up the lines of communication with a student who might have kept to themselves in the past. It is going to create a safer, more inclusive campus in

which people come to learn and can focus on their studies. Perhaps most importantly, this program can help the staff identify students who are in trouble and help them before it's too late. For the community, this program will be a great source of outreach and allow for an opportunity for community involvement.

Using literature previously written about programs like this, we can build upon the successes and failures of those who have tried this before. Hopefully, it will create an educational practice that reaches beyond the trained peer counselors and extends to the teachers. With teacher recommendations, all staff will be more aware of students who may need help and will thus become more invested in the day-to-day lives of their students.

### **Summary of Chapter**

This chapter introduces the concept of a peer counseling a mediation program at the high school level. The significance and the background for a program like this were clearly explained and the literature review and methodology were briefly examined. The words peer counseling and peer mediation were defined for reader context and clarity.

### **Definitions**

This section defines the terms that will be used throughout the curriculum project chapters.

#### **Emotional Literacy**

The ability to identify and understand one's own emotions as well as the ability to empathize and listen to the emotions of others. A skill of those who are emotionally literate is being able to discuss one's emotions productively with others.

#### **Emotional Intelligence**

The ability to be aware of and identify one's emotions. Emotional Intelligence also entails identifying the emotions of others and interacting with others based on the identified emotions.

### **Empathy**

The ability to understand, share, and relate to the feelings of another person. There are three types of empathy cognitive empathy (ability to recognize other person's feelings), emotional empathy (ability to feel another person's feelings), and compassionate empathy (desire to help person deal with emotion or situation). According to Ekman (2003), you must have cognitive empathy to recognize another person's feelings before you can have emotional empathy to feel what the other person feels or to have compassionate empathy - the desire to help the person because of their feelings and situation. But Ekman (2003) claims that you do not need to have emotional empathy (to feel the other person's feelings) to have compassionate empathy (be able to want to help).

### **Peer Counseling**

Peer Counseling is the counseling of someone who has the status equal to that of the patient, for example, student to student counseling.

### **Peer Helper**

Simply, a person of similar status helping another person. Example: students helping students.

### **Peer Mediation**

Peer Mediation is problem solving by the youth with the youth. It is a process by which one or more students in need of counseling or advisement meet in a private, safe

and confidential setting to work out problems with the assistance of a trained student mediator.

**Stress Relief Strategies**

An action or a plan of actions that will lead to the reduction of mental or emotional pressure.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review focuses on the published work about the development of skills that will help develop effective peer counselors. For the purpose of this project, a variety of sources have been reviewed and included. This review will focus on three themes: Developing Empathy, Developing Emotional Literacy, and Developing Effective Skills and Tools for Implementation. The completion of this literature review will lead to the formation of curriculum for a peer counseling training program.

### **Developing Empathy**

“Empathy is considered by society to be one of the most highly valued virtues of human beings” (Rogers, Dziobek, Hassenstab, Wolf, & Convit, 2006). When discussing empathy and the development of empathy in youth, an important distinction must be made between cognitive, affective - emotional, and compassionate empathy. The first type, Cognitive Empathy refers to one’s ability to accurately recognize the emotional state of another person, such as recognizing when someone is mad or sad (Davis, 1983). This is essential if you are to be able to understand another person’s situation and is the first step in the ability to help someone. The second type, Affective Empathy, refers to the ability to experience an appropriate emotional response to the experience of another person, like feeling happy when a friend wins a race (Davis, 1983). This type of empathy can be positive or negative. Being able to feel other people’s situation can take a toll and lead to burnout (Ekman, 2003). The third type, Compassionate Empathy is the desire to help based on the other person’s feelings or situation. This third type of empathy is where one can take action based on one’s ability to understand a different situation (cognitive empathy). When seeking to develop a peer mediation program to

support high school students, the first and third type of empathy are required to help peer counselors understand their peer's situations with cognitive empathy, but also to be able to assist in helping the peer solve their problems with compassionate empathy.

For peer counselors, all three types of empathy are important to be effective. The affective or emotional empathy can be an obstacle for some peer mediators, especially if the mediator's emotions are overwhelmed and make it difficult to assist the peer in finding a solution to their situation (Ekman, 2003). Trainings and education on the development of empathy can lead to growth of positive traits in high school students like reasoning and communication skills (Cotton, 1992).

### **Developing Emotional Literacy**

Claude Steiner coined the term emotional literacy in 1979, when describing one's ability to understand your emotions and others as well as to express emotions in productive ways. Steiner defined emotional literacy in five parts:

1. Knowing your feelings.
2. Having a sense of empathy.
3. Learning to manage our emotions.
4. Repairing emotional problems.
5. Putting it all together: emotional interactivity.

(2003, p. 33-34)

Goleman (1995) expanded on Steiners' original definition and advocated for emotional literacy to be taught in school to help student become more emotionally stable as they enter adulthood.

Creating a climate for the development of emotional literacy is of the utmost importance to the development of successful peer counselors. Peer counselors must be able to identify a peer's emotions that discuss them in a way that is non-threatening and neutral. Our emotional life is the heart of our experience of humans and dictates how we see and interact with the world (Killick, 2006). Studies conducted by clinical psychologist Steve Killick (2006) in the early 2000's have found that students who are emotionally literate are more resilient when faced with emotional challenges. He also found that over the past 25 years (as of 2004), there was a 70% increase in mental and emotional health problems in children and adolescents. Killick estimates that there is at least one student in every classroom who has their emotional needs unmet (Killick, 2006). Consequences for unmet emotional needs can be detrimental to the development of an adolescent and include behavioral problems in the classroom. While the numbers of emotionally unmet children skyrocket, the room for improvement grows along with it. Development in emotional literacy will help peer counselors navigate the sessions they will have with their peers. Educating our peer counselors in emotional literacy will also allow them to turn around and educate their peers in emotional literacy and intelligence.

Yale Center for Emotional Literacy lays out an approach to developing five emotional literacy skills using the acronym RULER:

1. Recognizing emotions in self and others
2. Understanding the causes and consequences of emotions
3. Labeling emotions accurately
4. Expressing emotions appropriately

## 5. Regulating emotions effectively

([Yale University \(http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/ruler-overview/\)](http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/ruler-overview/))

The Yale Center for Emotional Literacy has provided online curriculum in three phases. Year 1 is the Anchor of Emotional Intelligence where educators familiarize themselves with the fundamental RULER tools to be able “to understand and regulate their own emotions and to consider and empathize with how others are feeling” ([Yale University \(http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/ruler-overview/\)](http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/ruler-overview/)). The second phase is where educators integrate the Feeling Words Curriculum into day-to-day instruction. The third phase is Lasting Results where educators become RULER Trainers who prepare other educators at the school on the Emotional Intelligence Anchor and the Feeling Word Curriculum.

### **Developing Communication Skills**

There are many skills that an effective peer counselor must develop. These skills include observation skills, confidentiality and trustworthiness, listening skills, stress management tools, and communication skills. By developing, displaying, and even educating their peers about the above skills, peer counselors can have a positive impact on their community and can change a peer’s self-reported attitudes about violent behavior, improve school discipline, and can reduce absenteeism (Varenhorst, 2003).

