

CAST (Coping And Support Training)

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Description

CAST (Coping And Support Training) is a suicide prevention program designed for 13 – 25 year old youth and young adults who have been identified as at high-risk for suicide. CAST was developed by Reconnecting Youth, a well established juvenile delinquency prevention program. CAST is a 12 session small group suicide prevention curriculum designed to enhance personal competencies and social support resources. CAST is intended to be used as a follow-up intervention for youth identified as at-risk for suicide by screening and assessment programs, including but not limited to CARE, also developed by Reconnecting Youth. CARE is a three session, individual based suicide prevention intervention that consists of assessment, counseling, coping skills development and the selection of social support team, including at least one parent. CARE is covered in a separate review available at [http://idahosuicide.info/uploads/CARE-\(CareAssessRespondEmpower\).pdf](http://idahosuicide.info/uploads/CARE-(CareAssessRespondEmpower).pdf).

Reconnecting Youth is a school-based indicated prevention program for young people in grades 9–12 who are at risk for school dropout, drug involvement, anger, aggression, depression or suicidal behavior. The Reconnecting Youth program utilizes:

- Skills training to develop self-esteem, goal setting, decision making, personal control, and interpersonal communication.
- A small group setting to build personal and social protective factors to prevent suicide.
- A school and community crisis response plan that includes suicide prevention strategies and resources.
- Parent involvement in monitoring and support of the youth in crisis, and reinforcement of Reconnecting Youth concepts and goals

Widely implemented, the Reconnecting Youth program is designed as a semester long high school class and has been found to produce substantial reduction in depression and hopelessness; increase in personal control; major decrease in anger-control problems; positive connections with teachers, friends, and family members; significant improvement in GPA; and a reduction in hard drug use.

Reconnecting Youth designed CAST (Coping And Support Training) as an evidence-based program designed for youth and young adults identified as high-risk for suicidal behavior. CAST was originally designed for high school age youth but has been found to be effective with young adults up to age 25 in school settings, other institutions and as a community-based program. Reconnecting Youth is currently testing a version of CAST for middle-school students. The CAST program is conducted by a CAST Leader, typically master's-level high school teachers, counselors, or school nurses.

The core of the CAST program is a series of 12 one-hour lessons delivered twice per week that teach life skills, social interaction skills and teaches the youth how to develop and use a social support system. Life Skills taught in the CAST sessions include goal setting and monitoring, self-esteem, decision making skills, anger and depression management and ways to succeed at school. CAST also provides skills to limit or eliminate drug use and prevent relapse. Instructional techniques in the small group setting include motivational coaching, skills practice and assignments to practice the skills out in the real world before the next session.

Characteristics

- Population
 - Gender – male and female
 - Ages – 13 to 25 years old.
 - A middle school variant of CAST is in development.
 - Races – nonspecific to race
- Risk, Protective & Causal Factors
 - Suicide attempts (R)
 - Suicide ideation (R)
 - Unmanaged depression, anxiety and feelings of hopelessness (R)
 - Anger control problems and poor stress management (R)
 - Increased self-esteem and personal control(P)
 - Increased problem solving and coping skills (P)
 - Increased social skills and use of social support systems (P)
 - Increased anger and stress management skills (P)
 - Decreased drug and alcohol use (P)
- IOM Category (level of care)
 - Indicated, Selective – adolescents and young adults with risk factors for suicide

Effectiveness

Compared to a “usual care” group of suicidal youth, youth who were exposed to the CAST program:

- reported a significant decrease in positive attitudes about suicide
- reported a significant decrease in suicide ideation
- reported a significantly greater and swifter decrease in depressive symptoms
- reported a significantly greater and swifter decrease in feelings of hopelessness
- reported a significantly greater and swifter decrease in anxiety for female participants
- reported a swifter decrease in anger control problems but with a complex interaction for gender
- reported significant and approximately equivalent decrease in alcohol and other intoxicant use
- reported a significantly greater and swifter increase in feelings of personal control
- reported a significantly greater and swifter increase in problem solving and coping skills

Unless noted, the above effects of the CAST program were still significantly detectable 9 months after the intervention.

