Evidence-Based Practices to Promote Children’s Happiness: A Multicomponent Classwide Positive Psychology Intervention

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Presentation Agenda

Objective 1: Provide an empirical rationale for the importance of assessing both subjective well-being and psychopathology when determining youth mental health status, and promoting complete mental health for all students

Objective 2: Describe, demonstrate, and provide active practice in universal evidence-based intervention strategies for promoting students’ subjective well-being

Objective 3: Illustrate strategies for overcoming common challenges encountered when implementing positive psychology interventions in a universal manner

Complete Mental Health

Negative Symptoms (Mental Illness)

Positive Indicators (Wellness or Well-Being)

Risk Factors

Resilience Factors

Dual Factor Model of Mental Health

- Factor 1 (Traditional Psychology): Mental illness or mental health problems (symptoms)
- Factor 2 (Positive Psychology): Subjective well-being

Mental Health Problems (Negative Indicators) Subjective Well-Being (Positive Indicators)

Low Average to High

Low Vulnerable Complete Mental Health

High Troubled Symptomatic but Content

Complete Mental Health =

- High subjective well-being AND
- Few to no symptoms of mental illness

Positive Outcomes in Students with Complete Mental Health

- Compared to peers with low subjective well-being (but also without mental illness), students with complete mental health have:
  - Superior grades, test scores, attendance, attitudes about learning
  - Better social relationships (with teachers, classmates, parents)
  - Better physical health
  - Strongest personal identities (high self-esteem, involvement in meaningful activities)

Complete Mental Health

Percent of Middle and High School Students

- Complete Mental Health
- Vulnerable
- Symptomatic but Content
- Troubled

Distribution of Students across Mental Health Groups

- Suldo & Shaffer, 2008; Suldo, Thalji-Raitano, Kiefer, & Ferron, 2016
Best Practices in Fostering Student Resilience: Emphasis on Tier 1 (Universal Supports)

Goal: Enhance assets and protective factors for entire school population

How? Develop personal resiliency skills and enhance protective settings

- Select and implement evidence-based curricula to develop student-level factors (social competence, problem-solving, autonomy, sense of purpose)
- Social-emotional learning curricula
- Positive psychology interventions

Support teachers, administrators, and parents to promote the school- and family-level assets

- Teacher-student relationship building
- Positive friendships, classroom support
- Home-school partnerships (home activities to support learning, psychosocial communication with parents)
- Enhance students’ behavioral self-control through PBIS practices

Not to be overlooked: join forces to minimize exposure to adversity and risk in the first place

- Nelson et al., 2013; Noltemeyer, 2014

Universal Level Supports (Tier 1)

- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula
- School-Wide Positive Behavior Support
- School Climate initiatives
- Resilient Classrooms
- Positive Psychology (well-being promotion)

See schoolwide data to determine:
What type of program does my school/students need?
Who has emerging symptoms (needs early intervention)?
Who needs more intensive supports?

Schoolwide development and generalization of skills via:
- Direct instruction of selected skills
- Adult/peer modeling of skills taught
- Schoolwide practice of specific skills

Features

- Social-emotional learning curricula
- School-wide positive behavior support
- School Climate initiatives
- Resilient Classrooms
- Positive Psychology (well-being promotion)

Programs and Practices

- Needs assessment
- Universal screenings for emerging problems (internalizing and externalizing, academic well-being)
- Monitor progress of Tier 1 services

Prioritizing Tier 1 Practices and Programs

- Bullying, Violence
- Depression, Suicide
- Anxiety, Stress
- Lean Pregnancy
- Gang Involvement, Delinquent Behavior
- Substance Use
- Group Health Problems

PBIS, SEL/Positive Psych, Screening

Multicomponent Approach to Promoting Elementary School Students’ Happiness

Well-Being Promotion Program, involving:

- Students (all in class)
- School psychologists (interventionists)
- Teachers (co-interventionists and targets)
- Parents (informed)

What does it mean to be happy?
Can people get happier?
How scientists define happy: Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

Subjective Well-Being

- Life Satisfaction
- Positive Emotions
- Negative Emotions

What Determines Happiness?

