CASE STUDY IN EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE IN CLINICAL CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGY:
The Use of the Coping Power Program to Treat a 10-Year-Old Girl with Disruptive Behaviors

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CASE STUDY IN EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE IN CLINICAL CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGY

The Use of the Coping Power Program to Treat a 10-Year-Old Girl with Disruptive Behaviors

John E. Lochman, Caroline Boxmeyer, Nicole Powell, Mary Wojnaroski, and Anna Yaros

Center for the Prevention of Youth Behavior Problems, University of Alabama

This article describes the successful application of the Coping Power program by school-based clinicians to address a 10-year-old girl’s disruptive behavior symptoms. Coping Power is an empirically supported cognitive–behavioral program for children at risk for serious conduct problems and their parents. The following case study illustrates the core features of the Coping Power child and parent components while describing the use of assessment data and clinical decision making during the implementation of a manualized intervention.

This article provides a case example of the Coping Power program (Lochman & Wells, 1996) with a child with disruptive behavior. The case is drawn from an outcome research study of the Coping Power program. Prior to enrolling in the study, participating parents provided informed consent and assent was obtained from children. Identifying information and selected clinical information have been changed to protect participants’ identities.

Coping Power has two primary components, a 16-session behavioral parent training component and a 34-session cognitive–behavioral child component. Prior research indicates the program has a positive impact on children’s behavior and social cognitive processes and parenting practices (Lochman & Wells, 2002b). In two different samples, the Coping Power program has been found to reduce children’s substance use, delinquent behavior, and aggression in school settings 1 year after the intervention has ended in comparison to control children, indicating that the intervention can produce sustained changes in child and family functioning that persist even after the program’s supports are removed (Lochman & Wells, 2003, 2004).

The program’s long-term effects appear to be mediated by program-induced improvements in children’s hostile attributions, outcome expectations, locus of control, person perception abilities, and inconsistent parenting (Lochman & Wells, 2002a). Although Coping Power was developed as a targeted preventive intervention, it has been effectively disseminated to children with conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder in outpatient settings (van de Wiel et al., 2007; van de Wiel, Matthys, Cohen-Kettenis, & van Engeland, 2003; Zonnevylle-Bender, Matthys, van de Wiel, & Lochman, 2007).

Case Study

Background Information

To address the rising level of disciplinary incidents in the Redford School District, a panel was convened to identify evidence-based preventive interventions for disruptive behavior problems. Kathy, a school psychologist, took a leadership role in searching for appropriate evidence-based programs and found a Web site that provided links to effective and promising programs. Based on the descriptions provided, Kathy felt that the Coping Power program fit well with the aims of her school district. She read about the steps to obtaining training on the program’s Web site (http://www.copingpower.com) and attended a training workshop, where she received intervention manuals outlining the session-by-session content for
the Coping Power child and parent components. Following the training, Kathy was enthusiastic about the program content but was anxious about how she could stick to such a structured program with families who have such urgent and diverse needs. She was also concerned about whether she would have time to hold all of the sessions, how she could pay for the program incentives, and whether she could motivate parents to attend the parent group. Kathy felt that it was worth a try and asked Andrew, a social work trainee, to co-lead the groups with her.

Kathy followed the recommended procedures for identifying at-risk students for the program. At the beginning of the school year, she asked fourth-grade teachers to rate each of their students on a 6-item scale indicating the frequency of proactive and reactive aggressive behaviors (Dodge, Lochman, Harnish, Bates, & Pettit, 1997). Based on past research, Kathy knew that children who fall into the upper 25% on this screening measure compose a moderate- to high-risk group appropriate for a targeted preventive intervention such as Coping Power (Hill, Lochman, Coie, Greenberg, & Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2004; Lochman & Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1995). Eight 4th graders fell in this range, and Kathy and Andrew contacted their parents/caregivers to discuss the Coping Power program. Five families enrolled in the program, including one mother who said her child could participate but was not interested in attending the parent group.

Jasmine, the focus of the case study presented here, was one of the five students who enrolled in Coping Power. Her score fell at the 85th percentile on the screening measure, because of a predominantly reactive pattern of aggressive behavior (e.g., overreacting to peer provocation, blaming others), though she was also noted to bully and threaten (proactively aggressive acts) others at times. Kathy arranged meetings with Jasmine’s mother and teacher to learn more about Jasmine and her behavioral functioning.

Assessment and Diagnosis

Preintervention assessment. Kathy conducted clinical interviews with Jasmine and her mother, a single parent of three. Kathy learned that Jasmine is a 10-year-old African American girl who lives with her mother and two older brothers in a neighborhood where many families receive public assistance and the crime rate is high. Jasmine’s parents divorced when she was 5 years old, and she sees her father every other weekend. Her mother holds two jobs, and Jasmine often is left home alone or cared for by her brothers. Jasmine obtains C and D grades; however, her teacher thinks she has the potential to earn higher grades. Jasmine has trouble paying attention and following directions and is often sent out of class because of misbehavior. Jasmine’s teacher feels that she is more easily agitated by peers than other children her age. She often reacts impulsively to others’ provocations, misinterprets peers’ intentions, and is very susceptible to peer pressure. Her aggression escalates when she is around her friends, as they often encourage her negative behavior and provoke confrontations with other children. Although some of Jasmine’s friends have gotten in trouble with the law, Jasmine has not.