#### **Observation Skills**

Observation is perhaps the most important skill for a new peer counselor. It is defined by Barbara Varenhorst, Ph.D., as the ability to listen with one’s eyes (2003) . Peer counselors who are going to be effective need to listen to the words their peer is saying as well as the body language they are displaying. Significant information is often

communicated nonverbally and more frequently than not, our body language expresses feelings that one cannot or will not put into words. Teaching students to be observant of the body language of their peer will allow them to rely on more than just the words their peer is expressing.

### **Confidentiality and Trustworthiness**

Confidentiality is crucial for the success of a peer counseling program. Students who are seeking help must be able to trust their peer counselor and have confidence that the information they share will remain confidential. According to Varenhorst (2003), “trust takes time to establish, but once it is broken, it can be very difficult to reestablish. Therefore, one of the key tasks students have is to responsibly handle information, even when it comes from casual conversation” (p.100). The training of confidentiality is important but almost equally important is training these peer counselors when to break confidentiality. Just like a professional counselor, when students identify harmful behaviors in a peer like drug use, depression, suicidal tendencies, or extreme anger towards another, they are legally obligated to report their superior (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). Because these peer counselors may be the first to know of a serious problem with their peer, it is important to discuss their limitations, boundaries, as well as ethical and legal obligations. During training sessions about confidentiality, students should be made aware of school resources that may be able to provide more professional help to students who need it.

### **Listening Skills**

Austrian Psychologist Elton Mayo renowned for his publications on human relations once stated in an interview that “one friend, one person who is truly

understanding, who takes the trouble to listen to us as we consider our problems, can change our whole outlook on the world” (Bok, 1947). As students navigate the years of high school, they are mostly likely going to be lonely at one point or another. Speaking from experience, having someone there who will listen when you need an ear can make all the difference. Most peer counselors will think they already know how to listen, but as Varenhorst (2003) explains, becoming a true and active listener takes practice.

Students need to be able to simply let another person talk without providing a verbal response or thinking about a response. Students need to be trained to do more than simply memorize what the other person is saying. Students need to be trained to respond with nonverbal cues, respond by repeating back what their peer has stated, and ask open-ended questions that will encourage their peer to continue the conversation (Bodie, 2012).

### **Body Language**

Many students do not realize what effect their body language can have on a conversation. Not only will training students in body language skills help them appear more open and be more successful as a peer counselor, but it will also teach them how to read the body language of others as a type of nonverbal cue. Gerard Egan (1986) created the acronym SOLER to help develop effective body language. Egan (1986) defines SOLER as squarely face the client, open posture, ask questions, eye contact, and relax. This body language will help ease the peer and make them feel comfortable during the session.

### **Stress Management Strategies and Tools**

High school students have a variety of responsibilities including family commitments, part time jobs, competitive sports and extracurricular activities, clubs and community involvement, and multiple challenging academic classes. With the pressure increasing as they get older and start applying for colleges, many students are plagued with stress (Healthy Kids Survey, 2015-2016). Stress coping and management strategies are acquired throughout one's life, but are said to be developed through experiences like the loss of a pet or loved one. For most of us, these experiences happen during our childhood and adolescent years, and thus it is of the utmost importance to develop stress management strategies before reaching adulthood (Hayes & Eddy, 1985). Developing these strategies and successfully coping with stress during the teenage years can minimize the acquisition of "unhealthy stress coping responses that could promote illness and disease" (Hayes & Eddy, 1985). Strategies and tools will be taught to peer counselors during training in a way that will allow them to teach such strategies to their peers during counseling sessions. Strategies and tools include time management, deep breathing exercises, mindfulness, meditation, and communication skills (Robinson, Smith, & Segal, 2017). In the following, I focus my discussion on meditation and communication skills.

### **Meditation and Mindfulness**

Mediation refers to the method of relaxation or focusing one's mind for a period of time. Mediation can be used in the peer counseling setting in a variety of ways. Peer counselors can help student go through a meditative process when they enter a session upset, distracted, confused, or anxious. Helping the student calm themselves can help them identify what they are feeling and can help the student discover the root for the

feeling. Implementing meditation and suggesting the use of meditation on a regular basis to peers can have beneficial outcomes (Greensburg & Harris, 2012).

Mindfulness refers to the mental state of awareness. Goleman and Davidson (2017) describe the science behind the effect meditation has on our stress management. They claim that being versed in mindfulness practices can help students feel more calm, be less stressed, and not be so reactive in high pressure situations. While the accounts discussed in their book, Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body, follows the story of a PTSD in adults who have gone through traumatic events like 9/11, the ideas and concepts put forth by Goleman and Davidson (2017) can be applied to adolescents as well. According to the American Medical Association, meditation can lessen anxiety and depression, as well as pain. While the results are short-term, and have no evidence supporting long-term healing, teaching students the practices of meditation can help alleviate some of the negative emotions they are currently feeling (Goleman & Davidson, 2017).

Implementing mindfulness into meditation is a valuable practice. During meditation, as one has focused on their breathing and reached a place of relaxation, mindfulness practices encourages the person to observe the wandering thoughts as they drift through the mind, acknowledge the thoughts and why they have come to the forefront, and then let them drift away. The intention of the mindfulness meditation is to simply be aware of each thought that passes by, but to not get involved with it or focus on the thought. Practicing mindfulness meditation can help a person see how their thoughts and feelings develop and organize into patterns. Over time, those who practice mindfulness meditation can become more aware of their tendency to quickly judge an

experience as good or bad, pleasant, or unpleasant. From here a person can reevaluate how they approach situations and bring a more emotionally balanced perspective into their daily routine (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

### **Communication Skills**

There are a range of skills that fall under 'communication' that are important to the development of an effective peer counselor. The first and most basic of those skills is initiating a social relationship; simply put, peer counselors need to know how to start a conversation with one of their peers. Peer counselors need to establish a non-threatening, comfortable, and trusting relationship with their peer who needs help (Varenhorst, 2003). Starting the conversation is the first, and perhaps the most important, part of a peer counseling session.

Another important communication skill that peer counselors must have is assertiveness, or the confidence to speak out and share their opinion. Varenhorst (2003) explains that assertiveness, although usually used negatively, is a positive skill for a peer counselor. Being assertive as a peer counselor means speaking up when a peer is not being treated properly. To teach peer counselors to be assertive, we must first teach them that their opinion is important and that they have the right to express their ideas. Building self-confidence in our peer tutors will encourage them to be assertive when necessary. When developing assertiveness, it is important to demonstrate appropriate scenarios in which assertiveness is effective. Varenhorst (2003) explains that there are three scenarios in which assertiveness is effective for a peer counselor: handling peer pressure, dealing with authority figures, and when talking about sensitive issues. Although, for some students, developing assertiveness as a skill

might be intimidating, it will allow them to handle situations with dignity and demand respect.

