Ice Breaker Activity: Worries in a Hat

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**Grade level/Age**

This activity will be used for 9th grade students and any other students transitioning to the high school. It will be performed several weeks into the beginning of the school year, once the students have passed the introductory stage of the group and are entering the working stage.

**Purpose/Goal**

“Worries in a Hat” is a teambuilding exercise that promotes unity and fosters group cohesion and group support (Icebreakers.ws, 2012; Neill, 2004). It will be used with first-year students and transitioning students in the high school in order to help them start to deal with fears/worries they have about their new environment. A good way of starting to deal with these fears is to have them openly acknowledged, without being subject to ridicule. Having one's fears expressed and heard almost immediately cuts them in half.

This icebreaker not only helps students feel comfortable discussing worries about the transition to high school, but also develops group connection and cohesion by the discussion of common fears. The icebreaker is a great segue into helping students overcome their worries by receiving suggestions and possible solutions from their peers, as well as offering suggestions/solutions to their peers, which can serve as a way to empower the students.

**ASCA and NYS Learning Standards**

***ASCA Standards***

**Academic Standard A:** Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span.

**Competencies:**

*A:A1 Improve Academic Self-concept*

* A:A1.1 Articulate feelings of competence and confidence as learners
* A:A1.2 Display a positive interest in learning
* A:A1.3 Take pride in work and achievement
* A:A1.4 Accept mistakes as essential to the learning process
* A:A1.5 Identify attitudes which lead to successful learning

 *A:A2 Acquire Skills for Improving Learning*

* A:A2.3 Use communication skills to know when and how to ask for help when needed

*A:A3 Achieve School Success*

* A:A3.1 Take responsibility for their actions
* A:A3.2 Demonstrate the ability to work independently, as well as the ability to work
* A:A3.3 Cooperatively with other students
* A:A3.6 Share Knowledge

**Academic Standard B:** Students will complete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial postsecondary options, including college.

**Competencies:**

*A:B1 Improve Learning*

* A:B1.1 Demonstrate the motivation to achieve individual potential
* A:B1.2 Learn and apply critical thinking skills
* A:B1. Seek information and support from faculty, staff, family, and peers

*A:B2 Plan to Achieve Goal*

* A.B2.7 Use problem solving and decision-making skills to assess progress toward education goals.

**Academic Standard C:** Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.

**Competencies:**

*A:C1 Relate School to Life Experiences*

* A:C1.1 Demonstrate the ability to balance school, studies, extracurricular activities, leisure time, and family life

**Personal/Social Standard A:** Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

**Competencies:**

*PS:A1 Acquire Self-Knowledge*

* PS:A1.1 Develop positive attitudes toward self as a unique and worthy person
* PS:A1.2 Identify values, attitudes and beliefs
* PS:A1.3 Learn the goals setting process
* PS:A1.4 Understand change is a part of growth
* PS:A1.5 Identify and express feelings
* PS:A1.6 Distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior
* PS:A1.7 Recognize personal boundaries, rights, and privacy needs
* PS:A1.9 Demonstrate cooperative behavior in groups
* PS:A1.10 Identify personal strengths and assets
* PS:A1.11 Identify and discuss changing personal and social roles

*PS:A2 Acquire Interpersonal Skills*

* PS:A2.2 Respect alternate points of view
* PS:PA2.3 Recognize, accept, respect, and appreciate individual differences
* PS:A2.4 Recognize, accept and appreciate ethnic and cultural diversity
* PS:A2.6 Use effective communication skills
* PS.A2.7 Know that communication involves speaking, listening, and non verbal behavior
* PS:A2.8 Learn how to make and keep friend

**Personal/Social Standard B:** Students will make decisions set goals, and take necessary action to achieve goals.

**Competencies:**

*PS:B1 Self-Knowledge Application*

* PS:B1.3 Identify alternative solutions to a problem
* PS:B1.4 Develop effective coping skills for dealing with problems
* PS:B1.7 Demonstrate a respect an appreciation for individual and cultural differences
* PS:B1.10 Identify alternative ways of achieving goals

(ASCA, 2005)

**New York State Learning Standards**

***The Arts***

*Standard 2*: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts in various roles.

***English Language Arts***

*Standard 1:* Language for Information and Understanding: Students will listen, speak, read, and write for information and understanding. As listeners and readers, students will collect data, facts, and ideas; discover relationships, concepts, and generalizations; and use knowledge generated from oral, written, and electronically produced texts. As speakers and writers, they will use oral and written language that follows the accepted conventions of the English language to acquire, interpret, apply, and transmit information.

*Standard 3:* Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation Students will listen, speak, read, and write for critical analysis and evaluation. As listeners and readers, students will analyze experiences, ideas, information, and issues presented by others using a variety of established criteria. As speakers and writers, they will use oral and written language that follows the accepted conventions of the English language to present, from a variety of perspectives, their opinions and judgments on experiences, ideas, information and issues.

