

8-4-2024

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Amanda Garrett
ag3349@mynsu.nova.edu

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NSUWorks Citation

Amanda Garrett. 2024. *An Anxiety and Coping Mechanism Educational Program for Children and Adolescents*. Capstone. Nova Southeastern University. Retrieved from NSUWorks, . (157)
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An Anxiety and Coping Mechanism Educational Program for Children and Adolescents

Amanda Garrett, OTD-S

Nova Southeastern University, Department of Occupational Therapy, Tampa Bay Regional Campus, Clearwater FL
Mariana D'Amico, EdD, OTR/L, FAOTA and Ashley Carter



Introduction

- Over the past few years due to increased academic pressure, societal factors, social media, and family changes during adolescents' lives (Cahill et al., 2020 & Carsley & Heath, 2018).
- Feiss et al. (2019) reported a rise in adolescent mental health issues, and within those mental health issues, anxiety represents 31.9% (Merik et al., 2010).
- My goal was to develop a program that integrates coping skills and includes education on general anxiety symptoms for anxiety management, tailored for 12-15-year-olds as they make the transition into high school.

Site description

The YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) is a non-profit organization that aims to strengthen individuals and communities nationwide.

The YMCA facilities where my capstone occurred were in Largo, Florida, and Saint Petersburg, Florida. These facilities have multiple activities and teen camps, where I implemented my project.

The teen camp occurs for ten weeks during the summer and parents can either pay for their child to attend or they can receive scholarships to allow their child to attend.

The teen summer camp consists of arts and crafts, sports, and plenty of field trips.

This summer the camp also included a brief educational program regarding anxiety and various coping mechanisms.



(YMCA, n.d.)



(YMCA, n.d.)

Summary of Needs Assessment

- Education on anxiety and coping mechanisms for anxiety symptoms in the child and adolescent population is critical.
- Informal interviews were completed with camp counselors, camp directors, and other individuals who worked closely with the camp each year and determined that this population lacks educational resources and tools regarding anxiety and coping mechanisms for anxiety.
- Additionally, the interviews concluded that the topics most important for their campers would be test anxiety, generalized anxiety, and social anxiety.
- The development of this program focused on providing weekly educational sessions and hands-on coping mechanisms and practices to work on these identified needs.



Literature review

- Anxiety is common among adolescents and can impact their academic performance, social interactions, and overall emotional well-being (Feiss et al., 2019; Borquist-Colon et al., 2019).
- Yoga, mindfulness practices, and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) effectively decrease feelings of anxiety in the adolescent population (Cahill et al., 2020; Borquist-Conlon et al., 2019 & Hudson et al., 2015)
- Health education programs increase mental health literacy, reduce stigma, and encourage earlier help-seeking from the adolescent population (Abd El Salam et al., 2023).
- Individual factors such as type of anxiety diagnosis, original severity, and the amount of parent involvement significantly influence the success of anxiety education programs (Hudson et al., 2015).



(Wellmark, n.d.)

Capstone project

- My capstone project involved developing and implementing a comprehensive six-week educational program created for 12-15-year-olds at the Bardmoor YMCA. The program addressed six distinct types of anxiety and stress and introduced six corresponding coping mechanisms throughout their duration at camp this summer.
- After each module, the campers would fill out a short survey that I created, asking if they learned anything, enjoyed the overall activity, and had fun. The survey results can be found on the horizontal bar graph in Figure 2. Additionally, there were two optional fill-in-the-blank questions asking what went well during the presentation and what would they change. A word cloud with the answers from the "what went well" question can be found in Figure 3.
- During my 16-week capstone experience, I consistently built rapport with campers, developed a weekly schedule that included creative team-building activities, and supported fellow teen camp counselors. Additionally, I offered emotional support to campers experiencing stress, anxiety, sadness, or confusion by engaging in discussions and reinforcing the coping mechanisms we had covered.