Anyone who has had a lengthy conversation with another person knows that conversations can sometimes get off track or take detours. As a peer counselor, an effective communication skill is navigating the conversation and avoiding detours that are not productive. Teaching peer counselors why their peers may use detours is an important part of identifying when a conversation has taken an unproductive turn. According to Varenhorst (2003), students will use detours when they are hesitant to discuss a topic that brings them fear or pain. For this student, simply ignoring the pain and emotion is easier than discussing it and dealing with it. Students who use detours need peer counselors to practice empathy. Peer counselors should identify the detour and acknowledge that there is pain in the topic. By asking open-ended questions about the topic that is being avoided and redirecting the peer with “I feel” statements, a peer counselor may slowly break down emotional walls and help their peer with their underlying issues.

### **Summary of Chapter**

This chapter has explored relevant literature needed to develop curriculum for a peer counseling program in a high school setting. During the training, peer counselors will be working on developing cognitive and compassionate empathy. Peer counselors will be developing their emotional literacy and practicing how to use emotional literacy with their peers. They will also be developing skills in effective communication, active listening, and observing to better understand their peers during sessions. Students will be defining and discussing confidentiality, when to break it, and the procedure of

breaking it. Lastly students will be given resources to implement mindfulness meditation into their practice to help their peers focus on their emotions in a calm and peaceful manner. Developing all of the aforementioned traits in peer counselors will lead to successful program.

### Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this project is to create and implement a peer counseling application process and training materials at La Costa Canyon High School (LCC). This project, once up and running, is going to provide the students of LCC with an opportunity to be counselled by their peers in a less formal setting than a counseling session with their assigned counselor. Recently, LCC has had an increase in traumatic events and this program will hopefully provide students dealing with issues like bullying, stress, anger issues, social dilemmas, home life problems, or depression a safe place where they can get help. This program is aimed at increasing student wellness, decreasing student stress, and creating a more caring and empathetic experience for all students during their four years at LCC.

#### **Project Design**

The design for this project is a training program for peer counselors at a high school setting. The training program includes two four-hour training sessions to take place outside of normal school hours. Students will be trained in groups and will be working with one another to develop skills like stress management, listening, observing, communication, mindfulness meditation, and confidentiality. Students will undergo simulations to develop empathy and emotional literacy as well as trustworthiness. Once the 15 peer counselors are trained, they will be able to counsel their peers and run peer counseling sessions for those students who may seek or are recommended for guidance or additional support. These students will also be responsible for communicating with counseling staff and administration to help facilitate student wellness across campus.

### **Target Audience and Setting**

The target audience for this program is the students of La Costa Canyon High School. All students at LCC may request a session with a peer counselor at any time during the school year, once the program is up and running. I am currently working with my district and administration on a tracking system for students who wish to be a peer counselor. Currently, only upperclassmen may apply to be peer counselors, but the lowerclassmen will be involved in the future. All students, including English Language Learners and special population students may apply to be a peer counselor and may also request sessions with peer counselors during the academic school year. Not only will the student body benefit from this program, but the counseling staff will also benefit. More students will seek an appointment with a peer counselor about issues like breakups, stress, bullying, and so on, which will result in a freeing up of time for our very busy counseling staff who is responsible for an average of 500 students per year. This will also provide the counseling and administration staff a better understanding for what is going on with the students of the school. Hopefully, this program will be able to lower rates of self-harm, student stress, fights and aggressive behavior on campus, and bullying to create a better student experience.

The setting of this project will be at La Costa Canyon High School (LCC). LCC is located in Carlsbad, California and is composed of 76.7% Caucasian students, 14.2% Hispanic students, 5.9% Asian students, and 3.5% students that are either Black, American Indian, or more than once race. Only 6.7% of the students are eligible for a free or reduced lunch and only 3% of the student population as of 2015 fails to graduate. At LCC, 61% of students are members of at least one or more sports

programs but no statistics were provided of students who were members of clubs, band, theater, or other programs on campus outside of sports.

### **Procedures**

First, I conducted a literature review on best practices for peer counseling. I reviewed relevant literature on the process of creating a peer counseling program as well as the skills students need to develop in order to be successful as a peer counselor. Once I identified skills students needed to develop, I reviewed literature about the best practices for skill development in high school students.

Second, I identified what strategies I would implement in the peer counseling training based on the literature review. Strategies that were implemented based off the findings of the literature review include developing empathy (Ekman, 2003), emotional literacy (Goleman, 1995), communication skills (Varenhorst, 2003), SOLER (Egan, 1986), RULER (Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence), practices in mindfulness meditation (Greensburg & Harris, 2012), active listening (Bodie, 2012), observation (Varenhorst, 2003), and working with confidentiality (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). From the literature review, I implemented trainings to develop all of these characteristics that students need to be successful. In the training, I defined all of the above strategies for students and then put them through simulations where they were required to demonstrate their understanding. For example, peer counselors were asked to use SOLER body language during each conversation throughout the training. Peer counselors were also asked to critique the SOLER practices of their peers to allow for better development. Peer counselors also practiced mindful meditation by being walked through a session in which they were the ones meditating. This will help students not

only utilize this practice in their own lives, but help their peers use the practice to add a sense of calmness to their lives.

Third, I visited North County San Diego schools that currently run peer counseling programs. I wanted to learn what they do and what their recommendations were for starting a new program. This step took about two weeks to complete and provided a basis for a peer counseling program. Five high schools were identified by my administration as successful programs with student populations similar to ours: Torrey Pines High School, Canyon Crest Academy, San Dieguito Academy, Rancho Bernardo High School, and Poway High School. I reached out to the staff at these school who run the peer counseling programs and set up in person interviews when applicable. For staff that was not available for in person interviews, I sent them my interview questions via email and followed up with questions upon their responses prompting deeper, more detailed conversations. These interviews included questions about their application process for peer counselors, their ideal candidates, and the interview questions they asked at peer counseling interviews since all schools stated that they conducted interviews.

Fourth, I reviewed the McTighe & Wiggins (2012) three step backward planning process to design the application and the training. The first step is to identify the desired results and then plan backwards. The second step is to determine evidence of the students attaining the peer counseling skills. The third step is to plan the learning experiences.

Fifth, to determine the desired results I began to imagine the skills and dispositions of the desired peer counselors (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). This step not

only included identifying the results for a trained peer counselor, but who would be a good candidate to participate in the training. Based on what was learned in the interviews and surveys, I created an application and selected peer counselors who met the requirement and criteria. The application took about a week to create and another two weeks to advertise to the student-body. I advertised the Peer Counseling Program and application to all students via in-class visits, a spotlight on our weekly student news, personal visits to related campus clubs like Community Club, Random Acts of Kindness Club, Creating Campus Culture Club, Find a Friend Club, etc. Students who were interested in becoming a Peer Counselor were instructed to pick up an application from my classroom and submit the completed application within two weeks. Application began to be provided to interested students on November 13, 2017 and were due back by November 24, 2017. Along with the provided application, students were asked to submit copies of their transcripts, two teacher recommendation forms, an essay explaining why they would be a good peer counselor.

