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Book Review

Social and Emotional Skills Training for Children: The Fast Track Friendship Group Manual

John D. Coie, John E. Lochman, Karen L. Bierman, Kenneth A. Dodge, Mark T. Greenberg, Robert J. McMahon, Guilford Press, 2017, 444 pp, paperback or e-book, \$29.75.

Social and Emotional Skills Training for Children: The Fast Track Friendship Group Manual presents an evidence-based group intervention and curriculum for children who are challenged by various peer difficulties. It was developed as part of a larger federally funded Fast Track Project, which includes a combination of school-based and family-focused interventions aimed at supporting children with a high level of disruptive and aggressive behaviors. The Friendship Group focuses on social skills and peer interactions. In addition to teaching core social skills (participation, communication, cooperation, good sportsmanship, and conflict resolution), the Friendship Group promotes emotional understanding and empathy, self-control, and effective coping with social stressors. It has been found to be effective for children who have difficulty gaining peer acceptance for a variety of reasons. It is not intended for children who have adequate social skills but who demonstrate aggressive behaviors.

The initial chapters of the Friendship Group Manual consist of an overview of the program, followed by details of the administration of the program itself, the therapeutic process, and behavioral management strategies. It provides 2 sets of sessions; 1 for grades K-2 and 1 for grades 3 to 5. The early elementary curriculum (K-2) includes 6 units consisting of 26 sessions. The advanced elementary curriculum (3-5) includes 4

units consisting of 14 sessions. It includes step-by-step implementation guidelines and tools. Each session has a detailed overview and content description as well as an outline. There are prompts and activities for each session. Each session follows the same routine: group review, construction activity, snack, collaboration activity, and closing circle. Sessions from each of the age groups can be combined depending on the specific needs of the group.

A strength of the manual is that it contains detailed content description for each session, allowing for consistent replication of the curriculum. The manual provides an introduction to behavioral strategies for managing a group; however, to ensure successful implementation, the curriculum should be administered by a professional who has some experience in working with children who have challenging behaviors, particularly given its effectiveness in settings in which children are displaying both difficulties with peer acceptance and aggressive behaviors.

Another important strength of the curriculum is the flexibility it provides. There are 2 sets of sessions. Individual units or sessions can be integrated from each age group to individualize the program to the needs of the group. For example, sessions from the early elementary curriculum can be added to the advanced elementary curriculum to teach specific skills. Sessions can also be

broken down into multiple sessions or repeated to reinforce a specific skill set.

The book also details the importance of group dynamics. It is designed for groups of students with similar social emotional profiles and challenges but also provides strategies for integration with groups of peers who do not have social difficulties. This might make it difficult to implement in a school environment because of scheduling. It was initially used as part of an after-school program and could be used in a similar setting.

Finally, the large-size format facilitates photocopying; purchasers also get access to a Web page in which they can download and print the reproducible materials. The book contains 145 full-color reproducible handouts, posters, and other tools.

Overall, the group manual provides an evidence-based social emotional group training for elementary school-age children. It would be useful in a school setting or clinic setting with a group of children with similar social difficulties. The group manual is easy to read and provides step-by-step outlines and scripts, which would aid in its implementation in a novel setting.

Disclosure: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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