Next, Kathy reviewed Jasmine’s academic record, concluding that she had no apparent cognitive limitations that would require special consideration for her inclusion in a group. She then developed an assessment protocol that encompassed three main areas: child behavior, child social-cognitive functioning, and family functioning. These areas were specifically targeted (a) to obtain a more complete picture of Jasmine’s referral behaviors and relative strengths, (b) to better understand Jasmine’s thinking processes and how they might contribute to her aggressive behaviors, and (c) to identify aspects of family functioning relevant to Jasmine’s presentation and treatment. To obtain an accurate and complete picture of Jasmine’s functioning, the leaders asked for information from a variety of sources. Table 1 provides results of the initial evaluation as well as assessment information at postintervention.

Child behavior. Jasmine’s teacher and mother completed the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) a comprehensive behavior checklist yielding standardized scores for problem and adaptive behaviors. Results from Jasmine’s teacher placed her in the Clinically Significant range on the Conduct Problems (111T, 99th percentile), Aggression (87T, 99th percentile), and Hyperactivity scales (76T, 98th percentile). Her score on the Externalizing Composite was also Clinically Significant (95T, 99th percentile). Her score was in the At-Risk range on the Adaptability scale (33T, 6th percentile), though all other adaptive behavior scores were within normal limits. Scores from Jasmine’s mother were in the Clinically Significant range for Conduct Problems, (83T, 99th percentile) and in the At-Risk range for the Externalizing Composite (63T, 91st percentile). Jasmine’s mother rated her in the At-Risk range on the Leadership
scale (35T, 8th percentile), though all other adaptive behavior scales were within normal limits.

Given the important association between peer relations and child adjustment, Kathy was interested in how Jasmine was perceived by her classmates. She conducted a classroomwide sociometric survey in which children nominated classmates for several categories of positive and negative traits. Classmate sociometric nominations have proven to be one of the best predictors of children’s long-term social functioning (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). Results suggested that Jasmine was controversial (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982) among her classmates: 12 of her 23 classmates indicated that she was a student they “liked most,” whereas 9 students rated her as “like least.” She also received 9 nominations for “fights most” and 6 nominations for “bothers.” In addition, the clinicians’ discussions with Jasmine, her mother, and her teacher also revealed that Jasmine was increasingly spending time with a group of older, “trouble-making” peers.

### Table 1. Assessment Results at Preintervention and Postintervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Preintervention</th>
<th>Postintervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>BASC–2 TRS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct problems</td>
<td>111T</td>
<td>91T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>87T</td>
<td>73T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>76T</td>
<td>74T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Externalizing composite</td>
<td>95T</td>
<td>82T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>33T</td>
<td>43T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>50T</td>
<td>55T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>52T</td>
<td>60T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study skills</td>
<td>49T</td>
<td>52T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptive skills composite</td>
<td>45T</td>
<td>53T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>BASC–2 PRS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct problems</td>
<td>83T</td>
<td>64T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>46T</td>
<td>53T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>55T</td>
<td>38T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Externalizing composite</td>
<td>63T</td>
<td>52T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>47T</td>
<td>61T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>35T</td>
<td>48T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>44T</td>
<td>44T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptive skills composite</td>
<td>41T</td>
<td>51T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classmates</td>
<td>Sociometric survey (no. of nominations)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like most</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like least</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fights most</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bothers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Problem solving measure for conflict (%solutions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct action</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help-seeking</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal assertion</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compromise/bargaining</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Outcome expectations questionnaire (M score)a</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Child attribution measure (M score)b</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Alabama parenting questionnaire (M scores)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive parenting</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor monitoring/supervision</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconsistent discipline</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporal punishment</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent (Self-Report)</td>
<td>Beck depression inventory (raw scores)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** BASC–2 = Behavior Assessment System for Children–2; TRS = Teacher Rating Scales; PRS = Parent Rating Scales.

a Higher scores indicate stronger belief that aggression will have an undesirable outcome.

b Higher scores indicate more hostile/angry attributions.
Child social-cognitive functioning. Jasmine completed several measures to assess her social-cognitive functioning, including the Problem Solving Measure for Conflict (PSM-C; Lochman & Dodge, 1994), the Outcome Expectations Questionnaire (OEQ; Lochman & Dodge, 1994), and the Child Attribution Measure (Dodge, Pettit, McClasky, & Brown, 1986). The PSM-C presents respondents with a problem stem and an outcome, requiring respondents to generate possible solutions to link the two. Jasmine’s responses were noteworthy for failing to logically connect the problem and the outcome (50%; “Irrelevant”), and for focusing on immature solutions such as seeking help from an adult (17%) or simply taking physical action (17%). Only one response included the more appropriate and developmentally advanced strategy of verbally asserting her wishes (17%). From Jasmine’s pattern of responses, Kathy hypothesized that she could benefit from problem-solving skills training to help her formulate constructive solutions and decrease her reliance on direct action and help-seeking strategies.