The Sixth step was to conduct interviews of the peer review applicants. In conjunction with administration and counseling team at my school site, students underwent interviews. As a team we agreed on the criteria for the participants: emotionally stable, confident, empathetic, a good listener, a good communicator, carry higher than a 2.5 GPA, no disciplinary issues, and has good attendance. Each student was asked the same questions, which were predetermined by myself and the counseling staff. Interviews lasted no more than ten minutes per applicant and were conducted on November 26, 2017 after school. Student answers were recorded and

reviewed later along with their application and 15 peer counselors were selected to move forward to the training.

Although not all the candidates had demonstrated the desired results of a peer counselor, they each demonstrated the potential to be a good listener, communicator, confident, empathetic, and emotionally stable. All students who were selected did carry higher than a 2.5 GPA, had little to no disciplinary issues, and had good attendance. The attendance piece is important to a successful program because peer counselors need to be present in order to provide counseling to their peers. If a peer counselor has bad attendance than they may not be present when they are needed and may not be dependable.

Seventh, I determined evidence of the peer counselors' skills. Each training day included activities for the peer counselors to complete and simulations for each peer counselor to go through to demonstrate their understanding and development of each particular skill. This included the development of body language skills to show students that the peer counselor was listening, the development of observation skills and the ability to read nonverbal cues provided by students, mindfulness meditation practices, confidentiality simulations where students had to decide when and how to break confidentiality, as well as simulations to empathize with the student's issues and identify their emotions using emotional literacy techniques.

Eighth, the counseling staff and I created a training program to prepare our peer counselors with the student interactions they would have once they became available for appointments. Students were trained on empathy, emotional literacy, communication skills, stress management techniques, and mindfulness meditation.

The ninth step was to conduct the trainings. The trainings consisted of two hour-hour sessions held on Saturday February 24, 2018 and Saturday March 10, 2018. All students were required to attend if they wanted to conduct peer counseling sessions. Students who did not attend will still be part of the peer counseling team and help with campaigns and school wellness awareness, but will not be allowed to counsel their peers in one to one or group sessions.

Lastly, peer counselors were required to attend a lunch meeting held in my room on Wednesday March 14, 2018 to reflect on their trainings and share their level of preparedness. Peer counselors were asked to communicate if they were ready to start counseling their peers, organizing wellness campaigns on campus, and/or working with counseling staff to conduct group counseling sessions.

### **Summary of Chapter**

Peer counseling programs have been successfully running in North County, San Diego for some time now. Staff who organize and run such programs have years of experience that would have a major impact on the develop of curriculum of this project. By communicating with those experienced peer counseling educators, I was able to develop an application and training process that would select and train viable candidates who have good intentions and the right motivation. With the support of the administrative and counseling staff at my school site, I was able to create two four-hour training sessions to help prepare the selected students to help counsel their peers as they navigate the sometimes rough time of high school. The use of peer counselors, while still in the trial phases, has seen some success on our campus.

#### Chapter 4: Project Presentation

For this project, I created and included the application and requirements for the selection of peer counselors. Also included are the materials needed to conduct two four-hour training programs to prepare students for the variety of situations they may find themselves in as they provide support to their peers. The goal of this project is to create a better campus environment for all students by equipping a few students with the skills they need to help a struggling peer. While developing empathy, emotional literacy, skills in communication, observation, and active listening, peer counselors will be confronted with hypothetical situations and as a result be prepared to handle the variety of situations that high school students struggle with. In order to help the selected peer counselors, feel confident in their abilities, I used the following strategies. First, I communicated with educators at other school sites who run similar programs for guidance on how formulate a training program. I next collaborated with my administrative and counseling team at my school site to review the demographics of our school and the variety of issues they have seen in our student body during their tenure. I then created a training program to focus on skill development, empathy, and emotional literacy to equip my students to handle the high-pressure situations they may be put in during their sessions with their peers.

Project Cover Page

# Peer Counseling

## Application &

## Training Curriculum



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Current class schedule:

|            | Class | Teacher | Room Number |
|------------|-------|---------|-------------|
| 1st Period |       |         |             |
| 2nd Period |       |         |             |
| 3rd Period |       |         |             |
| 4th Period |       |         |             |
| 5th Period |       |         |             |
| 6th Period |       |         |             |
| 7th Period |       |         |             |

Current Overall GPA (weighted): \_\_\_\_\_

Please list your **in-school** sports, clubs, and extracurricular (if any) that you are a part of:

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Please list your **outside of school** sports, clubs, and extracurricular (if any) that you are a part of:

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Do you currently work or volunteer on a weekly basis? (Circle one): yes                      no

- if yes, please list and briefly describe below:

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**Personal insight questions:**

1. How do you contribute to helping others?

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2. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths that will be valuable in the Peer Counseling Program?

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3. Who do you go to for support when you need to talk about personal situations? Identify at least three characteristics about this person that makes him or her easy to talk with.

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4. What motivates you to apply to the Peer Counseling program?

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5. What leadership experiences have you had, or what leadership programs are you currently involved in?

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## TEACHER RECOMMENDATIONS

*Students need at least 2 teachers from the current school year*

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Current Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_

A teacher recommendation for each ASB applicant gives an indication of the student’s academic standing, motivation, leadership skills, and attitude. Your input will be very much considered in each candidate’s evaluation.

Please rate the student in the following areas on a 1-5 scale:

**5 = excellent   4 = above average   3 = average   2 = needs improvement   1 = poor**

Attendance \_\_\_\_\_

Responsibility \_\_\_\_\_

Leadership \_\_\_\_\_

Initiative/ Motivation \_\_\_\_\_

Attitude toward fellow students \_\_\_\_\_

Attitude toward authority \_\_\_\_\_

School Spirit/Pride \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments:

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Teacher’s Name \_\_\_\_\_ Current Grade in class \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to Caitlin Eichlin’s mailbox by \_\_\_\_\_ This information will be kept confidential. Thank you for your cooperation and support! And as always, Go Mavs!

## **Explanation of Application**

All students wishing to become a peer counselor must complete an application. The application requires that students provide their contact information, information about their current school schedule, a copy of their transcripts, two completed teacher recommendation forms from current teachers, and a two page essay explaining why they would like to become a peer counselor and what they believe they can add to the peer counseling team. This application should provide enough information about each candidate to decide which applicants should move on to the interview process.

### [Peer Counseling Application](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nXf3Z3r2i_3GOipxiqVGeATIOOFj0LsIxT3djXjxZEI/edit?usp=sharing)

[\(https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nXf3Z3r2i\\_3GOipxiqVGeATIOOFj0LsIxT3djXjxZEI/edit?usp=sharing\)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nXf3Z3r2i_3GOipxiqVGeATIOOFj0LsIxT3djXjxZEI/edit?usp=sharing)

### [Teacher Recommendation Form](https://docs.google.com/document/d/10nkqINJVIIHxQNso0OsW70Ji6foLoLBhH0rw_NIPDFk/edit?usp=sharing)

[\(https://docs.google.com/document/d/10nkqINJVIIHxQNso0OsW70Ji6foLoLBhH0rw\\_NIPDFk/edit?usp=sharing\)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/10nkqINJVIIHxQNso0OsW70Ji6foLoLBhH0rw_NIPDFk/edit?usp=sharing)

## **Interviews**

After all aspiring peer counselors submitted their applications, students who fit the criteria of a possible ideal candidate were asked to be interviewed. Students who moved on to this round had a 2.8 GPA or higher, wrote an essay that proved they were a good match for this program, had good recommendations from two teachers, had parent permission, and had the rest of the application completed.

