

Improving Adolescent Health Outcomes: activities to educate and engage teens about their health

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Abstract

The purpose of the UST adolescent interest group was to create activities to engage and educate the youth who participate in Norwich Youth and Family Services (NYFS) on different aspects of health. The interest group subdivided into two subcommittees to focus on body health, and healthy minds and relationships. These groups then created 20-minute pre-recorded activities (specifically a quiz-show game and a word association game). The goal was to engage the students and provide an informational and sustainable project that could be used in multiple settings and community centers to educate other youth. The interest group met with one guest speaker and the final project yielded two mini projects to educate the youth. We suspect that it would be optimal to present these activities in-person on site in the future because it allows for a more personal and intimate conversation. In addition, we hope to expand the interest group project pool and engage more aspects of adolescent health through creating more activities, and involving additional community centers.

Background

The goal of the Urban Service Track: Adolescent Interest Group is to explore adolescent health, gain the tools to treat adolescents in the future while simultaneously engaging our local communities. The interest group recognized that adolescence is a critical period for both mental and physical development. Our large community engagement project was to explore aspects of adolescent health and create tools to educate Norwich Youth and Family Service adolescents (NYFS). The major topics explored were: Health and Your Body, Health and Your Mind and Health and Your Social Life. The goal for the Health and Body project was to educate adolescents about sleep, diet, physical activity and body image. Health and Mind focused on mental health, focus, and school. Health and social life explored social interactions and relationships in the context of others. For each focus the individual teams created activities which are pre-recorded due to COVID restrictions and played back to the students by NYFS Staff.

Objectives

- Educate adolescents on how to maintain a healthy mind, body, and social life
- Provide resources for adolescents to learn more about their health
- Provide a platform for adolescents to talk about their health and various challenges they may face in relation to their health

Methods

1. The IG broke into two teams to focus on health and your body and health and your mind/relationships.
2. Each team researched their specific topic and created an activity to educate and engage adolescents.
3. Activities were limited to 20 minutes.
4. Each team pre-recorded their activity.
5. The activities were all sent to NYFS for the youth counselor to provide to the adolescents.
6. The activities will also be saved in UST records for future community use.

Results

The interest group was made up of 15 students. During the monthly meetings, students discussed a case study focusing on adolescent primary care, listened to a guest speaker, and conducted our youth outreach project.

Our final project yielded two individual activities to engage and educate the youth.

| JEOPARDY BOARD | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-------|------------|
| Science of Nutrition | Application of Nutrition | Physical Activity | Sleep | Body Image |
| \$100 | \$100 | \$100 | \$100 | \$100 |
| \$200 | \$200 | \$200 | \$200 | \$200 |
| \$300 | \$300 | \$300 | \$300 | \$300 |
| \$400 | \$400 | \$400 | \$400 | \$400 |
| \$500 | \$500 | \$500 | \$500 | \$500 |

Fig. 1a: Health and Body adopted the game-show theme to engage their population of students. Questions were ranked in terms of difficulty and categorized by nutrition, activity, sleep, and body image.



Fig. 2a: Healthy Mind and Relationships activity.