Next, Jasmine completed the OEQ, which asks the respondent to imagine 12 scenarios involving an aggressive behavior and then to indicate the level of confidence that a particular consequence (e.g., tangible rewards, adult approval) will result. Her answers suggested that, similar to many aggressive children, she thought that bullying and retaliation would help her to control others and obtain rewards (Lochman & Dodge, 1994). As expected, Jasmine also demonstrated a hostile attributional bias on the Child Attribution Measure, which asks the child to imagine himself or herself in four interpersonal problem scenarios and to speculate on the other person’s motivation. Jasmine’s answers suggested that she assumed others were intentionally trying to provoke her, even when the situation was neutral. Kathy made note of these results and planned to work closely with Jasmine during the Coping Power sessions on consequences of behavioral choices and perspective-taking.

Family functioning. Jasmine’s mother, Yolanda, completed several measures assessing family factors associated with aggression in children. On the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (Shelton, Frick, & Wootton, 1996) a 42-item, 5-point Likert scale measure that provides information on positive and negative parenting practices, Yolanda’s scores suggested that she “often” engaged in behaviors promoting parental involvement and positive parenting practices and “never” to “almost never” used poor monitoring and supervision practices, inconsistent discipline, or corporal punishment. Although her scores did not suggest cause for concern, Yolanda verbally reported feeling overwhelmed and ineffective in her parenting skills and specifically requested advice from the clinicians in managing her children’s behavior. On the Beck Depression Inventory (Metcalfe & Goldman, 1965), a 21-item measure on which depressive symptoms are rated on a 4-point scale, Yolanda’s score indicated a moderate degree of depression. Yolanda volunteered that she felt particularly dissatisfied with her parenting of her children and that she often felt guilty about the limited amount of time she spent with them and resorting to corporal punishment for discipline. Kathy felt that the Coping Power parent component would be ideal to strengthen Yolanda’s parenting practices while offering her a needed source of support from other parents and group leaders.

Overall, results of the assessment suggested that the Coping Power program would be a useful intervention for Jasmine and her mother based on Jasmine’s pattern of disruptive behaviors and social-cognitive deficits and her mother’s mood symptoms and reported concerns about parenting. Notably, both Jasmine and her mother presented as outgoing, talkative individuals who were likely to enjoy a group-based program. Other strengths identified for Jasmine included a good sense of humor and talent in music and dance.

Case Conceptualization and Treatment Planning

Target behaviors for the child intervention. Kathy’s next step was to synthesize the assessment information to develop a specific treatment plan for Jasmine. At the child level, Jasmine was evidencing moderate impulsive behavior and tended to attribute hostile intent to others. As a result, she frequently encountered social problems. When faced with perceived social problems, Jasmine tended to generate less competent solutions, expecting aggressive solutions to help her achieve her social goals. Even when she was able to identify a more effective solution, such as verbally asserting her wishes, Jasmine had difficulty enacting the solution skillfully because she tended to interrupt her classmate’s conversations and use a demanding tone. It was becoming clear to Jasmine that many of her peers did not like her; however, she enjoyed the peer attention she received for “acting up” in class. She was often able to elicit laughter by talking back to the teacher and making clever but rude comments to the teacher and to peers, and she was sought out by classmates for the “information” (often rumors and gossip)
she shared about others. These behaviors were particularly appreciated by a group of students who were frequently in trouble at school. Jasmine was starting to spend more time with these deviant peers and, with their encouragement, was engaging in more defiant and delinquent acts, such as lying to the teacher and taking things out of other students’ desks.

Kathy knew that these were some of the key child-level factors that have been causally linked to conduct problems in children (Lochman, 2006). She also knew that the Coping Power program was designed to teach children skills to improve social cognitive deficits before they reach the clinically disordered range. The module on goal setting could help Jasmine think about her long-term goals and identify specific behavior changes that she could make each week to help her reach these goals. The point system could offer an opportunity for Jasmine to earn prizes as well as social reinforcement for her efforts to improve her behavior. The module on anger management could help Jasmine recognize when she was becoming angry and allow her to practice adaptive anger coping skills. Learning to see things from other people’s perspectives during the sessions on perspective taking could be helpful in reducing Jasmine’s tendency to make hostile attributions. During the module on social problem solving, Jasmine could learn to evaluate the potential consequences of her actions to resolve social problems more effectively. Finally, the module on peer relationships and resisting peer pressure could help Jasmine affiliate with positive peers and learn to resist pressure to engage in deviant behavior. Kathy was optimistic that Coping Power could help Jasmine, particularly because she knew that intervention-produced improvements in children’s social cognitive skills have been shown to mediate their longer term behavioral outcomes (Lochman & Wells, 2002a).