### **Interview Format**

Each student was required to complete a solo, panel type interview to be selected as a Peer Counselor. Interviews were conducted by myself, the counselors,

the principal, and two assistant principals. Interviews were conducted from 3:00-5:00 pm, each interview lasting no longer than ten minutes. Each interviewer took notes on student responses for reference in the selection process.

### **Interview Questions**

1. What is confidentiality, and what does it mean to you?
2. How would you maintain the integrity of the PALs program?
3. How comfortable are you in sharing your feelings in a large group?
4. As a PAL, we commit to being drug and alcohol free. Would this be a problem for you?
5. What do you do in your down time?
6. Do you have any goals/ambitions? What do you care about/interests? What makes you happy?
7. What is something about you that you would like us to know?
8. What makes you a good applicant for PALs?

### **Explanation of Interviews**

The interviews and the interview questions are very beneficial to getting to know our peer counselors. For a teenager, it can be intimidating to walk into a room of administrators, teachers, and counselors and have to answer somewhat person questions with no time to think. It gives the interviewers a good idea of how each student handles high pressure situations, their body language and confidence, and their ability to communicate with others. Being a peer counselor requires basic communication skills, so before training even starts, our students must be able to thrive in this interview. A Google Document of the observation questions can be found at the

following link: [Observation Questions \(https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uNG-0BKZ5W3g\\_eenSraVdbbSgcvzb-oGmlNahw7teyo/edit?usp=sharing\)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uNG-0BKZ5W3g_eenSraVdbbSgcvzb-oGmlNahw7teyo/edit?usp=sharing)

### **Day One Training Session**

This training session took place at La Costa Canyon High school on a Saturday in our Learning Commons, formerly known as our Library. The training was mandatory for all aspiring peer counselors and students were made aware that the failure to attend the four-hour training would result in removal from the program. The training ran from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm with a 15 minutes break in the middle. Pastries, fruit, water, and juices were provided by the administrative team. The training was conducted by three of the counselors and myself.

A copy of the Google Slideshow can be found using the link below. Included in this training manual is an explanation of each slide and activity.

#### [Day One Training Slideshow](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/13e5a4tv5qs8RzACNaBt35vsix33AR_09J3AcVIFv2dM/edit?usp=sharing)

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/13e5a4tv5qs8RzACNaBt35vsix33AR\\_09J3AcVIFv2dM/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/13e5a4tv5qs8RzACNaBt35vsix33AR_09J3AcVIFv2dM/edit?usp=sharing)

#### **Slide One: Welcome Peer Assistance Listeners**

This is an introduction slide that was projected when students entered the Learning Commons. The slide read, “WELCOME PEER ASSISTANCE LISTENERS” with an image. It also served as the backdrop for the staff introductions. Each staff member present took about 2 minutes to introduce themselves and explain why they wanted to be a part of this program.

#### **Slide Two: Agenda**

This slide had the agenda for today training. It reads:

Today's Agenda 8:00am-12:00pm

8:00-8:15- Welcome messages and introductions

8:15-8:30- Contract and expectations of PALs

8:30- 8:45-Warm up, getting to know you Activity

8:45-9:00- PALs program explanation

9:00-9:45- Empathy, Confidentiality, Respect, and Genuineness Discussions

9:45-10:15- Body Language demonstrations & Observation Skill Development

10:15-10:30 Break

10:30-11:15- Think, Pair, Share Scenarios

11:30-11:45- PALs What if's

11:45-12:00- Future training plans

### **Slide Three: Contract**

This slide is a placeholder for the discussion and signing of the Peer Counseling Contract. Each peer counselor is provided two copies of the contract, one to sign and return and one to take home. A Google Document of the Peer Counseling Contract can be found using the link below and a copy of the contract is provided on page 37 of this training manual. [Peer Counselor Contract](#)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vRaC8yU3tSncYaXQmIPou0qfMaNxj41-EbKZDtI2nt8/edit?usp=sharing>

## **PALS Contract Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, will abide by the following Code of Conduct set forth by the La Costa Canyon High School PALS staff and administration. The following standards of eligibility, conduct, and responsibilities shall apply to all members during their tenure with the PALS program. Violation of any of the stated rules is cause for immediate removal from the PALS program. Removal from the program is determined by the La Costa Canyon High School administrative team, counseling members, and PALS staff. The aforementioned has the right to remove members at their discretion.

### **I. Academic Achievement**

**A.** I will maintain an unweighted academic 2.8 grade point average computed on a 4.0 scale with no deficient or failing grades. If I receive less than a 2.8 GPA or receive a failing or deficient grade, I understand that I can be dismissed from the program.

### **II. Behavioral Standards**

**A.** As a member of PALS, I realize that my conduct must be beyond reproach at all times, on and off campus.

**B.** I will follow all rules and regulations presented in the student handbook. I understand if I am suspended from La Costa Canyon High School, I may be removed from PALS temporarily or permanently, as determined by the La Costa Canyon High School administrative team.

**C.** I will cooperate with and support all other PALS members and be respectful of all staff.

**D.** I will abide by school dress regulations at all times.

**E.** I will not carry nor use any illegal chemical substances or stimulants, drugs, alcohol, etc... at any time, on and off campus.

### **III. Responsibilities of Office**

**A.** I will abide by the rules of confidentiality, protecting the sensitive information shared with me during counseling sessions with peers. I will not share information with other PALS, members of the student body, or members of the community. I will break confidentiality and report to the appropriate person only if a student may cause harm to themselves or others.

**B.** I will be a positive influence on those I counsel and I will not provide advice without checking in with the La Costa Canyon Counseling Staff first.

**C.** At the end of each week, I will complete a weekly write up providing the La Costa Canyon Counseling and PALS staff with a summary of each student I saw and well as an explanation of the reason for their session.

**D.** I will not abuse my position as a PAL and remove students from class who have not requested a session. Students will return to class directly after their session is over and minimize the amount of class time being missed.

**E.** I will maintain a professional relationship with those I counsel and uphold the integrity of the PALS programs at all times.

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**Participant's Printed Name**

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**Participant's Signature**

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**Date**

**Slide Four: Snowball Get To Know You**

Slide four is for a getting-to-know-you type of activity. My team and I elected to use the snowball fight activity as a way to loosen our peer counselors up and have a little bit of fun. Each peer counselor is instructed to write an easy question on a piece of paper. These should be very low pressure questions like favorite food, animal, movie, etc. Once peer counselors have written down a question they are instructed to crumple their piece of paper up into a “snowball”. Staff also participates in this activity by writing down a question, instructing peer counselors to get in a circle, and throw your ball into the middle. Once everyone has thrown their ball, everyone picks one up, opens it, and reads their questions. Then one-by-one peer counselors and staff take turns sharing the question they have chosen and answering it. This is a fun and easy way to open the dialog between peer counselors and to also get to know each other a little better. We did a second round of this in our training and wrote a more personal question the second round. The peer counselors and staff participated and it created an open, trusting environment in which we could share with each other and be vulnerable.

