



HEALTH

U.S. News Weekly
Subscribe to our Digital Magazine »



Boosting Teens' Mental Well-Being Is Goal of New Skills Program

Students learn to watch for emotional triggers, shed negative beliefs

September 10, 2013



TUESDAY, Sept. 10 (HealthDay News) -- When high school students learn how their thinking affects their well-being, they may boost their grades and reduce their risk of obesity, severe depression and substance use, researchers say.

"This is what has been missing from prior healthy lifestyle programs with teens -- getting to the thinking piece. We teach the adolescents that how they think directly relates to how they feel and how they behave," study lead author Bernadette Melnyk, dean of the Ohio State University College of Nursing, said in a university news release.

The study included nearly 800 high school students, aged 14 to 16, in the southwestern United States. Half of them were assigned to a control group that received lessons on standard health topics such as dental care, immunizations and road safety.

The others were enrolled in a program based on the concepts of so-called cognitive behavioral therapy, with an emphasis on skills building. The program includes 15 weeks of 50-minute sessions with information on behavioral skills, nutrition information and physical activity. It is called COPE (Creating Opportunities for Personal Empowerment).

Compared to the teens in the control group, those enrolled in the COPE program were less likely to be overweight, had better social behaviors, higher health class grades, lower levels of depression and drank less alcohol, according to the study published Sept. 10 in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

"This program dropped scores of severely depressed teens almost in half. Less than 25 percent of adolescents who have mental health problems get any help, and here we have an intervention that addresses that suffering and also can prevent or reduce obesity," added Melnyk, developer of the COPE program and the university's chief wellness officer.

Nearly one-third of American youth are overweight or obese, and suicide is the third leading cause of death among people aged 14 to 24, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We teach kids how to monitor for activator events and show them that instead of embracing a negative belief, they can turn that around to a positive belief about themselves," Melnyk said.

"Schools are great at teaching math and social studies, but we aren't giving teens the life skills they need to successfully deal with stress, how to problem-solve, how to set goals, and those are key elements in this healthy lifestyle intervention," she added.

Adults in a variety of professions can be taught how to deliver these skills, said Melnyk.

More information

The American Academy of Pediatrics has more about [teens and mental health](#).

Copyright © 2012 HealthDay. All rights reserved.

Tags: [mental health](#), [psychology](#), [depression](#)

Copyright © 2013 U.S. News & World Report LP. Use of this website constitutes acceptance of our Terms and Conditions of Use / Privacy Policy.