Program delivery

The CAST program is intended to be used as a suicide prevention intervention for youth that have been identified as at-risk by screenings or risk assessment. Originally developed to be used with youth identified by the CARE program, CAST can be used with other evidence-based screening or assessment tools.

The CAST program is conducted by a CAST Leader, typically a master's-level high school teacher, counselor, school nurse or someone with equivalent experience working with troubled adolescents. 12 one-hour lessons delivered twice per week teach life skills, social interaction skills and how to develop and use a social support system. Instructional techniques in the small group setting include motivational coaching, skills practice and assignments to practice the skills out in the real world before the next session. The table below shows the 12 CAST session titles.

1. Welcome & Orientation	7. Anger Management #2
2. Group Support & Self-Esteem	8. Drug Use Control - Making Healthy Decisions
3. Setting & Monitoring Goals	9. School Smarts
4. Building Self-Esteem, Beating the Blues	10. Preventing Slips & Relapses
5. Decision Making - Taking STEPS	11. Recognizing Progress & Staying on Track
6. Anger Management #1	12. Celebrating Graduation

Considerations for use in Idaho

CAST can be implemented fairly easily by school staff with counseling experience. The small group format demands few school resources, primarily the space to hold the group sessions. Once training has been completed, the primary cost is personnel time to deliver the CAST lessons. The intervention is targeted, relatively brief, cost effective and has the advantage that the key personnel are already available in most if not all Idaho schools.

The CAST training is relatively expensive at approximately \$1000 per person for the basic Leader Training when the minimum of 7-8 participants is considered and will likely preclude its consideration by many Idaho schools. Another difficulty to implementing CAST in many of Idaho’s small rural schools may be the lack of enough students simultaneously experiencing suicide crises to build a reasonably sized support group. Unfortunately, this likely won’t present a problem in the large, municipal-based schools.

Schools, institution or communities considering implementation of CAST should consider simultaneously implementing a school wide suicide screening and assessment program. CARE, Signs of Suicide, TeenScreen or other evidence-based screening and assessment protocols may all be used to identify at-risk youth.

Training & costs

CAST training consists of a four day, interactive training for 14-16 participants and is highly encouraged by the developer. Regular trainings are offered on site or in the Seattle area. The CAST training includes instruction and practice leading CAST sessions, coding leader behaviors, evaluating group process and outcomes, building infrastructure, developing a CAST School Community Team, etc. A sample training agenda is available here: http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/cast/pdfs/CAST_leader_agenda.pdf. CAST trainings are relatively expensive at approximately \$1,000 per person for the basic Leader Training, when the minimum of 7-8 participants is considered. The CAST Lead Training and other costs may be found here: http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/cast/pdfs/CAST_Leader_Training.pdf.

Higher levels of training are also available, such as school coordinator and school administrator. Unfortunately, Reconnecting Youth does not appear to offer a Trainer of Trainers certification. This training and program dissemination model has worked well in Idaho, where a number of schools and districts can pool resources to train one or two key staff, and then fund program delivery out of operational costs, Safe and Drug Free Schools funding, etc.

Dissemination & support

The CAST program is well designed and offers many program implementation strategies and materials. The program and trainings are designed to obtain buy-in and participation at all levels of a school

administration, counselors, teachers, parents and students. The program includes resources to develop a school Crisis Response Plan, local mental health care referral networks, and stakeholder support. CAST offers program evaluation, fidelity and quality assurance tools. Other resources include community readiness surveys, marketing guides, PowerPoint presentations, and so on. A sample marketing brochure may be found here:

http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/cast/pdfs/CAST_gen_market_broch.pdf.

Reconnecting Youth offers onsite consultation and support for the CAST program. Contact CAST support team at the number below for support details and cost information.

Contact information

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Other program synopses

- NREPP: http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/programfulldetails.asp?PROGRAM_ID=137

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