*Standard 4:* Language for Social Interaction: Students will listen speak, read, and write for social interaction. Students will use oral and written language that follows the accepted convention of the English language for effective social communication with a wide variety of people. As readers and listeners, they will use the social communication of others to enrich their understanding of people and their views.

(NYSED, 2013)

**Theoretical Approach**

The counselors in this activity will be working mainly under the Humanistic/Existential paradigm. This paradigm emphasizes the importance of the therapeutic relationship, as well as “anxiety, freedom, values, and responsibility and finding meaning in one’s actions” (Byrd & Erford, 2014, p. 15). The Person-Centered approach within the Humanistic/Existential paradigm will be used through techniques including focusing on the counseling relationship, genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathy. Additionally, each individual’s unique perspective will be taken into consideration.

As Byrd & Erford (2014) describe, Humanistic/Existential strategies and interventions include “providing opportunity for empathy and safe exploration of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors,” “building relationship,” “focus on the present,” “examination of anxiety and behavioral issues and a sense of belonging to classmates, classroom, school, and community,” “acceptance and trust,” and “helping student to find a place through a major life transition,” all of which are addressed through the ice breaker “Worries in a Hat” (p. 18-19).

**Cultural Considerations**

This exercise allows students to bring up any concerns they have about their new environment in an anonymous way. Students are told they may bring up any worries they have, including issues of race, gender, culture, socioeconomic status, stereotypes, and discrimination. By hearing other students’ concerns and attempting to understand their perspectives, students will develop multicultural awareness and will empower each other.

**Developmental Considerations**

Psychosocially adolescents are in Erikson’s stage of identity versus role confusion. During this stage, which begins and ends during adolescence, teens are developing a sense of self and personal identity. Peers become increasingly important and influential. Adolescents during this stage are transitioning from childhood to adulthood, and struggle for independence and autonomy. They begin to explore and experiment different roles, activities, and behaviors, and may feel insecure and confused (AllPsych Online, 2011).

During early adolescence, teenagers starting high school may experience anxiety and insecurity when transitioning and adjusting to high school. They may face challenges because of the different academic demands and expectations, peer influence and social relationships. A major task of the icebreaker activity is to normalize the fears and worries the students may be experiencing during their adjustment into high school, along with building trusting relationships with their peers. Developmentally, adolescents are forming their own personal identity along with balancing their social identity and peer relationships (AllPsych Online, 2011). Normalizing their fears and concerns will foster peer relationships and connections, as well as ease anxieties related to the new academic demands and adjustment of high school.

Cognitively, adolescents are capable of thinking logically and abstractly and can reason theoretically (AllPsych Online, 2011). During the icebreaker activity each member will have the opportunity to read other member’s fears/worries, and communicate abstractly how the member may be feeling. They will take on another’s perspective as well as their own regarding the written worry/fear statement.

**Description**

*Materials*: Index cards, pens, and hat.

The activity will take approximately 15 minutes. There will be a circle of chairs for the students to sit in, with the co-leaders sitting across from each other in the circle.

Group rules and the topic of confidentiality will be briefly reviewed. The leaders will set an appropriate tone, e.g., settled, attentive, caring and serious. The tone could be set by introducing the topic of fear/worry and explaining how it is normal and natural at this stage of program that people are experiencing all sorts of anxieties, worries and fears about transitioning to high school (2 minutes).

Setup for Worries in a Hat (4 minutes): Distribute an index card and a writing utensil to each person. Instruct them to anonymously write a fear or worry that they have (Icebreakers.ws, 2012; Neill, 2004). Ask everyone to complete this sentence on an index card (anonymously): “After a couple weeks as a new student in the high school I am afraid, I worry about…” Tell them to be as specific and as honest as possible, but not in such a way that they could be easily identified. Provide an example, such as, “After a couple weeks as a new student in the high school I am afraid that I am not making any friends, OR, I worry about being the only girl in my math class.” After everyone is done writing a fear/worry, collect each index card into a large hat.

Explain that each student will have a turn to pick an index card from the hat. He/she will read the concern aloud and attempt to explain what the person who wrote the worry means, trying to describe his/her understanding/reflection of the person’s emotions associated with the worry (Icebreakers.ws, 2012; Neill, 2004). Explain that there will be no comments on what the reader said. Students should simply listen and go on to the next reader (If a student selects his/her own index card from the hat then he/she simply will reselect. Additionally, each student is allowed one “phone a friend” if assistance is needed. In order to provide an example of an appropriate response, the counselor will model first). All students should respect one another privacy and feelings while they are reading their worries (7 minutes).

After all fears have been read and elaborated, discuss as a whole group what some of the common fears were. This activity also helps build trust and unity, as people come to realize that everyone has similar fears. At the end of the discussion, inform the group that the next session will be a continuation of this theme, using the concerns and fears discussed to help discuss the future direction and goals of the group (addressing some of these fears and possible solutions to the concerns) (2 minutes).

References

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