**Slide Five: PALs Program**

This slide was to introduce what it means to be a peer counselor and what some of the basic expectations are. This slide is used as a discussion starter and includes questions like

What is a Peer Counselor?

What does a Peer Counselor do?

Why use Peer Counselors on campus?

What are some responsibilities of a Peer Counselor?

After discussing these questions and defining some of the basic of this program, this slide also introduces some basic expectations of each peer counselor:

- Be on time, reliable, and available
- Be a role model on and off campus
- Be trustworthy and gossip-free
- Always follow the guidelines on the PALs Contract
- Keep an up to date contact log

### **Slide Six: What is Empathy**

This slide is used to introduce and discuss empathy. The slide asks “What is empathy?” and then reads “Cognitive versus Compassionate”. This slide it to first define empathy for students who are unfamiliar with the term, then explain the different types of empathy as discussed in Chapter 2, and finally to start a discussion on how students can demonstrate empathy during peer counseling sessions.

### **Slide Seven: Respect and Genuineness**

There are only two words written on slide seven: respect and genuineness. These words appear big and bold because they are important to a successful peer counseling program. This slide is meant to open a discussion on how peer counselors should be respectful and genuine to all of their peers in and out of sessions. In order for someone to open up to a peer, they need to feel comfortable, and in order for a peer counselor to make someone feel comfortable they must be respectful and treat that person’s emotions with genuine caring.

### **Slide Eight: Confidentiality**

Slide eight reads “What is confidentiality? And when should I break it?” Confidentiality and trust, as discussed in Chapter 2, are hard to establish and complicated at times, and when broken can save a life. It is important for peer counselors to know that they are not protected by some type of doctor patient privilege and that everything that is said during a session can and should be repeated to the counseling staff. While this slide serves as a discussion starter, it is important to tell students that there are four situations in which they should immediately break confidentiality:

1. When someone wants to potentially hurt themselves
2. When someone wants to potentially hurt another person
3. When someone is being hurt by another person
4. When someone discloses about committing a crime

It is also important to discuss with peer counselors *how* to break confidentiality. Peer counselors need to know who to go to in case of an emergency and that telling another peer counselor is not an appropriate way to break confidentiality. Peer counselors should be instructed how to get ahold of a counselor, administrator, or staff member when a dangerous situation presents itself.

### **Slide Nine: SOLER Active Listening**

Slide Nine is an introduction into body language and active listening. This slide implements the theory from Chapter 2’s body language section on SOLER. Counselors first demonstrated SOLER for the peer counselors, showing them good and bad body language and how to adapt SOLER to specific situations. Peer counselors were then instructed to partner up and practice their SOLER body language and provide tips to

their fellow peer on how to improve. Slide nine also touched on active listening and how to use SOLER to portray active listening.

### **Slide Ten: Observation Skills**

Slide Ten is a discussion starter on observation skills and reads:

The first part of a PAL session with a PALee is observing. Observing should tell you the tone of how the meeting will go.

Here are some things to look for and questions to ask yourself:

What is the demeanor of this person? Do they appear anxious, scared, upset, quiet...? What is their body language telling you? Are they closed off? Hiding their wrists? Jumpy when touched or when someone enters the room or walks by? How talkative is this person? Are they using one word answers? Do you feel like they are holding back with the answers they provide? What can the person's appearance tell you? Do they look clean? Are their clothes torn? Do they look like they've been crying?

These questions are intended to get peer counselors thinking about the nonverbal cues that each of us is constantly giving off. By developing and implement observation skills, peer counselors can direct the conversation with a peer and have a more successful session.

### **Slides Eleven through Fourteen: Scenarios**

These slides are scenario slides. Students have been broken off into partners, randomly assigned by numbering off so that they are with someone they are not sitting next to. Scenarios were written by myself and the counseling staff from our previous experiences and are intended to be the basis of discussion starters. Peer counselors

are asked to discuss what they would do in the situation while practicing their SOLER body language and active listening skills.

### **Slide Fifteen: What If's**

Now that we have presented students with our real-world scenarios, its important to open the floor to them and allow them to bring their personal experiences into play. Peer counselors were allowed to ask "what if" questions that were specific scenarios that they were in or could think of and were able to receive feedback from the group on how to handle the situation in their new role as peer counselor.

### **Slide Sixteen: What Comes Next**

Slide Sixteen is the last slide of the Day 1 training and is used as a placeholder to discuss the next training session.

## **Day Two Training Session**

This is day two of two-day training program. This training program is a four-hour session that is scheduled on Saturday from 8:00am to 12:00pm in the Learning Commons. The Google Slide Presentation for this training session can be found using the link below: [Day Two Training Slideshow](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1uMLYXNDANjMgpK8kzHQy0Qxa83NwmZXEIkUcNtAm80g/edit?usp=sharing)

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1uMLYXNDANjMgpK8kzHQy0Qxa83NwmZXEIkUcNtAm80g/edit?usp=sharing>

### **Slide One: Peer Assistance Listener Training Day Two**

This is an introduction slide that was projected when students entered the Learning Commons. The slide reads "PEER ASSISTANCE LISTENER TRAINING DAY Two". This slide will serve as a backdrop as the peer counseling staff re-introduces ourselves.

**Slide Two: Agenda**

This slide had the agenda for today training. It reads:

Today's Agenda 8:00am-12:00pm

8:00-8:15- Welcome messages and agenda for today

8:15-8:45- Emotional Intelligence Discussion

8:45-9:15- Active listening and Body language practice

9:15-9:45- Communicating Effectively Discussion

9:45-10:15- Mindfulness Mediation discussion and practice

10:15-10:30 Break

10:30-11:00- PALs Procedures

11:00-11:15- PALs Rules to live by

11:15-12:00- Future PALs Planning

**Slide Three: Review**

This slide is a discussion starter for students to review what we learned about last training session. Students are instructed to get with a partner and discuss confidentiality, empathy, respect, and genuineness while practicing their SOLER and body language skills.

**Slide Four: Emotional Intelligence**

Slide four focuses on emotional intelligence and reads: "Emotional Literacy is defined: One ability to understand your emotions and others as well as to express emotions in productive ways. Emotional Intelligence can be developed in five steps:

knowing your feelings, having a sense of empathy, learning to manage our emotions, repairing emotional problems, putting it all together: emotional interactivity.” This slide should serve as a discussion starter lead by the peer counseling staff to discuss how to use emotional literacy in peer counseling sessions and help their peers understand the emotions they are feeling.

### **Slide Five: Active Listening**

This slide focuses on active listening and reads: “It’s important to make your PALee feel like they are being heard. **What to do:** SOLER, nodding, be aware of your facial expressions, periodically say “uh huh” or other affirmation verbal cues you feel comfortable with, summarize what they said when they are finished. **What NOT to do:** yawn, interrupt, stare intensely, provide opinion.