- Intentional Activity
- Circumstance
- Set Point

How to Increase Happiness?

Improve Intentional Thoughts (about Past and Future) and Activities (in Present)

Pillars of Positive Psychology

- Positive Emotions
- Positive Character
- Positive Institutions

- Communities
- Schools
- Families
- Workplaces

10-week Classwide Well-Being Promotion Program for Elementary School Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Program Evaluation</td>
<td>Baseline data collection (well-being, engagement, relationships)</td>
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<tr>
<td>#1a</td>
<td>Teacher-Student Relationships</td>
<td>Teacher Information: Connecting to Students, Practice PPIs</td>
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<tr>
<td>#1b</td>
<td>Student-Student Relationships</td>
<td>Team-Building (Creative Coloring)</td>
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<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Character Strengths</td>
<td>You at Your Best</td>
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<td>#3</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>Gratitude Journals</td>
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<td>#4</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Acts of Kindness</td>
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<td>#5</td>
<td>Character Strengths</td>
<td>Introduction to Character Strengths</td>
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<td>#6</td>
<td>Character Strengths</td>
<td>Character Strengths Assessment</td>
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<td>#7a</td>
<td>Character Strengths</td>
<td>Apply Strength 1 in New Ways</td>
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<tr>
<td>#7b</td>
<td>Character Strengths</td>
<td>Apply Strength 2 in New Ways</td>
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<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Hope, Goal Directed Thinking</td>
<td>Best Possible Self in the Future</td>
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<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Program Termination</td>
<td>Termination; Review of Strategies and Plan for Future Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within 1 week</td>
<td>Program Evaluation</td>
<td>Students complete measures of well-being and engagement, to track change over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Intervention Components

- Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005
- Seligman
**Positive Introduction and Relationship Building**  
(Week 1-throughout)

- Understand determinants of happiness and program goals
- Generate positive feelings towards oneself
- Create a supportive group atmosphere

**Goal:**
- Informational Meeting for Teachers – How to Stronger Build Teacher-Student Relationships
- Getting to Know You Through Team-Building Activities (e.g., Commonalities with Classmates; Creative Coloring)
- Me at My Best activity

**Activities:**

**Teacher Involvement Sessions 2-11**

**Teacher Activities in Weeks of Classwide Intervention**

- Model and reinforce teachers’ classroom behavior management skills
- Include teacher in manualized intervention activities (especially as it relates to positive classroom interactions)
- Introductory meeting questions:
  - Teacher:
    - What have students done to show support and care?
    - In what ways have students shown kindness to each other?
  - Student:
    - What nice or supportive things have you noticed your teacher do or say?
    - Tell us about some recent times where you have seen classmates being particularly kind to you or another student.
- Prompt students to reflect/include teacher in PP activities
- Focus on importance of positive teacher-student interactions

- Suldo, Hearn, Bander, et al., 2015

**Teacher Information Handouts**

- Teacher handout includes:
  - Overview of the lesson covered that week
  - Description of the student homework task(s) assigned
  - Suggestions for teachers to apply the intervention strategies in their classrooms

**Teacher Handout – Acts of Kindness**

- Suldo, 2016

**Session 1: Team Building**

- Icebreaker activity “Take a Step Forward If You…”
  - All students stand in a line and step forward when the counselor’s statement relates to them (e.g., “have a pet,” “like to sing or dance”)
  - Counselors initiate reflections by asking if students realized they had so much in common and what they were surprised about

**Creative Coloring Activity**

- In small groups, counselors provide each student with a different colored marker and the group with a single coloring book page
- Students instructed to use only the color they received and work together to complete the page
- Counselors initiate discussion on challenges/benefits of working together to complete the picture