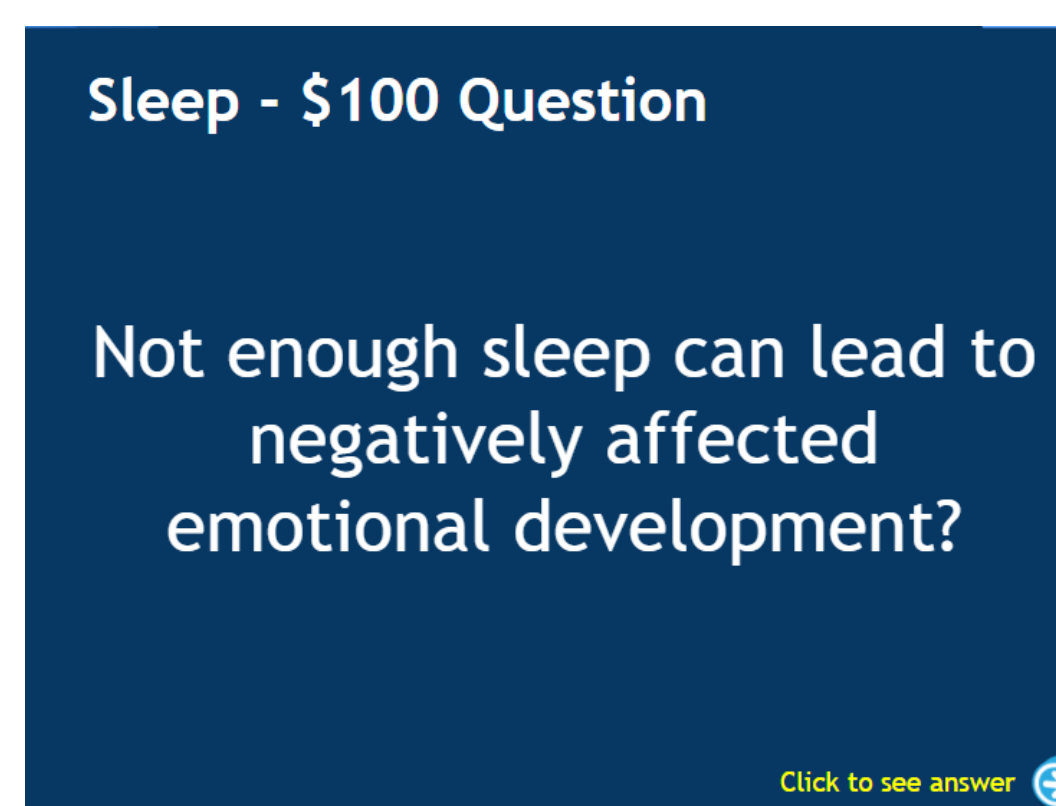


Fig. 1b: Health and Body example question presented.

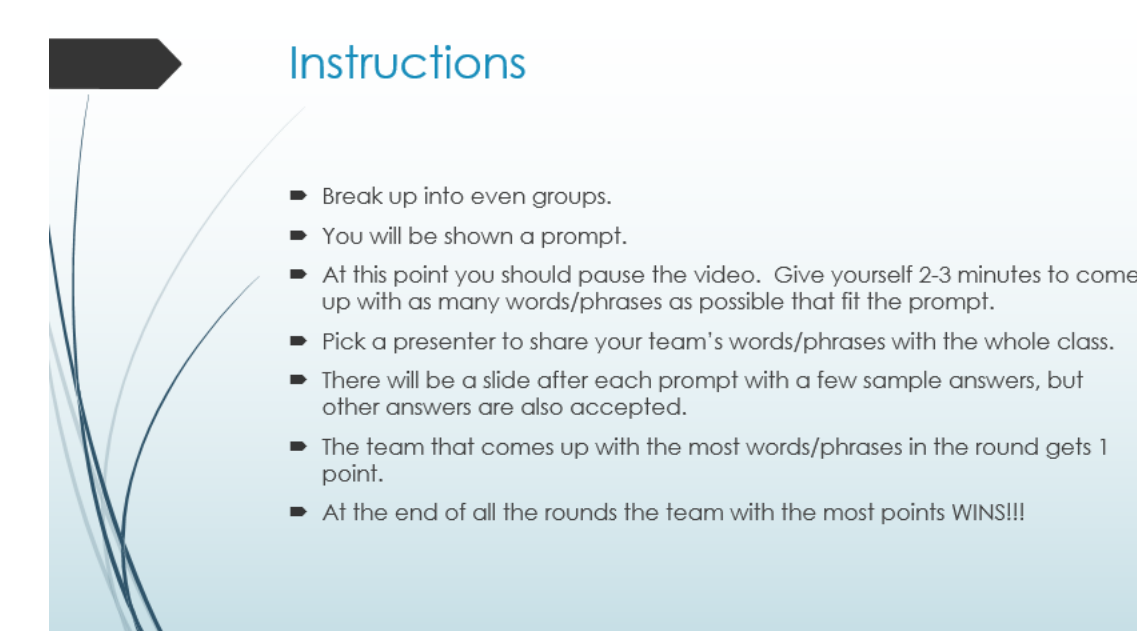


Fig. 2b: Healthy Mind and Relationships instructions.



Fig. 2c: Healthy Mind and Relationships example of a word association.



Fig. 2d: Healthy Mind and Relationships suggestions for words that have to do with "ways to cope with stress."