**Target behaviors for the parent intervention.** Another reason Kathy thought that Coping Power would be a good program to implement with Jasmine was because it offered a parent-training component. She knew that multicomponent programs are generally more effective than child- or parent-only interventions in treating and preventing child conduct problems (Lochman & Wells, 2004; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1997) and that Yolanda was feeling frustrated in her parenting role. If she could engage Yolanda in the Coping Power parent group and help strengthen her parenting skills, she was likely to have the strongest impact on Jasmine’s long-term behavioral outcomes (Lochman & Wells, 2004).

Kathy felt that the Coping Power parent module on stress management would help Yolanda learn to manage her own mood and stress level and would likely help Yolanda interact with Jasmine more positively. Kathy thought that the module on family cohesion building would help Yolanda feel more connected to Jasmine and find ways to engage in more pleasurable communications with her. Kathy felt that the module on behavior management would help Yolanda to provide Jasmine with specific labeled praise, to set clear rules and expectations for Jasmine’s behavior, and to consistently and appropriately respond to rule violations and other defiant behavior. Finally, Yolanda would learn to apply the same social problem-solving model Jasmine was learning to resolve family problems and to reinforce Jasmine’s use of positive solutions at home.

**Intervention Course**

*Coping power–child component.* Kathy and Andrew took several steps to prepare for the Coping Power child group. They met with the fourth-grade teachers and provided an overview of the Coping Power program. They distributed a handout describing the skills that the children would learn and encouraged the teachers to reinforce students’ use of these skills in the classroom. Kathy and Andrew described the goal-setting process and elicited teachers’ input about target behavioral goals for each student, including Jasmine. When the teachers expressed resistance to completing additional paperwork, Kathy reassured them that the time they spent completing the goal sheets would ultimately help to reduce the time they spent addressing the participants’ disruptive behavior in the classroom. The teachers were receptive to this, and one teacher suggested that they could sign the goal sheets at the same time they distributed behavior reports each day. The teachers were instrumental in identifying a time that the group could meet each week that would not interfere with core instructional time. Kathy had only a small budget for program incentives. Prior to the first child group, she identified a number of nonmaterial reinforcers (e.g., free play time, get out of homework pass, vice principal for the day, leader’s helper).

Upon arriving at the first Coping Power group meeting, Jasmine looked around and noticed some other fourth graders she knew. She thought the group might be for “bad kids” because most of the other students there got in trouble a lot. The leaders explained that the purpose of the group was to help the students learn to cope with strong feelings and to make good choices. Kathy also
explained that the students had been selected for the group because the screening questionnaires their teachers filled out indicated that they could each benefit from some extra help in these areas to prepare for middle school. Kathy praised Jasmine and the four other students for joining the group and commented that five was an optimal group size for interactive discussions and activities while still allowing for some individualized attention. Jasmine learned that she could earn points each week and exchange them for prizes. The leaders told the group that to earn points, they needed to work on a behavior goal each week. They could also earn points by participating positively in group and following the rules during each meeting. The students generated group rules such as “Raise your hand and wait to be called on,” “Keep your hands and feet to yourself,” and “What we say here stays here.” The leaders told the students that if they broke a rule, they would receive a strike, and if they got three strikes they would not earn their rules point. Jasmine didn’t think the group seemed like it would be very fun and asked the leaders whether she had to be in it. They told her that she did not have to be in the group but that they would like her to come to a few sessions before making a decision.

During the second session, the co-leaders talked about goals that people set for themselves. Jasmine blurted out, “I want to be a singer!” The leaders told Jasmine that this was a good example of a goal, but she had earned a strike for not waiting her turn to speak. The leaders let Jasmine raise her hand and repeat her comment and then asked the group what shorter term goals Jasmine would have to meet to reach her long-term goal of becoming a singer. One group member said Jasmine would have to graduate from high school. Another member said she would have to take singing lessons. “Yeah but to do that, my mom says I have to make B grades and not get suspended,” Jasmine said. Kathy pointed out the connection between Jasmine’s current behavior and grades and her long-term goal of being a singer. Jasmine agreed that remembering to raise her hand and wait to be called on in class would be a good short-term goal to start working on because it might help her earn singing lessons.

