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Feasibility and acceptability of an approach to emotional wellbeing support for high school students

Sarah Kendal

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Reason for the study

- Mental health of young people a public health concern (Meltzer et al, 2003; WHO)
- Young people's voices marginalised in research
- UK schools under pressure to deliver emotional support (Stallard et al, 2005; National Healthy School Standard (DH/ DES 2004)
- Supported self help could be a useful model – need to ask young people (Khan et al, 2007; NICE 2005)

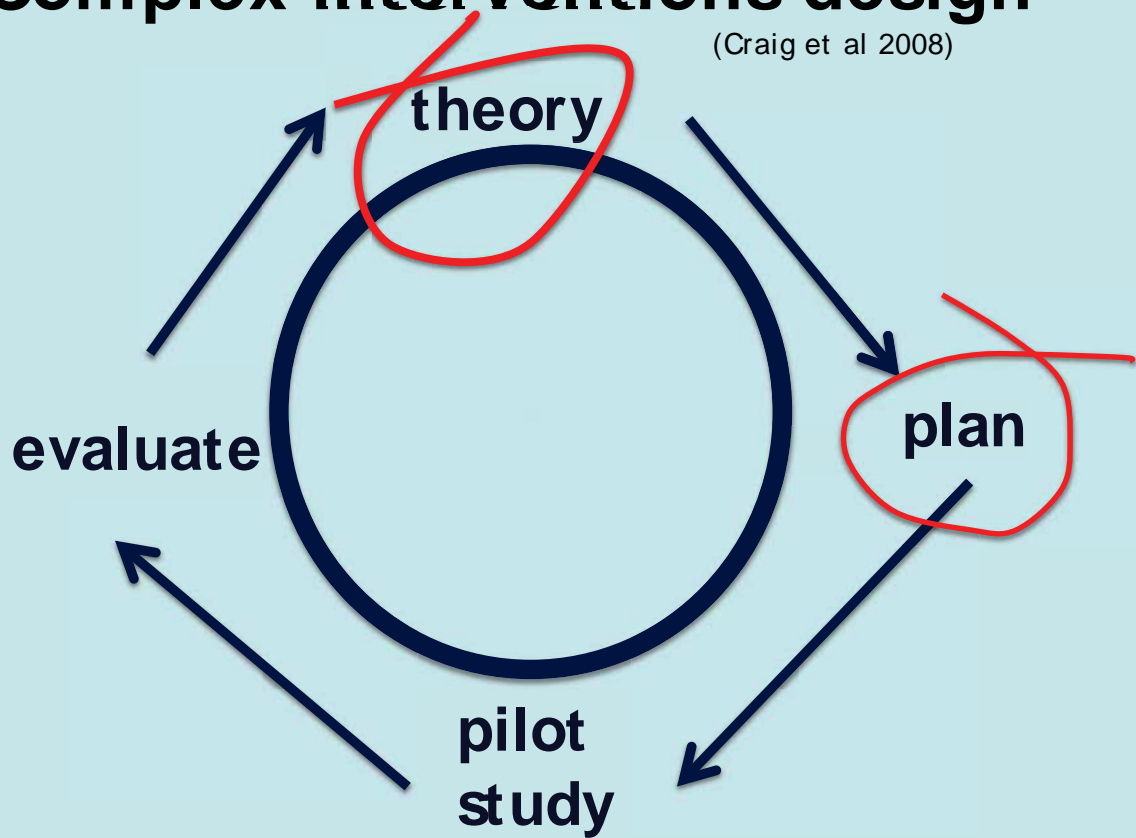
Plan

- Develop a new intervention that is intended to be feasible and acceptable
- Introduce it in schools
- Conduct a research study to evaluate feasibility and acceptability



Complex interventions design

(Craig et al 2008)



Development of the intervention

- Focus groups with 54 young people (12-15 yrs) in three UK high schools
- Collected ideas about emotional support for them in school
- Designed a supported self help intervention



Focus groups with teenagers!



Our intervention

- Available to every student/ 3 schools (A, B, C), 9 months
- Self referral/ Confidential
- Short appointments (15-30 minutes)/Practical and emotional support
- ‘Therapists’- support staff, not teachers or clinicians
- ‘Therapists’ had brief training in CBT techniques e.g. anxiety management, problem solving, goal setting
- Advertising: school TV, newsletter, posters, announcements, in class, leaflets, letters home
- Works with existing pastoral support