### **Slide Six: Communicating Effectively**

Slide Six is about communicating effectively. There are two text boxes on slide six. The first text box is a list of things peer counselors can do to communicate effectively with their peers during sessions. These points are to serve as discussion starters for the counseling staff to discuss how they get students to talk about difficult things in a safe environment. It reads:

- “-Using Questions: closed, informational, open, feeling
- When to use “why”
- Paraphrasing to verify perception, for clarification, and to demonstrate empathy
- Work with their feelings to help identify, define, clarify, acknowledge, and then deal with the feelings

- Help with decision making by identifying the problem, gather information, find alternative choices, explore consequences, evaluate the factors, and making a plan for action
- Establish Rapport and make them feel comfortable”

The second text box is labeled “Communication Blockers” and is a list of communication faux pas that students should avoid. These are things that will make a student feel uncomfortable, anxious, underappreciated, or judged during a session with a peer counselor. This slide reads: “Communication Blockers: Quick reassurance, providing advice, why questions, patronizing, preaching, interrupting, being judgmental, digging for information, bring in your own emotions, talking too much instead of listening, thinking of what to say instead of listening.” The goal of the peer counseling programs is to make students on campus feel like they have a safe place to discuss their issues. If students start to feel like the peer counselors are dis-in genuine, judgmental, or prone to gossip, students will no longer buy into the program and the peer counselors will have to be removed. During this slide, it is important to give examples of the do’s and the don’ts that are outlined on this slide. Providing peer counselors with examples will help them reflect on how they communicate and will allow them to adjust their behavior during a session with a peer.

### **Slide Seven: Implementing Mindfulness Practices**

This slide is about mindfulness meditation practices. This is an important part of this training day because this section is usually a new concept to most students and they seem to struggle with the concentration it takes to meditate successfully.

However, if they can practice mindfulness meditation and teach it to their peers during sessions, it can help students lower anxiety, depression, and mental pain. The slide first defines meditation and then walks peer counselors through a step-by-step process on how to meditate and how to develop a mindful meditation practice. This slide is also used as a discussion starter to open a conversation between the peer counselors and the counseling staff on the positive effects of mindful meditation and when peer counselors can implement it into their sessions.

### **Slide Eight: PALs Procedures**

Slide Eight is specific to the way this peer counseling program will be run at this specific school site. During the first step in Chapter 3, teachers who run similar programs provided various ways to organize their procedures. This slide is broken up into three different sections: daily, weekly, and referrals.

The daily section defines the responsibilities that each peer counselor is responsible for on a daily basis and reads: “let the Counseling Secretary know who you are scheduled to meet with, maintain the PALs office, only call students who have requested or been referred for a meeting. Use the proper PALs pass, extra time in PALs should be spent on projects and campaigns for PALs.”

The weekly section explains what each peer counselor is responsible for each week and reads: “submit visit log and summaries of meetings to counseling staff, and check in with administrator to update them on students of concern.” Students are tasked with writing a summary at the end of each week and submitting that summary to the administration and counseling staff. Peer counselors are instructed that they do not

need to go into that much detail, but need to provide enough detail that a counselor or administrator knows what is going on with each student who visits a peer counselor.

The last section on this slide is the referrals section and how students should respond when they get a referral for a meeting. This section reads: “when a referral is made, respond within 24 hours and note the meeting in the PALs record book. After the meeting fill out a summary contact form and enter your PALee in the record book. After additional PALee contact continue to fill out summary contact forms and keep your record book up to date. Always complete your weekly schedule summary and submit to counseling.” This is the section can make be change dependent on school site and altered to best fit the needs of each individual school. Schools with higher disciplinary rates may want to increase peer counselor check-ins to twice weekly.

### **Slide Nine: PALs Rules to Live By**

This slide is some peer counseling rules to live by to help students navigate the demanding task of helping their peers. This slide reads: “First, take care of yourself. Second, know yourself, your limitations, and emotions. Third, know what gets you upset and when to refer a peer to another peer counselor. And fourth, don’t be afraid to ask for help.” Including these rules is a good reminder to peer counselors that helping their peers can be emotionally demanding and can be hard for them sometimes. It is important for these peer counselors to take care of themselves and seek help when they need it. Taking on the problems of another person can be hard for any person, but can be extremely difficult for a teenager. It’s important to be in constant contact with peer counselors to make sure that they are emotionally able to best support their peers.

**Slide Ten: Future Planning**

The last slide in the Day Two training curriculum is earmarked for future planning. It provides some suggestions of campaigns peer counselors can help organize on campus like Red and Yellow Ribbon Weeks, lunches for new students, how to recruit future peer counselors, and peer counselor program advertisements.

**Student Feedback Form**

A Peer Counseling Student Feedback Form is provided to each participant in the peer counseling training. The feedback form includes three closed ended questions. The first two questions require a yes or no answer. The first inquires on the participant's readiness to lease a one-on-one peer counseling session. The second inquires on the participant's readiness to lead group counseling sessions. The third question provides multiple choices of the events the participant wants to plan and participate in as a peer counselor.

## Peer Counseling Student Feedback Form

Please answer the following questions honestly by circling one answer per question

1. Are you ready to lead one-on-one peer counseling sessions with your peers?

Yes

No

2. Are you ready to help lead group peer counseling sessions?

Yes

No

3. Please circle any events that you would like to help plan and participate in:

Yellow Ribbon Week

Red Ribbon Week

New Student Tours

Peer Counseling Advertisement

New Student Luncheon

New Peer Counselor Recruitment

Dude Be Nice Campaign

Compliment Grams

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Peer counselors were asked to attend a lunch meeting after both trainings were completed. Peer counselors provided feedback on the training and were asked to complete the form above opting in or out of any of the events that peer counseling will be responsible for. Peer counselors could also identify if they felt ready to lead sessions with their peers in one-on-one or group settings. To find a Google Document of the Peer Counseling Student Feedback Form, please use the following link: [Peer Counselor Feedback Form](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Muf25F1TNCIC1JwpaNTnRPN_nhObhk8LATXSHZmHT0/edit?usp=sharing)

([https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Muf25F1TNCIC1JwpaNTnRPN\\_nhObhk8LATXSHZmHT0/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Muf25F1TNCIC1JwpaNTnRPN_nhObhk8LATXSHZmHT0/edit?usp=sharing))

## Chapter 5: Reflections and Recommendations

Creating training curriculum for a peer counseling program is a challenging, yet rewarding process. But creating the training curriculum is only the start. Schools across the nation are struggling with bullying, violence on campus, suicide, and depressed and anxious students. There is a culture that seems to be forming that going through a struggle in high school is the norm, and that everyone is depressed. The purpose of this training manual was to create something that would help students successfully navigate the sometimes challenging halls of their high school. It was to create an additional support in which students could find relief and safety. For some students, this may be the first time they feel safe, and perhaps, it could even save their life.

In this final chapter, lessons learned, plans for implementation of a successful peer counseling program, and suggestions for modifications will be discussed to help those wishing to implement the program take the steps necessary to be successful.

### **Lessons Learned**

I learned a couple important lessons during the journey of created peer counseling training curriculum. Those lessons can be categorized into two different types: working with students and creating the training curriculum.