Just as Jasmine was beginning to appear engaged in Coping Power, she stood up and hit another group member. Kathy assigned Jasmine a strike and halted the goal-setting activity to process the incident. Jasmine complained that a group member had told her she was too ugly to be a music star and that her mom probably couldn’t pay for lessons anyway. Andrew reminded the group that hitting was against the rules and so was making derogatory comments. He also explained that as we grow up we have to learn effective ways to cope with teasing and other situations that make us angry. He asked the group what else Jasmine could have done to handle the teasing. One group member said that Jasmine could have ignored the tease, but several others argued that Jasmine did the right thing because it is important to stand up for yourself, especially when someone makes fun of your family member.

Based on these comments, Kathy and Andrew had several decisions to make. First, they had to decide whether to let Jasmine stay in the session after hitting another group member. Second, they had to decide whether to continue to direct the discussion toward anger management strategies, which was several sessions ahead in the Coping Power manual and might keep them from covering the activities outlined for today’s session. Kathy felt that this was an important “teaching moment” and decided to extend the discussion of the incident to introduce several skills they would be covering in Coping Power, including emotional awareness, anger coping strategies, and problem solving. One group member pointed out that getting in fights would prevent Jasmine from earning singing lessons, so even though it was tempting to hit her taunter, it would be better to find other ways of handling her anger. During the positive feedback activity at the end of the session, Jasmine and her taunter apologized to each other, and the leaders praised the other group members for their constructive input to the discussion. After group, Andrew met with Jasmine individually and she committed to not get into any more fights. She seemed more motivated to stay in Coping Power because the group had taken time to thoughtfully discuss her goals and listen to her perspective on the teasing incident.

Despite her promise not to fight, Jasmine missed the next Coping Power session because she was serving suspension for showing a classmate during Physical Education. Kathy met with Jasmine to give her handouts from the missed session and to check Jasmine’s goal sheet. Jasmine had forgotten to have her goal sheet signed, so they discussed options to help her remember. David, a group member who was in Jasmine’s class, had done a good job having his goal sheet signed, so Kathy suggested that Jasmine could take her sheet to the teacher as soon as she saw David do so. Jasmine said she would give it a try. Kathy explained the physiological cues of anger and asked Jasmine which cues she had experienced prior to showing her classmate. Jasmine said she had felt her face flush and fists
that the group had earned as a reward for

program with a review game and the pizza party

wrapped up the fourth-grade portion of the

students to utilize a few skills well. So, they
decided it was most important to teach the

ting through all of the manualized material, but

extra time to do so would prevent them from get-

They were concerned about whether taking the

students to master these anger-coping skills, so

activity.

effectively when they resumed the role-play

the group members used coping statements more

anger. This seemed to be a useful adaptation, as

she had recently had with a family member to

model for the group how she had coped with her

through in Coping Power for more than 5 months

in trouble so often when she had been participat-

questioned whether she

didn’t interrupt them and that she had avoided

a fight with her brother after she noticed her “tem-

perature” was starting to rise and her face was feel-

ing hot. Kathy reinforced Jasmine for these

insights and used the incident with Jasmine’s

brother to model using deep breathing and coping

statements to stay calm in anger-provoking situa-

Jasmine picked her favorite coping state-

ments from the handout the leaders provided

(“Grow up, don’t blow up!” and “It’s not worth

fighting”) and recited these out loud while the
group members pretended they were Jasmine’s

brother and took turns teasing her. When one of

the group members used a racial slur, Jasmine for-
got about her coping statements, yelled back at
the taunter, and nearly started a fight. Kathy halted
the activity, assigned a strike to the group member
who used a racial slur, and empathized that it can
be difficult to keep your cool when people say
things that really push your “anger buttons.” Even
though the Coping Power manual did not say to
do so, Kathy decided to describe an argument
she had recently had with a family member to
model for the group how she had coped with her
anger. This seemed to be a useful adaptation, as
the group members used coping statements more
effectively when they resumed the role-play
activity.

Kathy and Andrew felt it was essential for the
students to master these anger-coping skills, so
they devoted several extra sessions to role playing
hypothetical and real-life provocation situations.
They were concerned about whether taking the
extra time to do so would prevent them from get-
ting through all of the manualized material, but
they decided it was most important to teach the
students to utilize a few skills well. So, they
wrapped up the fourth-grade portion of the
program with a review game and the pizza party
that the group had earned as a reward for

receiving 70% of the total points possible for 8
of the 11 sessions.

Several changes occurred during the summer
between fourth and fifth grade that Kathy had to
address. Andrew obtained a position at another
school, so Kathy asked his replacement, Maureen,
to serve as her co-leader. One of the group mem-
bers was placed in alternative school and another
was retained in fourth grade. Kathy tried to
include the student who had been retained in the

Kathy expanded the number of review sessions
from one to three and encouraged the original
group members to serve as peer mentors to the
new members. This seemed to work well, but
Kathy had to adapt the curriculum and combine
some sessions to make up for the extra time.