**Student Intervention Components**
Session 2: Me at My Best

- Students write about a time when they were at their best
  - Examples:
    - Doing something really well
    - Going above and beyond for someone else
    - Displaying talent
    - Creating something

- Students reflect on the story
  - Remember feelings of that day
  - Identify personal strengths displayed in story
  - Think about time/effort that led them to their accomplishment

- Students share story with other students near them
  - Reflect on each others' strengths

Try it Yourself: Me at My Best

- Using your handout, write about a time you were at your best
  - Doing something really well
  - Going above and beyond for someone else
  - Displaying talent
  - Creating something

- Think
  - Remember feelings of that day
  - Identify personal strengths displayed in story
  - Think about time/effort that led them to their accomplishment

- Pair
  - Share story with others around you
  - Reflect on each others' strengths

- Share
  - Who would like to share their partner's story?

Positive Feelings about the Past (Weeks 3 and 4)

Goal:

- Focus thoughts on positive interpretations of past events

Activities:

- Gratitude Journal
  - Write down five things in life for which you are grateful each day for at least one week
  - Gratitude Visit
    - Express gratitude to someone who has been especially kind but never properly thanked via writing a one-page letter then delivering/reading the letter in person

Session 3: Gratitude Journaling

- Students use journal to write down 5 things they are currently grateful for
  - Examples:
    - My friend’s funny stories
    - My teacher giving me help
    - My mom taking me to soccer practice

- Students share 1-3 responses with peers

- Journaling continued for homework
Session 4: Gratitude Visit

Students generate a list of people who have been especially kind to them then select one person to whom they can deliver a letter in person.

Students write a 1-page letter that describes reason(s) why they are grateful.

Students plan day and time during which they will read the letter aloud to the person using Gratitude Visit Planning Form.

Students seal letter in envelope and take home to deliver before next session.

- Read with expression
- Make eye contact during face-to-face visit

Session 5: Acts of Kindness

What?

- "Acts of kindness" = actions that benefit others or make others happy, at the cost of personal time or effort.

Why?

- Carrying out kind acts (e.g., 5 per day; 3 per week) and remembering kind acts leads to gains in happiness.

How?

- Perform 5 acts of kindness during one designated day per week.
- Examples: household chores typically assigned to parents (e.g., walking the dog, washing dishes), helping siblings with school assignments, and helping the teacher clean up the classroom.
- Recount and share some of the kind acts completed. Such retelling provides a method of active savoring of these experiences.
**Session 6: Introduction to Character Strengths**

Review “Classification of 24 Character Strengths” sheet; students take turns reading definitions and saying what it means to them.

Students generate ideas to what they think their top 5 character strengths may include

- May use “You at Your Best” activity to identify strengths.

Students share aloud the strengths they chose and the group compares strengths shared by different classmates.

Discuss how using strengths relates to good feelings in the present.

**Try it Yourself: Identify Your Strengths from “You at Your Best”**

Use “Classification of 24 Character Strengths” sheet.

Review “You at Your Best” activity to identify your strengths:

- Circle strengths you see in your story.

Discussion:

- What strengths did you identify in your story?
- How did you feel when you were using your strength?
- How did using your strength affect your feelings in the present moment?

**Session 7a: Assessing Character Strengths**

Assist students to complete the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth).

Students review screen displaying their top 5 character strengths and are instructed to print two copies for activities during the following meeting.
+ Positive Psychology Intervention: Identification and New Use of Signature Strengths

VIA Survey of Character Strengths
- www.authentichappiness.org
- For adults
- 240 questions
- e.g., I have taken frequent stands in the face of strong opposition. (“very much like me” to “very much unlike me”)

VIA Strength Survey for Children
- Ages 8 to 17
- 198 questions
- e.g., I stick up for other kids who are being treated unfairly (“very much like me” to “not like me at all”)

Create a screen name for student through your login

VIA Youth Survey
- www.viacompass.org
- Brief version of the original VIA Strength Survey for Children
- 68 items (4 items that load most strongly on each strength)
- Fewer reverse-scored items