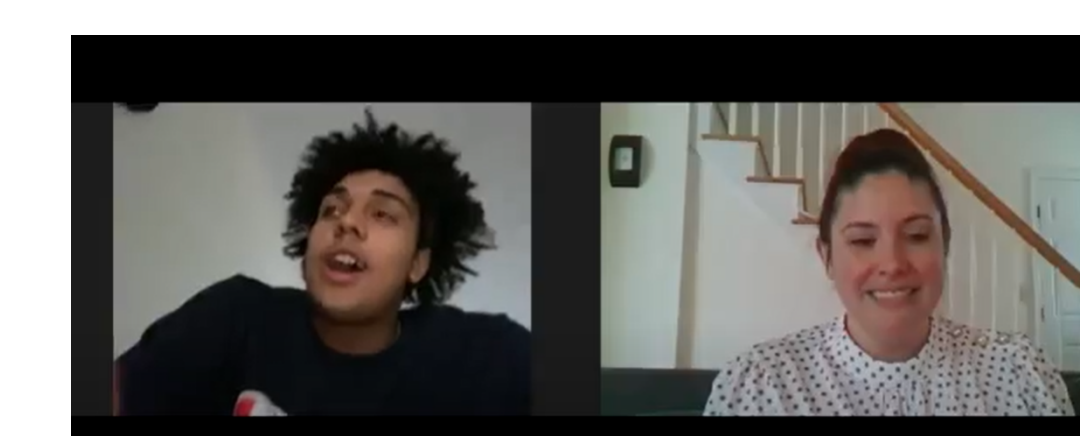


Fig. 3a: NYFS youth counselor with youth participant doing the Healthy Mind activity. This youth participant enjoyed the activity because it made him think about how he should treat himself and others.

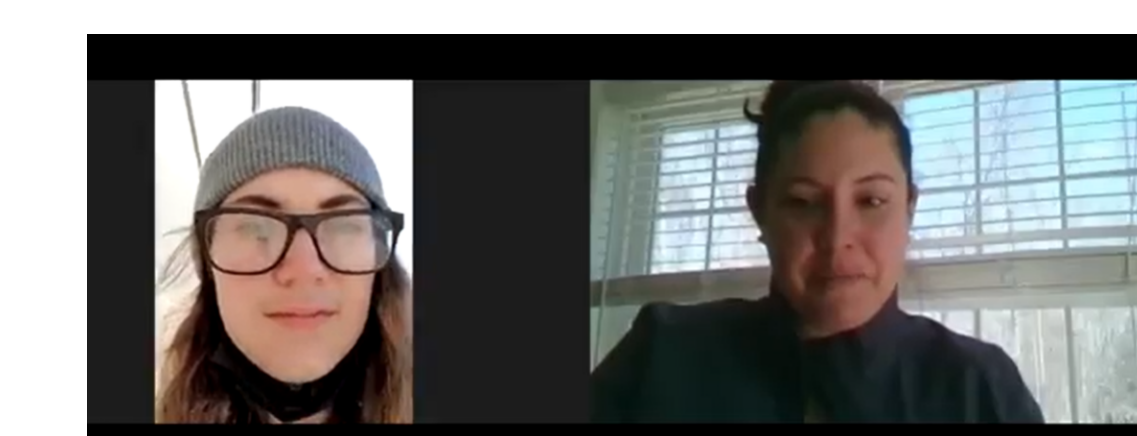


Fig. 3b: NYFS youth counselor with youth participant doing the Health and Body activity. This youth participant thought the game covered a wide range of topics that were important to teenagers' health.

Discussion

Given the unique COVID-19 circumstances, the Adolescent IG Community Outreach Project was largely successful. However, the project could be improved by facilitating these activities in person. Adolescents may feel more comfortable engaging with us directly to talk more about their individual relationship with their health. We hope to transition these exercises to in-person activities, as COVID-19 allows. In addition, we hope to create more activities that are more specific to distinct adolescent needs.

Conclusion and Future Direction

The Adolescent IG successfully met the goals of the community outreach project by developing various activities to inform adolescents about their health. Looking ahead, these activities will be employed at the NYFS in Norwich, CT. We are hoping to provide these resources to other community service centers across the state of Connecticut.

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