As an introduction to social problem solving,
Kathy and Maureen led the group through several
activities to teach them to see things from other
people’s perspectives. Jasmine particularly enjoyed
playing the “roving reporter” and interviewing
others about their side of the story after they acted
out a scene. She also enjoyed interviewing her tea-
cher, which helped her realize that her teacher
didn’t just “have it out for her” but rather wanted
to help Jasmine learn. Jasmine tried to remember
this whenever her teacher got upset with her for
shouting out in class or forgetting to turn in her
work, but it wasn’t easy to do so. Once she got
so mad she shouted back to her teacher and was
sent to the principal’s office. The principal subse-
sequently asked Kathy why Jasmine was still getting
in trouble so often when she had been participat-
ing in Coping Power for more than 5 months
and was missing a lot of class to do so. Kathy
was angered by this and questioned whether she
was making a difference with Jasmine. After dis-
cussing it with her colleagues, Kathy was reminded
that Jasmine’s problem behaviors were multifac-
eted, had taken a long time to develop, and could
take quite a while to show improvement. She
decided to review Jasmine’s progress toward her
weekly goals and conduct interviews with her
mother and teacher.

Mid-intervention review of progress. Review of
Jasmine’s goal sheets indicated that she had earned
24 of 45 possible goal points. She had done quite
well on the goal of keeping her hands and feet to herself, earning all possible points 2 weeks in a row. Her next goal, “Be respectful,” proved more challenging. After Jasmine received 0 points 2 weeks in a row, the goal was changed to “Be respectful to the teacher.” She met this goal 20% of the time the first week, and 60% of the time for the next 2 weeks.

Jasmine’s teacher acknowledged that she was often frustrated with Jasmine because of her failure to complete assignments, talking back, leaving her seat, and calling out in class. She reported that Jasmine had not become physically aggressive since starting fifth grade but indicated that she did tease and yell at others several times a week. The teacher also indicated that Jasmine appeared to become agitated several additional times per week but asked the teacher for help or walked away from frustrating situations.

Jasmine’s mother reported that Jasmine was controlling her anger better at home and that she had overheard her reciting coping statements under her breath when she was upset. She acknowledged that Jasmine still frequently argued with her and her brothers, but these arguments did not escalate into major outbursts as they had during fourth grade. She was particularly pleased that Jasmine’s physical aggression had declined and that she had not received any detentions or suspensions during the current school year. Despite the progress Jasmine had made, Yolanda felt that Jasmine still had improvements to make, particularly in her arguing and bossiness. She noted that these behaviors often resulted from Jasmine’s jumping to conclusions, demanding her way, and refusing to compromise. In addition, she reported concern about Jasmine’s ability to remain focused on tasks, particularly homework assignments, and her forgetfulness.

After reviewing this information and reflecting on Jasmine’s symptomatology, Kathy concluded that Jasmine might also benefit from a referral for a medication evaluation for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Kathy based this recommendation on research that children with coexisting ADHD and disruptive behavior symptoms often respond well to medication treatment (e.g., Jensen & Members of the MTA Cooperative Group, 2001). Kathy encouraged Yolanda to speak with Jasmine’s pediatrician. Although Yolanda shared Kathy’s concerns about Jasmine’s impulsivity and difficulty focusing, she expressed reservations about stimulant medication. Yolanda preferred to wait to see how effective the behavioral intervention was first. Yolanda and Kathy agreed to reevaluate Jasmine’s treatment needs after she had completed Coping Power.

Jasmine and several other Coping Power students continued to have difficulty not responding aggressively to provocations, so Kathy and Maureen decided to devote eight sessions to social problem solving. They taught the students the PICC model (Problem Identification, Choices, and Consequences) to stop and think through a problem before picking the solution that would best meet their goal. Using hypothetical and real-life problem scenarios, Jasmine and the other group members practiced identifying the problem, brainstorming choices, and picking the solution with the best consequence. Jasmine got a chance to apply the PICC model when a girl bumped into her in the hall. Jasmine reportedly noticed her anger starting to rise, took a deep breath, and reminded herself that “it was not worth fighting.” She was trying to avoid getting sent to the principal’s office so she could perform in the school’s musical production. She knew if she shoved the girl back, she was likely to get in trouble. She thought another choice would be to say, “What’s your problem?” but that could also start a fight. She thought if she just kept walking, that might be the best chance of avoiding a fight, so that is what she did. It was hard not to say anything to the other girl, but Jasmine found a friend to talk to, which helped her forget about what had happened. Jasmine shared this experience with her Coping Power group and the leaders praised her example of how to use the PICC model to meet a personal goal. The class decided to use Jasmine’s example for the video that they made to teach other kids how to use the PICC model to deal with tough situations.

Kathy and Maureen were proud of the group’s work during the social problem solving component but were concerned about how they were going to cover 10 more sessions of material in just 4 weeks. They decided that the most important topics to cover were resisting peer pressure, avoiding deviant peer affiliations, and joining positive peer groups. So Kathy read through the Coping Power manual and pulled out the activities that she thought would best teach these skills. Kathy also decided that to leave time to cover the most material, she would review group members’ goal sheets and conduct the prize box exchange during individual meetings with each student rather than using group time for this.