#### **Working with Students**

Working with students was the most rewarding part of this experience, and the lessons I learned from creating something for the students is something that will impact my teaching for the rest of my career. During this journey, I kept telling myself that I was creating this curriculum *for* these aspiring peer counselors, but what I did not realize

until about halfway through was that I was actually creating this curriculum *with* these students. It was something I was so energetic and motivated about, but they were feeling the same emotions. I was so focused on training these students to be prepared, that I overlooked what they could contribute to this training curriculum. I quickly realized how much they had to contribute during the “what if’s” section of the first training day. I allotted about 15 minutes for their hypothetical situations and realized after taking a few scenarios that this portion of the training could last a couple hours. To help with this, I hosted a couple lunchtime training sessions and created a question box in my room where students could submit their hypothetical questions for group discussion.

Another main lesson I learned during this experience was how important it was to have administration and staff support. This is the type of program that is going to take more than just one willing teacher to implement it. All teachers need to be involved and on the lookout for students who may need some additional support. All the counselors need to be involved and be willing to help the peer counselors when they feel overwhelmed. The administration needs to support the program by providing financial support as well. This program does really take a village to be successful, but if the support for this program is there, it can be super impactful.

### **Creating Training Curriculum**

A lesson I learned about developing the curriculum itself was that the original idea I had for this program transformed so many times. When I started this journey, I had a pretty good vision in my head for what this would turn out to be. But after collaborating with other peer counseling staff members, conducting my literature review, creating applications and conducting interviews, and completing the training processes,

I realized that my original idea and vision for this curriculum had blossomed more than I could have ever imagined.

Specifically, from my literature review, I learned more about empathy and how to develop the different types of empathy in adolescents (Ekman, 2003). From my own high school experience and from my experience working with teenagers prior to the development of this curriculum, I knew that these students would be feeling the variety of emotions as they complete their tenure of high school. However, I did not realize how impactful the teaching of emotional literacy could be (Goleman, 1995). My peer counselors were amazed at the amount of different emotions that they often felt that they identified as something else. For example, one of my trained peer counselors reflected on a session he had with a student by explaining the effect that emotional literacy had had on their session. He explained that the student he was talking to claimed he was angry all the time for the recent loss of his father. He told my peer counselor that he hated everything and everyone. But what he did not realize was that what he was actually feeling was pain and grief. After a couple sessions, this student started to acknowledge his loss and deal with his grief and pain appropriately.

The practices and skills of mindfulness meditation (Greensburg & Harris, 2012), observation (Varenhorst, 2003), body language (Egan, 1986), and active listening (Bodie, 2012) as researched in the literature review have also been impactful for my peer counselors. It has opened their eyes to a new level awareness and nonverbal communication that they were not alert to before.

This is an important lesson for me, not only for the process of creating curriculum, but for the development of my teaching career. Things may not always go

as planned and along the way there will be speed bumps, but if the motivations are right and the willingness to be successful is there, something amazing will result.

### **Plans for Implementation**

Now that the training of my peer counselors is sufficient enough to get them started, the implementation and student buy in are the next big tasks to tackle. The plans for implementation here are specific to my school site and are the best fit for my student body. After talking to other educators who run similar programs, I realized that there are so many different ways that this program can be successful.

In the 2018/2019 school year, my district has approved a peer counseling class to be run on campus. I have decided to align my class with the ASB class on campus and collaborate with the ASB teacher on campaigns like yellow ribbon week. We have created a track for students wishing to be in either of our programs. All incoming freshman interested in either class will be enrolled in Leadership. In this class they will learn about the school culture, the basics of the ASB, and peer counseling class, and be somewhat involved in the organization of campaigns and events. All sophomores will then choose between the ASB and peer counseling class. For students in the peer counseling class, they will receive their peer counseling training throughout the year, they will organize campaigns and events, and be responsible for the recruitment of potential peer counselors. For Juniors and Seniors who successfully complete both prerequisites, they will move on to Advanced Peer Counseling. This class will be organized in a very different way. These students will be placed in the counseling office during one period of the seven period bell schedule. They will be the student who is responsible for running sessions with their peers. They will not be used as a counseling

aid, but will be assigned to the counseling office and be there to assist in any way they can when they are not in a session with a peer. These students will also be responsible for collaborating with the peer counseling class and being mentors to the young aspiring peer counselors.

Some examples of other ways to implement your program include running it as club and having peer counselors meet with students in need of help during their free periods, only running the class and not designating a student per period as a peer counselor, or only having a student or two designated as a peer counselor per period and not running the class. I have seen successful programs ran in all the above ways.

### **Suggestions for Modifications**

There are several modifications that can be made to adjust to curriculum to fit the needs of specific student bodies. The modifications that I have seen can be categorized into a three different categories: training modifications, student selection modifications, and application modifications.

#### **Training Modifications**

Including in the training curriculum are two days of training. Depending on specific school sites and the level of disciplinary issues, suicide rates, and societal problems faced by the student body, the number of trainings may be increased. Students may need to be trained more on specific types of issues that they may encounter during their tenure as peer counselors. My specific school site, while dealing with higher than normal suicide rates on a district level, is lucky to be fairly low in terms of major issues. For that reason, I felt comfortable training my students for only eight hours. I do however, hold bi-weekly lunch meetings where we develop some of the skills in a more

relaxed setting. Peer counselors attend these lunch meetings with questions about specific situations they may be placed in, we discuss their progress, and we develop skills like SOLER, observation, and active listening.

While I believe that increasing the time spent training students and altering the content in which they are trained can be beneficial to meet the needs of a specific school site, I would not recommend shortening the training or cutting out any of the included material. I do believe that the curriculum provides a holistic training with the necessary components to be successful.

### **Student Selection Modification**

For this training curriculum, I decided to train 15 peer counselors. My school site runs on a seven period bell schedule as well as around 1,900 students, so I thought it was important to have at least two peer counselors available during each class period. The number of peer counselors that are trained should be modified to meet the needs of the specific school site. From my correspondence with educators running a similar program, the number of peer counselors trained ranged from eight to twenty. I do believe that having at least two peer counselors available each class period is the best approach.

### **Application Modifications**

The application that is laid out in the training curriculum gives me an in-depth look into each of the students aspiring to become a peer counselor. While it is lengthy and requires time and effort to complete, those who are willing to complete it will demonstrate their determination to become part of this program. The application can be modified to the specific needs of your student body. For example, if the students do not

have time to attend after school interviews, the questions that are asked in the interviews could be included in the written application. It might also be beneficial to ask applicants to receive teacher recommendations from all of their current teachers.

### **Conclusion**

The implementation of this training curriculum to develop a peer counseling program at a high school setting can have a drastic impact on the student body. A successful program can be implemented using applications, interviews, trainings, and feedback forms. While the willingness to implement such a program is admirable, staff, counseling, administrative, and district support is required to create a successful program. With that support, such a program can have a positive impact on individual students, staff members, and the school as a whole. The curriculum created as part of this project was heavily influenced by relevant literature, the needs of my school site, and the community in which we are located. The successful use of the created curriculum to implement a peer counseling program can have the potential to save students.

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