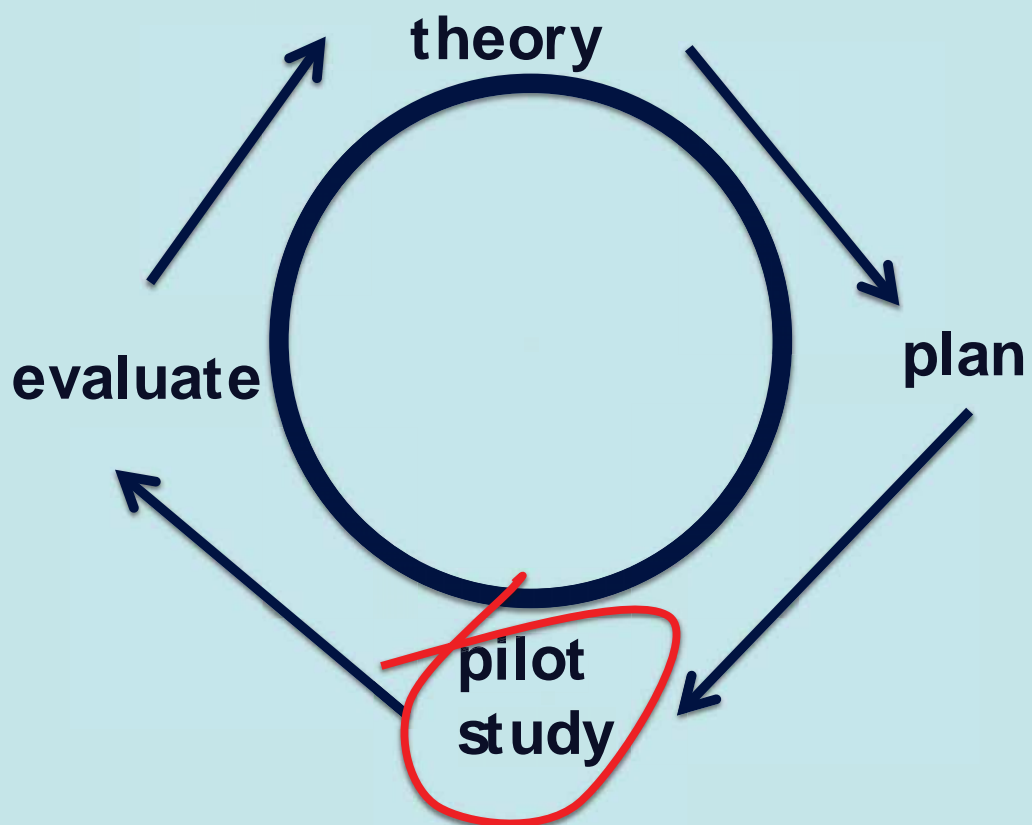
The Research Study

- Aim: explore staff and student thoughts on feasibility and acceptability of the intervention
- Design: Based in Complex Interventions Framework



Exploratory aim
Qualitative methods

Complex interventions design



Data collection

- Purposive sampling
- Students and staff from schools A, B, C
- All ages (students), genders, roles (staff)
- Semi structured interviews
- Participants chose time and place
- Interview questions changed during study to match our growing understanding of the issues

Data analysis

- Recorded and transcribed interviews
- Stored and coded in NVIVO 7 folder
- Analysis started during data collection
- Each new interview compared with previous interviews
- Themes developed iteratively from data
- Advisory group checked coding and themes

Results

- Interviews N= 50
- 9 students who had used intervention
- 14 other students
- 8 'therapist' staff
- 19 other staff
- Student data consistent
- Staff data variable



Impact on emotional wellbeing

- *“Before ...I didn’t know who to turn to”*
- *“I’m no longer thinking I’m rubbish”*
- *“I’m looking to pass my exams”*

Confidentiality

Student opinions:

- *“It’s private”*
- *“Nothing worse than other people knowing your business”*

Students like it

Staff opinions:

- *“Teachers need to be kept in the loop”*

Some staff don’t like it

Self referral

Student opinions

- *“You get the help when you need it, not when someone else says”*

Students like it

Staff opinions

- *A lot of children ... lack basic life skills“*

Many staff worried that students cannot understand self referral

Unqualified ‘therapists’

Student opinions:

- *“You know you can trust them”*

Students like it

Staff opinions:

- *“We haven’t got time”* [‘therapist’ staff]
- *“they have a great relationship with the kids”* [other staff]

Staff doubt feasibility

Short appointments

Student opinion

No strong opinion
about this

**No problem for
students**

Staff opinions

Long appointments
not practical in the
school day but
short appointments
are difficult

**Staff have mixed
feelings**

Structured goal setting

Student opinions

- " I like talking... (but) you have to learn about strategies, to help you"

Students like it

Staff opinions:

- "*Having short term and long term goals works very, very well with kids this age*" ['therapist']

Staff like it

Feasibility depends on management support

Intervention was not promoted effectively in School A.

“[If you advertise that we offer emotional support,] people looking in are likely to say, well there must be a big problem there.”

School manager, School A

Feasibility and acceptability

- Supported self help can be feasible and acceptable in high school
- ‘Therapist’ staff must have time to deliver it
- Managers must support it
- Students must
 - Know about it
 - Trust it

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Reference

Sarah Kendal, Peter Callery and Philip Keeley (2011). The Feasibility and Acceptability of an Approach to Emotional Wellbeing Support for High School Students. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Journal*.

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