During the next session, Kathy and Maureen showed a video in which students modeled a variety of skills to resist peer pressure (e.g., saying no thanks, using humor). Then the group members brainstormed a variety of potential peer pressure situations and wrote them on strips of paper. They placed these strips in one pile and created a
separate pile with strips listing each refusal skill. The group members took turns drawing from each pile and trying to implement the refusal skills. After each role-play, the other members guessed which refusal skill was being used and provided input on how well it worked. Jasmine thought that avoiding the situation seemed easiest and decided to start taking a different route home from school to avoid some older kids who were pressuring her to smoke. Jasmine pasted a picture of a girl walking away from a friend with a cigarette on the poster her group made to display in the fifth-grade hallway to teach others how to resist peer pressure.

Jasmine knew that her Coping Power leaders were right when they explained that our behavior is affected by the types of people we hang out with. Jasmine had earned detention last week when one of her friends started a fire in a trash can and everyone standing nearby got in trouble. She wanted to be friends with more popular kids, but they didn’t seem to want to be friends with her. She felt better after her Coping Power leaders helped her identify positive attributes in herself that made her a desirable friend and helped her practice ways to join group activities. Jasmine identified two girls in her class, Melissa and Karen, who seemed to get along well with others without being “goody-goodies.” She made an effort to get to know them better and was really excited when Melissa invited her to a slumber party.

In the second-to-last session, the Coping Power leaders played a game to review what the group members had learned over the past 1½ years. Jasmine surprised herself by how many questions she answered correctly. She realized she was not getting in trouble at school or at home as much and knew if she kept it up, she would be able to perform in the school musical. She enjoyed the party the group had to celebrate the end of Coping Power and realized she was actually looking forward to middle school because she was better at making friends now.

**Coping power–parent component.** Jasmine’s mother found it difficult to attend the scheduled parent sessions on a regular basis because of her irregular work schedule and her need to provide childcare for Jasmine and her siblings. However, she appeared highly motivated when she attended. To address the obstacle involving care for Jasmine and her siblings, Maureen agreed to oversee a child waiting room while Kathy led the parent group sessions. That allowed Yolanda to attend some sessions she would have otherwise missed. A more difficult obstacle to attending parent sessions arose from her rigorous work schedule for her two jobs. Her work hours often went into more than a few days ahead of time. As a result, there were many parent group sessions that Yolanda was unable to attend. Overall, Yolanda attended 6 of the 16 sessions. Yolanda also completed most of the homework assignments from sessions, and even when she could not attend a session, she was responsive to follow-up telephone calls from Kathy and continued to actively report on homework completion during these phone calls.

Kathy focused on helping Yolanda to use more “labeled praise” (e.g., “I like how you cleaned up your dishes after dinner”) and to track and reinforce Jasmine’s positive behaviors. Kathy found that although the concepts of labeled praise and behavior tracking appeared to be difficult for Yolanda to understand at first, that the use of a number of concrete examples allowed Yolanda to master these ideas and behaviors well. Yolanda came into a next session noting with clear pleasure that Jasmine had been helpful with her siblings on some occasions, that Jasmine liked to spend time reading, and that Jasmine could pay close attention to her school work when she wasn’t frustrated and angry.

Yolanda appeared particularly responsive to one of the early sessions she attended that focused on setting up special time with Jasmine. Kathy worked with Yolanda to identify a set of positive activities that she and Jasmine liked to do together, including playing board games and baking cookies together. Yolanda was instructed in the rules of parent–child special time, which included showing an interest in and attending to your child, praising your child often, allowing Jasmine to choose the activities, and not criticizing or reprimanding Jasmine during these times. Even though Yolanda indicated that she could not set aside 15 min each day for this task, Kathy helped Yolanda to set aside three 15-min periods during the school week, and two periods during the weekend. Because Yolanda seemed to be unclear how this special time was to be any different than her usual interactions with Jasmine, Kathy decided to have Yolanda role-play how to implement special time. In the role-play, Yolanda was directive and used a sharp questioning style in which she interrogated Kathy, who was role-playing Jasmine. Following some modeling by Kathy and an additional role-play, Yolanda become more fluid and positively engaged in the role-played interaction. Yolanda went on to use special time regularly and well with Jasmine. She reported that their interactions became progressively more pleasant over the next several weeks.

