Anxiety and Stress Relief for Youth

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Abstract

The project that I chose to do for my capstone project was to create an interactive workbook for youth to help them understand anxiety and stress. I found that there was a need for youth to have a tool to learn to cope with anxiety and stress. The words anxiety and stress have both become buzzwords amongst middle school and high school students, but do they really understand what it is and how to deal with it? This workbook will give them an arsenal of tools and resources to assist them with learning more about these buzzwords and most importantly, learn how to deal with them. As a parent of 4 children, I have found that teenage years are the hardest for our youth and the most pressure is put on them. It is heartbreaking to watch our youth struggle with such an adult subject. Our society has put many pressures on these young adults, and it is necessary for us to help them learn how to face these pressures head on and with a brave face on.

Keywords: youth, anxiety, stress, workbook, coping techniques
Section 1: Introduction to your Capstone Project

Youth of today are suffering from an exuberant amount of stress and anxiety more now than ever before. According to Aubrianna Osorio of Georgetown University, “anxiety and depression among children ages 3-17 have increased over the last five years.” (Osorio, 2022) I personally am a lifetime sufferer of anxiety and stress. I wish that I was provided opportunities to learn about the mental health challenges I suffered from and how to cope successfully with stress and anxiety at a young age to prevent continuing the path to adulthood carrying stress and anxiety with me. It is imperative for our young adults to learn coping mechanisms now or they will likely suffer from stress and anxiety as they enter adulthood. According to the Anxiety Workbook for Kids, “Millions of children suffer from anxiety, which can be extremely limiting, causing kids to miss school, opt out of activities with friends, and refuse to speak or participate in a variety of situations.” (Alter, Clarke 2016) I chose the Service-Learning project option because my project served the youth of our community. Since 2020, youth as a whole are under an incredible amount of stress. As these youth age, they will be our leaders of tomorrow. I think it is important that we provide them with the tools they need to make their future great. Ultimately, making the future of our country and even world great. As a parent of a young man of today, I see the incredible stress they are going through and there are so many that do not have the skills or techniques to reduce stress. My goal throughout the project was to help youth understand how they can use a few simple strategies to learn to cope with these pressures that they deal with daily.
Section 2: Elements coming together

Innovative Approach

In the early stages of development, I was able to meet with a group of advisors who held special interest in the project due to having interactions daily with young adults and they have witnessed the increased anxiety levels since the COVID 19 pandemic of 2020. “The COVID-19 pandemic has presented profound disruptions to young people at a critical period of psychosocial development.” (Bell et al., 2023) I have sought out advice from a variety of different stakeholders to get different perspectives from each of their positions. Including a teacher, a special education case worker, a youth minister, a counselor, as well as parents and grandparents. I believe that individuals that work with youth in any kind can benefit from the workbook. The most important guidance came from the discussions I held with a number of young adults. They expressed the pressures that they were under do affect their daily lives. One youth stated that, “I just can’t seem to find enough time to do everything I have to do in one day. If I concentrate on sports then my homework won’t get finished. Either way I am in trouble with someone.” Once I had a good idea of what content I needed I then developed the process I needed to follow, and began to create the workbook. Upon completion, I had my youth advisors look over it and determine if the workbook was something they were interested in using and if it would help reduce their stress levels as well as their anxiety. I requested feedback from each of my test users, and the results were positive on the project.
Emotional Intelligence

I believe the most important factor in this project was to begin to make youth aware of emotional intelligence. The best way to start this process was to help the young people learn to reduce their stress and anxiety levels. Anxiety and Stress are hard to deal with as an adult, imagine having to deal with anxiety as a youth much less a young child. According to YEDA, “Emotionally intelligent children are better equipped to build and maintain strong relationships with their peers, family members, and teachers. They can communicate effectively, empathize with others, and navigate social situations with ease, leading to healthier and more fulfilling relationships.” (YEDA, 2023)

My approach is focused on the emotional wellbeing of children and youth helping them become more emotionally intelligent. I believe that teaching youth about the importance of emotional intelligence and wellbeing will help our world in the future. Our society puts pressures on our youth to strive for perfection, to be competitive, to thrive for the top but yet our society does not provide good resources and coping mechanisms needed to deal with the stress and that therefore causes our youth anxiety. This project will not only impact youth but it will also include the parents who are dealing with their overly anxious and stressed out teens/children. Raising teens under normal circumstances is difficult but then add the heightened anxiety and stress levels, it then becomes that much more difficult. Hopefully my research can provide resources for these parents to guide their children through this very difficult time in their life.

