**Small Group Curriculum**

**Name of group**: Calming the Mind

**Focus of group**: All Lincoln Park High School programs have a college preparatory emphasis. The freshman students take a core curriculum of Reading/Writing Workshop or Research Workshop; English, a survey of literature; World Studies; Algebra; Biology or Environmental Science; and Art or Music. According to the needs assessment, 21% of the students surveyed reported feeling anxious at school. The *Calming the Mind* group is not merely about stress reduction. Students can actually learn how to increase their ability to deal with distress by integrating everyday life positive activities such as solving challenging problems, practicing regular exercise and relaxation techniques, maintaining social contacts, eating healthy, and engaging in optimistic and rational thinking. Stress management involves finding the right amounts of stress, given your individual personality, priorities and life situation, so that you can maximize your performance and satisfaction.

**Goal**: The goal of the stress management group is to assist students in increasing their knowledge of stress and to teach them how to cope more effectively with distress.

**Number of Students**: The target number of students is eight to ten. Students can be referred by the instructional staff and or freshman counselor.

**Grade Level**: The group is opened to Freshman Students only. The group is structured to help freshman students receive personal attention and support services as well as develop the necessary tools to make the transition from elementary to high school.

**Adult Leader**: A licensed professional school counselor familiar with the challenges that freshman students experience with managing stress.

**Number of Sessions**: There will be 4 sessions. The group will meet every Wednesday from 12 p.m. – 1 p.m. during their lunch period, starting April 2nd and ending April 23rd, 2015.

**ASCA National Standards for Students**:

Personal/Social development

* PS:A1.5 Identify and express feelings
* PS:A2.6 Use effective communication skills
* PS:B1.4 Develop effective coping skills for dealing with problems
* PS:B1.5 Demonstrate when, where and how to seek help for solving problems and making decisions
* PS:C1.6 Identify resource people in the school and community, and know how to seek their help
* PS:C1.10 Learn techniques for managing stress and conflict
* PS:C1.11 Learn coping skills for managing life events

**ASCA School Counselor Competencies**:

* I-A-5 Individual counseling, group counseling and classroom guidance programs ensuring equitable access to resources that promote academic achievement; personal, social and emotional development; and career development including the identification of appropriate pose-secondary education for every student.
* I-A-9 The continuum of mental health services, including prevention and intervention strategies to enhance student success.
* IV-B-2b Develops strategies to implement individual student planning such as strategies for appraisal, advisement, goal setting, decision-making, social skills and transitions.
* IV-B-2g Understand methods for helping students monitor and direct their own learning and personal/social and career development.
* IV-B-3 Provides responsive services.
* IV-B-3a Lists and describes interventions used in responsive services, such as individual/small-group counseling and crisis response.
* IV-B-3b Understands appropriate individual and small-group counseling theories and techniques.
* IV-B-3c Demonstrates an ability to provide counseling for students during times of transition, separation, heightened stress and critical changes.

**Materials**:

* Informed Consent Form
* Group Agreements
* Pre and Post Test Stress Inventory
* Writing Materials (pens, pencils, markers or crayons)
* “The World on My Shoulders” activity sheet
* “Symptoms Checklist” activity sheet
* “Stress Alert” activity sheet
* “Individual Plan for Coping with Stress” activity sheet

**Description of Group**:

Session One: What is Stress?

The first session will begin with an introduction of group members; the school counselor will review the group rules, norms, and informed consent. The school counselor will also administer the Pre-test Stress Inventory to establish a baseline for each student, as well as provide a brief description about the purpose of the group, including the group’s frequency and duration.

The school counselor will then begin the lesson plan by introducing the subject of stress and how the term “stress’ is often used by people to describe feelings of pressure, strain, or tension. Students will then be asked to share their feelings about the meaning of the word and how it affects their lives. The school counselor will then distribute “The World on My Shoulders” activity sheet, encouraging the students to illustrate a particular situation or experience that provokes stress. Group discussion will then be encouraged following the activity to reveal how the experiences or situations the students have depicted make them feel burdened by stress. All group members are invited to offer their interpretations as they may share similar experiences.

Session Two: What makes you feel under stress?

The school counselor will begin the lesson plan by checking in with the students and reviewing the definition of stress and how “stress’ is different for every student. The school counselor will emphasize that stress is a natural part of life and that not all stress is bad. In fact, to pursue important personal goals, students will need to be willing to take on new challenges.

The school counselor then engages the students in a conversation about the different sources of stress, e.g. environmental, social stressors, physiological and thoughts, and the connection between their own personal stress responses (internal and external awareness). Students will then be encouraged to share examples of everyday life situations that may be stressful, e.g. test taking, and asked to describe their bodies’ physical reaction to the stressor. The school counselor then distributes the Symptom Checklist activity sheet in efforts to help the students recognize and determine which symptoms cause them the most discomfort as well as those symptoms that they may want to work on.

Session Three: How can you prevent stress?

The school counselor begins the lesson plan by checking in with the students and reviewing how being aware of signs of stress can help them take steps to prevent the stress from getting worse.

The school counselor then engages the students in a conversation about prevention strategies and the importance of eliminating avoidable stress, e.g., developing a support system, having balance in their daily life and taking care of their health. The school counselor then re-emphasizes that too much stress can create physical, emotional, or mental problems and how important it is that students are able to detect signs of stress earlier on, before the stress gets out of hand. Students are then encouraged to share examples of prevention strategies that they may be already using and or would like to try to further develop. The school counselor would then distribute the Stress Alert activity sheet in efforts to help the students think about strategies for stress release. Following the activity, students would then be encouraged to discuss their view how they would release stress for the given stressful situations.

Session Four: How can you cope with stress effectively?

The school counselor begins the lesson plan by checking in with the students and reviewing the importance of being familiar with prevention strategies, such as eating well, getting enough sleep and having a support system, as they can eliminate avoidable stress.

The school counselor then engages the students in a conversation about strategies for coping with stress, e.g. utilizing breathing techniques, using positive self-talk and talking to someone. Explains that every student will develop different strategies, depending on what works best for them. Students are then encouraged to share examples of other coping strategies that they may be already using and or would like to further develop. The school counselor will then role model a breathing technique that can be effective for releasing tension. The students will then be encouraged to practice the learned breathing technique as a group. The school counselor then distributes the Individual Plan for Coping with Stress activity sheet in efforts to help the students create individual plans that identify the following: stressful situations, signs of stress, strategies for preventing stress, and strategies for coping with stress. Following the activity, students will be encouraged to share their plans with their support system. The school counselor will congratulate the students on their progress and thank them for their contributions over the past 4 weeks. The school counselor will end the session with administering the Post Test Stress Inventory and reminding the students that their assigned school counselor is available, if further assistance is needed.

**Plan for Evaluation**:

Process Data: Seventy-nine freshman students participated in the small group discussion – “Calming the Mind”

Perception Data: 100% of the freshman students can name at least two situations or experiences that provoked stress.

Outcome Data: The number of freshman students referred to counseling due to heightened stress has decreased from seventy-nine students to thirty. A 62% decrease.

Follow up:

In two weeks, the school counselor will follow up with the administration and instructional staff to review the outcome of the small group curriculum. Use the results to drive data for future interventions.