+ Session 7b/8: Applying Strengths in New Ways

Program leaders and students brainstorm ideas of new ways students can use their strengths
- Students organized into small groups according to similar strengths to assist each other

Discuss importance of identifying novel way to use strength that is of interest to student and feasible for implementation in the upcoming week

Students record their preferred ways of using their strengths on the “New Uses of My First/Second Signature Strength” form and identify at least two activities to be carried out over the week prior to the next session

+ Positive Feelings about the Future (Weeks 9 & 10)

Goal:
- Creating a positive framework and expectation of future events

Hope
- Write about future goals and ways to achieve them each night for a week
- Best Possible Self in the Future

+ Student Sample of Character Strengths Survey Results

Your Character Strengths Profile
- Gratitude
  - e.g., being grateful for the good things that happen, taking time to express thanks
- Love
  - e.g., caring for or being close to others, helping others in need
- Spirituality
  - e.g., having beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe, feeling one with the world, having a sense of oneness with the world, having a sense of oneness with the world
- Trust
  - e.g., having faith in the world or in the unknown, feeling secure in the world
- Forgiveness
  - e.g., being able to forgive others, being able to let go of grudges

+ Session 9: Best Possible Self in the Future

What?
- Exact goal-directed thinking through visualization of a positive version of oneself in the future that reflects attainment of personal goals

Why?
- This activity fosters hope (goal generation, pathways to reach goals, and motivation to pursue those paths), resulting in greater optimism, self-esteem, and happiness
- Visualizing academic best possible selves in the future => greater behavioral engagement and GPA for up to 2 years

How?
- Write about desired life at some point in the future
- Describe ways one can/will reach the specified goals
- For homework, revisit best possible future self and add new ideas each night for one week; think about specific ways to accomplish goals
- Share expanded Best Possible Future Self with others.
Session 1: Parent Information

- Establish rapport with parents
- Introduce parents to key positive psychology concepts
  - Define key terms
  - How to conceptualize youth well-being
  - Benefits of high SWB for youth and parents
  - Specific constructs targeted in the program (e.g., gratitude, acts of kindness, hope, optimism, character strengths)
  - Demonstrate an example of a positive psychology intervention (e.g., Savoring; Me at My Best)
- Introduce and provide parents an overview of the focus of sessions in the core program

Parent Involvement in Student Sessions

- Parents receive weekly updates on group activities through a handout
- Parents encouraged to follow suggestions to reinforce strategies at home
- Handout should be sent home the same day the student participates in that session
- Deliver as a hard copy or directly to parent through email

Session 10: Termination

- Counselors review happiness framework
- Counselors summarize activities and discuss their application to future situations
- Students reflect on their personal progress over the course of the intervention
- Counselors provide students with “Certificate of Completion” and express appreciation for their efforts throughout the past 11 weeks

Parent Intervention Components

- Roth, Suldo, & Ferron, 2017
Parent Information Handouts

- Parent handout includes:
  - Overview of the lesson covered that week
  - Description of the student homework task(s) assigned
  - Suggestions for parents to apply the intervention strategies in their own lives and as a family unit

- Roth, Suldo, & Ferron, 2017

Parent Handout – Gratitude Journaling

- Suldo, 2016

Well-Being Promotion Program in all 4th and 5th Grade Classes

- Roth, Suldo, & Ferron, 2017

Evaluation - Support for Feasibility and Efficacy

Evaluation Procedures

- USF research team collaborated with school leadership and teachers to implement intervention in 15 classes
- Fall: 8 intervention classes (data removed from 2; N = 86 for analysis); 7 control classes (N = 85)
- Data collected on:
  - Treatment integrity
  - Participants’ reactions to intervention strategies
  - Students’ completed measures of subjective well-being, engagement, and intervention targets (classroom relationships, hope, strengths use)
  - Teachers rated psychopathology and engagement
  - Analysis of group mean across times
  - (Friday 12PM presentation by Brittan Hearon): Repeated measures statistics, effect sizes