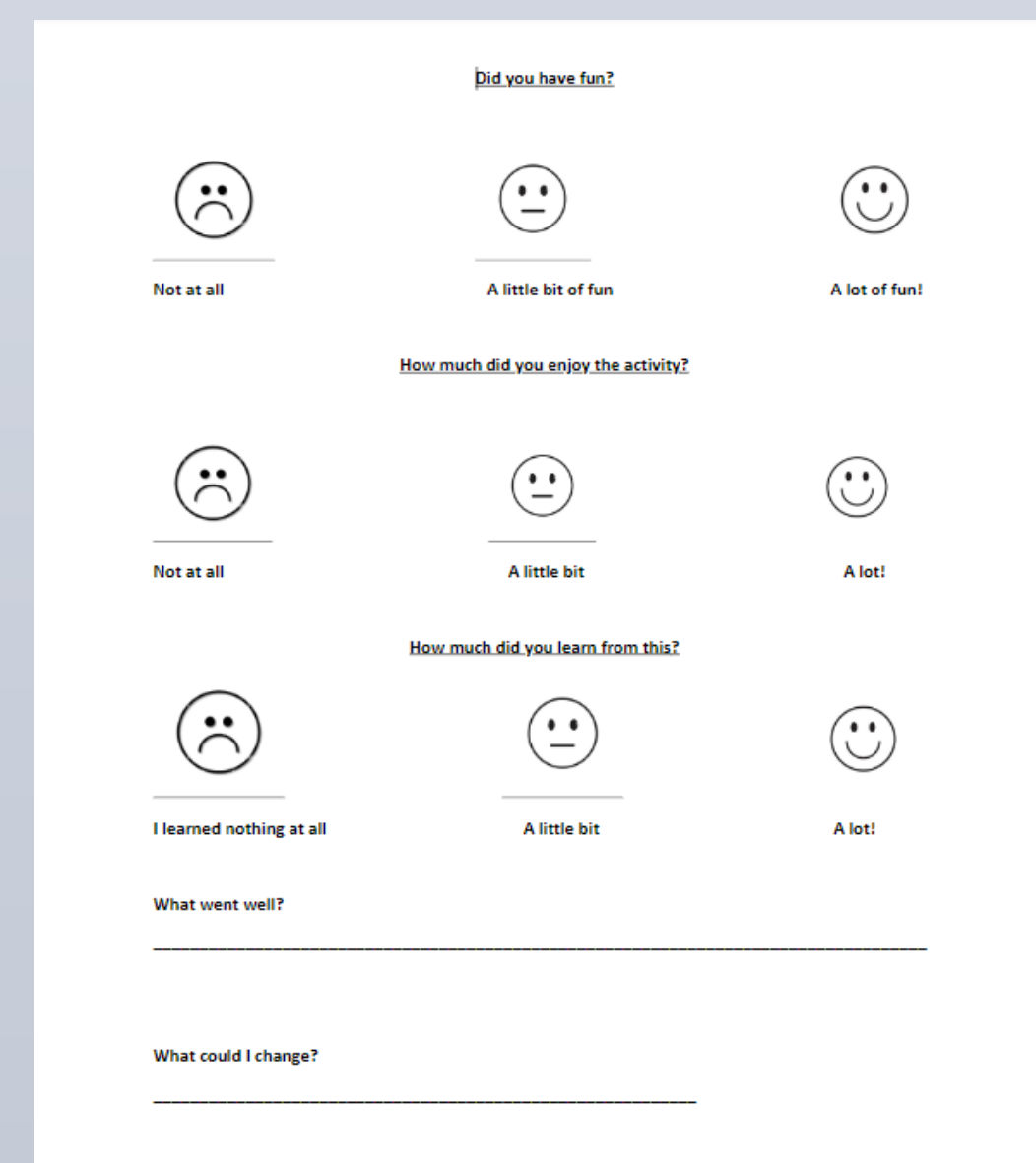


Figure 1. Weekly post-module survey

Topics discussed in my modules:

- Generalized Anxiety
- Social Anxiety
- Test Anxiety
- Feelings of panic
- Feelings of stress
- Health anxiety