Yolanda was very actively involved in the two parent stress management sessions that she attended. When Kathy introduced the topic of stress and noted how parenting itself can sometimes
be a stressor, Yolanda talked with the four other parents about how, when she became really stressed and felt down in the dumps, it was hard for her to be as consistent as she would like to be. Kathy had the parents complete “pie charts of life” to indicate how they fit all of the various roles they fill into their daily life. Yolanda indicated that her roles included being a chauffer and cook for her children, being a “listener” with her neighbor, nursing her seriously ill mother, and working her two jobs as the morning complimentary breakfast setup person at a hotel and as a cleaning service worker for a major business in town. Yolanda came to realize through this task that she was not allowing herself any private time to take care of herself, and she then talked about what she would like to do, such as listen to her favorite music, take a warm bath, and go for a walk in the park near her neighborhood. The parents in the group were then instructed in using an active relaxation method, in which they closed their eyes, became comfortable in their chair, tensed and relaxed several muscle groups, and then practiced deep breathing. When the relaxation techniques were presented to the parents, Yolanda did not feel very comfortable closing her eyes, but with Kathy’s reassurance she tried it out and eventually mastered the relaxation procedure well enough that she could use it periodically throughout her week (although not at the daily rate prescribed in the homework).

In the second session on stress management, Kathy talked about the cognitive model of stress and mood management that parents could use. Yolanda seemed particularly intrigued to learn that the children in Coping Power were learning a set of similar strategies to handle frustration and anger. When Kathy asked Yolanda for an example of a recent time when she had gotten more upset than she had wished, she described a time when she had gone to a physician’s appointment with her ill mother. Yolanda had become very frustrated with the long wait and began thinking that the nurse had it out for poor families. Kathy asked Yolanda how she could have coped with this situation in a more positive way, and she said the physician might have been running late because he had just been in surgery and that the nurse had to wait until he arrived. The therapist described this attributional reframe as an important coping effort, and Yolanda discussed how this could help her control her frustration in similar situations better, along with directly asking the receptionist for more information about when they would be seen.

Although Yolanda had to miss a series of parent group sessions because of her work, she was able to attend Session 10 on discipline strategies. Kathy had talked with Yolanda on a weekly basis during the intervening period, and Yolanda seemed to be able to reenter the group with relative ease despite having missed 5 sessions. Kathy discussed how an important challenge in parenting was to come up with a set of tools that they could use when faced with a problem from their children rather than relying on just one parenting strategy. In this session, parents discussed how privilege removal could be a useful alternate discipline method. Yolanda was initially rather dubious, saying that the only thing that Jasmine understood when she was really acting up was to yell at her. Yolanda noted that even though Jasmine was doing better at home, she still had her really bad moments. To challenge this belief, Kathy asked Yolanda if yelling had been working in the long run in stopping some of Jasmine’s problem behaviors. Yolanda had to acknowledge that it had not stopped the behaviors, and she was willing to try out a very specific privilege removal strategy for the next week. Yolanda noted in a subsequent session that as she began to use this procedure systematically, she found that she was not yelling at Jasmine as much and that Jasmine’s behavior at home continued to improve.

**Evaluating Outcome**

Postintervention BASC assessments indicated that teacher ratings of Jasmine’s conduct problems, aggression, and hyperactivity improved, though all remained in the Clinically Significant range. Her scores improved on all of the adaptive scales, with all falling within normal limits at postintervention. Maternal BASC ratings indicated improvement on two subscales, Conduct Problems, which fell within the At-Risk range (64T, 91st percentile), and Hyperactivity (38T, 11th percentile). The Externalizing Composite score fell within normal limits postintervention (52T, 64th percentile). By Yolanda’s report, Jasmine’s Adaptive Skills Composite fell within normal limits (51T, 52nd percentile), as did all of her adaptive scale scores. Results of a classroom sociometric survey reflected improved social status, with the number of “like most” nominations rising to 18 of 23 students and decreased nominations for “like least” (2), “fights most” (7), and “bothers” (3). Jasmine also demonstrated improvements on social-cognitive measures. Her responses on the PSM-C reflected use of adaptive verbal problem-solving strategies such as verbal assertion (14%); compromise and bargaining (43%); and fewer irrelevant (14%), direct action (14%), and help-seeking (0%) responses. On the OEQ, her responses indicated that she believed less strongly in the ability of
aggressive acts to yield positive consequences, and she was less likely to attribute hostile intentions to others’ actions on the Child Attribution Measure.

On the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire, Yolanda’s reported level of involvement with Jasmine and her use of positive parenting strategies remained high, and her reported use of corporal punishment remained at a low level. Her score on the Poor Monitoring/Supervision scale increased, though it still remained low, corresponding to a response of “almost never.” She reported an increase in her use of inconsistent discipline. Her scores on the Beck Depression Inventory indicated a reduction in her depressive symptomatology, though she continued to report a moderate level of symptoms.

Overall, the Coping Power program appeared to have a positive impact on Jasmine’s disruptive behaviors and social skills while effecting positive change on several important risk factors for child behavior problems including social-cognitive functioning, peer relationships, and maternal depression. Jasmine continued to exhibit moderate ADHD symptoms, so Kathy encouraged Yolanda to consider additional treatment options, such as medication treatment.

References


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