Outcome Measure: Engagement vs. Disaffection Scale (EvsD)

- Skinner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have fun at school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel as if I am in control.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I like it when I am in class.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I often daydream in class.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. When I am class, I feel like I am teaching.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Before I go to class, I look forward to it.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I can’t get enough of class.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. When I am in class, I think of other things.</td>
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<td>9. When I am in class, I wish I were elsewhere.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. When I am in class, I feel depressed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. When I am in class, I feel sad.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. When I am in class, I feel satisfied.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Class is fun.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. I often feel sad or bored in class.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. I like it when I am in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. When I am in class, I feel motivated.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>17. When I am in class, I feel interested.</td>
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<td>18. I can’t get enough of class.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Class is not all that fun.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. When I am in class, I feel bored.</td>
<td>1</td>
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Change Over Time By Group:
Student Engagement

Change Over Time By Group:
Classroom Relationships

Change Over Time By Group:
Intervention Targets

End-of-Program Feedback: from Teachers

Gaining Buy-In

+ What information is critical to convey to teachers and administrators before pioneering a universal focus on student happiness?

End-of-Program Feedback: from Teachers

Teachers expressed interest in and enjoyment of intervention meetings sessions for students:

Most important or preferred aspects of the intervention?

Suggestions for improvement?

Which of the PPIs that they were likely to continue to do on their own?

Summative comments

+ What information is critical to convey to teachers and administrators before pioneering a universal focus on student happiness?
End-of-Program Feedback: from Students

Students expressed interest in and enjoyment of intervention meetings/sessions

• "I liked the team-building activities."
• "I felt happier when practicing my gratitude journaling."
• "It meant a lot to get to talk to other students in the class."

Most important or preferred aspects of the intervention?

• "I feel happier!"
• "I enjoyed the happiness counselors."
• "I loved the candy."

Suggestions for improvement?

• "Maybe include more team-building activities."

Which of the PPIs that they were likely to continue to do on their own?

• "I am going to miss the counselors."

Summative comments

• "I am going to miss the counselors."

Barriers in Fall Implementation

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<tr>
<th>Concerns</th>
<th>Program Changes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sessions sometimes lasted 5 – 15 minutes longer than planned (mostly due to student enthusiasm for sharing stories, and distribution of treats for good behavior)</td>
<td>Removed candy reward at the end, will rely on existing classroom behavior management strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sometimes more than 1 classroom session per week</td>
<td>Added into schedule the separate data collection activities needed to evaluate program effects</td>
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<td>Some repetitive material</td>
<td>Removed potentially repetitive material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and reverse scored items on VIA Character Strengths assessment could be difficult for students to understand</td>
<td>Made clear rationale for why any activities are repeated</td>
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Implementing Positive Psychology Interventions in a Universal Manner

Solutions to common implementation challenges

• Interventionists created Uses of Signature Strengths lists with example ways to use strengths
• Split students up into teams by chosen signature strength to brainstorm together
• Interventionists and co-interventionists circled room during assessment to answer any students’ questions

Barriers in Spring Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concerns</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Some students (especially 4th grade students) had difficulties thinking of ways to use Signature Strengths</td>
<td>Interventionists created Uses of Signature Strengths lists with example ways to use strengths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scheduling of classroom intervention time was during a highly preferred activity for students (recess)</td>
<td>Collaboration with school administration and teachers to choose another time for classroom intervention sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and reverse scored items on VIA Character Strengths assessment could be difficult for students to understand</td>
<td>Interventionists and co-interventionists circled room during assessment to answer any students’ questions</td>
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Resources for Practitioners

Promoting Student Happiness
Positive Psychology Interventions in Schools

Shannon M. Sudlo

Resilient Classrooms
Creating Healthy Environments for Learning
SECOND EDITION

Beth Doll, Katherine Brehm, and Steven Zucker
Questions and Comments