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A school-based group program to support students experiencing crisis-related distress in alternative high schools

Submission date
25/08/2026

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
27/08/2026

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
27/08/2026

Condition category
Mental and Behavioural Disorders

[ ] Prospectively registered
[ ] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[X] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Adolescents experiencing substantial current stress or crisis-related difficulties may benefit from timely support before their needs develop into more serious mental health problems. However, schools may have limited access to specialist mental health services, and some existing interventions are difficult to deliver within routine school schedules. In this pilot study, Taking Charge-CR was delivered as a 6-week, school-based group program using a solution-focused approach to help students identify goals, strengths, coping strategies, exceptions to problems, and available resources. The study examined whether this version of the program could be delivered and studied under routine conditions in alternative high schools and gathered information to guide its refinement and future evaluation.

Who can participate?
Students aged 14–21 years who were enrolled at a participating alternative high school and reported a substantial level of current stress or trauma-related difficulties on the study screening measure could participate, provided the required consent or assent procedures were completed.

What does the study involve?
Participants took part in six weekly group sessions during the school day. Groups were led by school social workers with additional solution-focused support. The sessions addressed personal goals, coping with psychological distress, school performance, relationships, concrete resources, and review of progress. Participants completed questionnaires before and after the program assessing school well-being, perceived stress, hope, and solution-focused thinking. Brief measures of individual functioning and group alliance were also administered during the intervention, and participants were invited to take part in a post-program focus group.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Participants may have benefited from opportunities to identify personal strengths and resources, develop coping strategies, clarify goals, and receive support from peers and facilitators. Because the study addressed stressful or personal experiences, some questions or

discussions could have caused temporary discomfort. Participation was voluntary, and school social workers were available if additional support or follow-up was needed.

Where is the study run from?
The study was conducted through The University of Texas at Austin in partnership with alternative high schools in a public school district in Texas (USA)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
September 2023 to December 2023

Who is funding the study?
The study was supported by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health and the Solution Focused Brief Therapy Association.

Who is the main contact?
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Study information

Scientific Title
Taking Charge-CR as a solution-focused approach to indicated prevention among crisis-affected students in alternative high schools: a single-arm feasibility study

Acronym
Taking Charge-CR

Study objectives
To assess the feasibility, acceptability, and implementation of Taking Charge-CR, a 6-week solution-focused indicated-prevention group intervention for students experiencing current crisis-related distress in alternative high schools, and to obtain preliminary information on repeated and pre-post outcomes to inform subsequent controlled evaluation. The original pilot did not designate a single confirmatory primary endpoint; four pre-post outcomes were assessed and are listed as primary outcomes in this record.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 30/05/2023, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board (Office of Research Support & Compliance, PO Box 7426, Campus Code A3200, Austin, 78713, United States of America; +1 (0)5122321543; irb@austin.utexas.edu), ref: STUDY00003576

Primary study design
Interventional

Allocation
N/A: single arm study

Masking
Open (masking not used)

Control
Uncontrolled

Assignment
Single

Purpose
Prevention

Study type(s)

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Crisis-related psychological distress and psychosocial functioning among adolescents attending alternative high schools

Interventions
Taking Charge-CR is a 6-week, school-based group intervention adapted from the Taking Charge program and delivered using solution-focused principles. The six weekly modules address group goals, psychological distress and coping, school performance, relationships, concrete resources, and closing review. Sessions use solution-focused questions and activities focused on participants' goals, strengths, exceptions, coping, and available resources.

Groups were delivered during the school day. Each group was led by a district-employed school social worker paired with either an externally recruited licensed clinical social worker with solution-focused expertise or the first author. School social workers received three online training sessions and weekly supervision. Sessions were planned for 60 minutes but were typically delivered in 30–45 minutes.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
1. School-specific subjective well-being measured using the Student Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire (SSWQ) at baseline (pre-intervention) and post-intervention following the 6-week program

2. Perceived stress measured using the 4-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4) at baseline (pre-intervention) and post-intervention following the 6-week program

3. Hope measured using the Herth Hope Index (HHI) at baseline (pre-intervention) and post-intervention following the 6-week program

4. Solution-focused thinking measured using the Solution-Focused Inventory (SFI) at baseline (pre-intervention) and post-intervention following the 6-week program

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Individual functioning measured using the Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) at weekly during the 6-week intervention, administered at the beginning of each session

2. Group therapeutic alliance measured using the Group Session Rating Scale (GSRS) at weekly during the 6-week intervention, administered at the end of each session

3. Working alliance measured using the Working Alliance Inventory–Short Revised (WAI-SR) at post-intervention, following completion of the 6-week program

Completion date
01/12/2023

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Enrolled at a participating alternative high school
2. Aged 14–21 years
3. Endorsed at least 4 of 15 current stress and trauma items on the Child/Youth Assessment and Referral (CYAR) tool at a rating of 3 or 4 on its 0–4 scale
4. Provided written informed consent, or assent with parent/guardian consent when required

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Mixed

Lower age limit
14 Years

Upper age limit
21 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
19

Key exclusion criteria
Students were excluded if they did not meet the age, school-enrollment, or CYAR screening criteria, or if required consent/assent documentation was not obtained. Psychiatric diagnosis, medication use, and concurrent service use were not exclusion criteria.

Date of first enrolment
08/09/2023

Date of final enrolment
02/10/2023

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United States of America

Sponsor information

Organisation
The University of Texas at Austin

ROR
https://ror.org/00hj54h04

Funder(s)

Funder type

Funder Name
Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

Alternative Name(s)
Hogg Foundation, Hogg Foundation for Mental Hygiene, Hogg Foundation of Mental Hygiene, The Hogg Foundation, HFMH

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

Location
United States of America

Funder Name
Solution Focused Brief Therapy Association

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary
Not expected to be made available