

Implementation of a Crisis Response Program Customized for Adolescents with Mild Intellectual Disability at a Special Education School in Singapore

Michelle Chak

Tzer Fern Lim

Julyn Ng

Yingmin Wang

Abstract

Many who work in special education are trained to administer physical first aid, though there is less awareness and competence in emotional first aid. Research has suggested that due to limitations in skills like problem-solving and coping, individuals with special needs are at greater risk of entering a state of crisis or emergency in times of distress. As such, it becomes pertinent for staff at special education schools to be trained and ready to provide emotional first aid. A dual-faceted Caring Actions in Response to an Emergency (CARE) program was customized and implemented at a special needs school in Singapore for adolescents aged 17-21 with mild intellectual disability. The primary component involved training staff on crisis de-escalation skills, while the secondary component involved a specially assembled resource kit to facilitate adaptive emotion regulation in students. Over approximately 2 years, the CARE kit was used in 34 incidents when students demonstrated significant distress indicative of a potential crisis. Questionnaires were filled by staff who used the CARE kit following each incident to assess effectiveness. In 31 of the 34 incidents, staff who administered the CARE kit found it effective in lowering states of distress, even preventing crisis in some incidents. This study suggests that development of an emotionally-supported crisis response program may be a worthwhile endeavor for other special education schools to reduce the occurrence and intensity of crises.