Secondary educators who see what these individuals are facing on a daily basis and the workbook may give the educators more visualization and compassion to the load of emotions these young people are dealing with.
Creative Thinking

The project expanded my creative abilities greatly as I had to determine the best way to produce the final workbook and what would be the most creative way to share my message. Working on my capstone project has been a series of brainstorming sessions that allowed me to create the flow of the workbook to allow for youth to easily use the workbook. If they will not be able to easily pick up the workbook and use simple techniques, then the likelihood of them using it would be in jeopardy. I looked over multiple workbooks that had the same intention of destressing youth, but there was quite a bit of reading and complicated exercises that a young person may not have the time to dedicate their time to. My plan was simple but effective. The actual development of the workbook was a learning experience and I was able to reach out to a colleague who helped me learn the platform. I truly enjoyed this aspect of the project and learned quite a bit that I will definitely be using in my future.

Innovative Solution

The project was produced on an online platform that I had never used previously. This allowed me to create quality content and once I was over my initial fear of not being able to learn the platform, I really enjoyed the process. My initial idea was to use a Microsoft Office like platform to create the project in, but I felt that this project needed more pizazz to grab the attention of the young readers. I am glad to have taken the technological risk to try something different. If I were to redo the project with more than a 6 week turnaround, I would have done the workbook to be an interactive web
Section 3: Results

The youth stakeholders that I presented my project to said that they thought that the workbook would be a good way for them to think through a lot of the things that they go through on a daily basis. One youth, age 13 stated “I really like your workbook as there are a lot of different activities to do to help me with the stress and anxiety in my life.” They seemed to like the activities provided in the workbook as it gave them different things to do. I completed final interviews with a teacher, youth leader, a youth counselor, a mother, a grandmother, and a number of youth from ages of 12 to 16. We were able to sit down and discuss what they liked about the book and what they thought they may or may not use. The biggest feedback was that there was interest in having additional worksheets available for users to download and print themselves for future use. The youth leader stated that, “I believe that this workbook will not only help the kids understand what anxiety and stress are but also provides them with tools to use to work through the feelings they have. I think my own kids could use this as I have 5 children and each of them process stress very differently than their other siblings. This book gives you a variety of ways to deal with it.”

Section 4: Conclusion

Managing the project from beginning to end gave me helpful insight into the capstone process as well as the project management process. In my current position at work, each year we have to set goals at work and most of them are project related therefore we have to put together a proposal to present our desire
to perform a project that we can make a substantial difference for our team. I feel that the stakeholders for my project are able to use the deliverable for the future. I am hoping that these stakeholders will be able to use the workbook as a tool going forward to assist in helping youth with stress and anxiety. I know I personally suffer from anxiety and depression so it is great to have a tool to help you understand these issues and process how to learn to live a happy life with these challenges. Originally I struggled a bit coming into the class as I somewhat had an idea of a project that I thought would work, but the more I learned about the purpose of the capstone project, the more I realized that project was not fitting for this purpose. I am glad that the idea for my project took me out of my comfort zone and allowed me to be creative and make a difference for someone else. In the future I anticipate that the workbook that I created will have a positive effect on my audience who are youth suffering from stress and anxiety. I personally have a 12 year old that lives in my house and I know what stress he is under and how it affects him in his daily life. My hope is that after graduation, I will be able to work with schools and counselors to be able to distribute the workbook to those most affected by stress and anxiety. The biggest takeaway from this project was that we as a society need to be sensitive with our youth as we know not what burdens they are carrying on their back. My prayer is that the end user will find hope and the ability to make positive changes to how they deal with stress and anxiety no matter how big or small.
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Section 6: Appendix

Anxiety? Stress? What on Earth is that?

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Capstone Portfolio

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