Figure 4. All topics discussed in modules

Figure 2. Survey Results

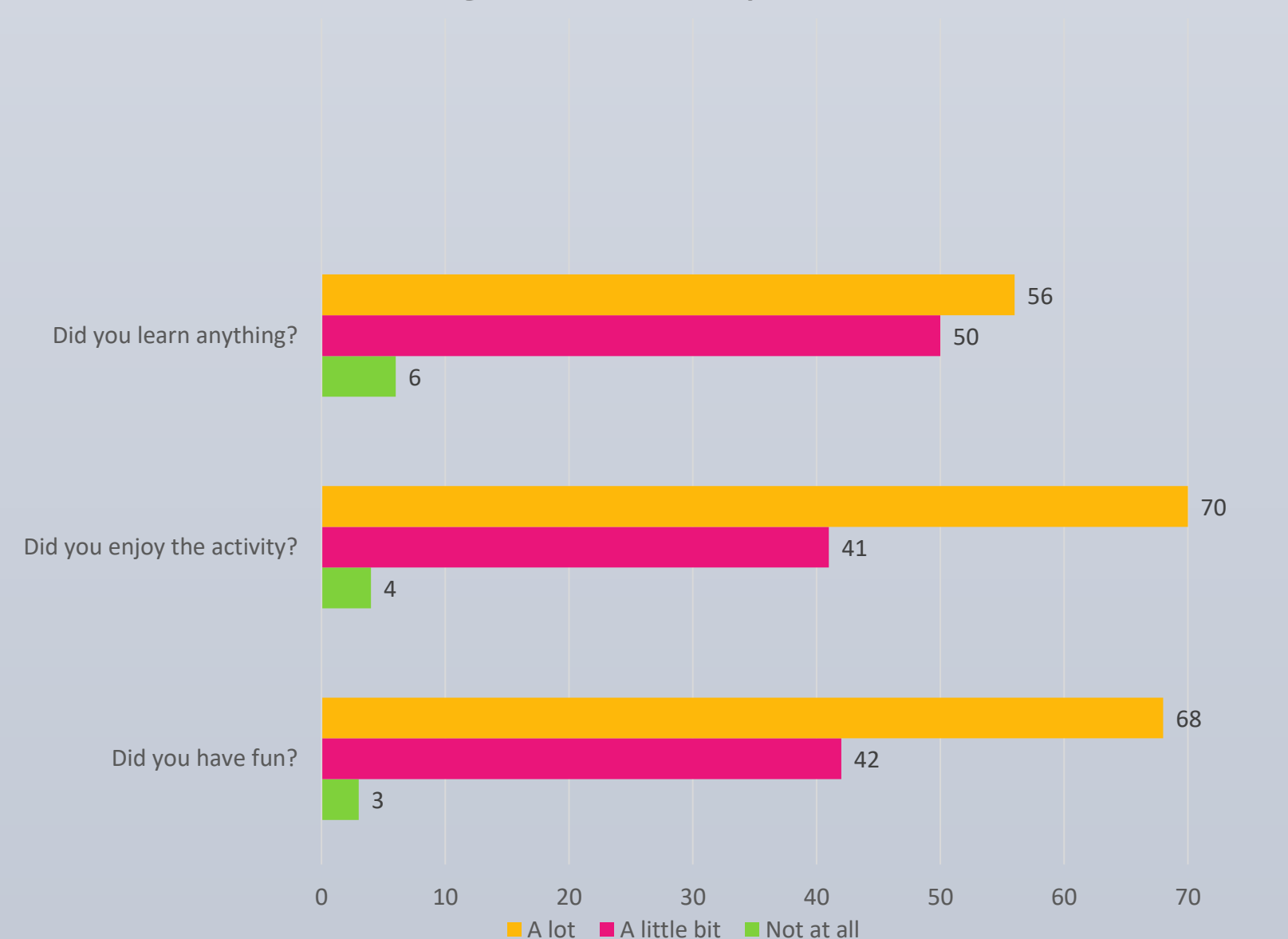


Figure 3. "What went well" free responses.

Learning objectives achieved

- Developed an education program that informs adolescents 12-15 about anxiety and different ways to cope with symptoms, with feedback from a mental health professional.
- Provided adolescents aged 12-15 with comprehensive education and resource materials on coping mechanisms through an online platform.
- Created heightened awareness and decreased stigma surrounding anxiety and its symptoms within the adolescent population of 12-15 years old, aiming for an increased understanding based on the post-survey.



Implications

- Occupational therapists have an opportunity to educate individuals about mental health topics, such as anxiety, and equip them with effective coping mechanisms to manage symptoms and navigate daily life successfully.
- Occupational therapists should emphasize how anxiety and other mental health diagnoses can impact daily functioning and then work on strategies to improve daily living skills, social participation, and even the academic performance of adolescents.
- Occupational therapists should continue with more research on the effectiveness of educational programs regarding mental health in the adolescent population.
- Occupational therapists should work with community programs and schools to advocate for the implementation of mental health education for the adolescent population.



References & Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Ashley Carter, the YMCA camp director, for the opportunity to work with their teen camp this summer and integrate my project into their curriculum.

I am also grateful to Dr. Mariana D'Amico, OTD, OTR/L, for her insightful guidance and consistent support throughout this experience.

Additionally, I appreciate the contributions of Christina Kane, Ed.D., MS, OTR/L, and Dr. Alicia Kopp, OTD, OTR/L, whose support and expertise were essential to the development and execution of my capstone project

References available upon request