

Group Protocol Outline

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OT-528-A: Transform Thru HO: Appl MH

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Student Group Protocol Template

Student Name: Sydney Hess, OTS

Group Title: Becoming Who I Am

Underlying Theories, Frames of Reference, or Models	Underlying Theories • Jean Piaget’s Intellectual Development in the Formal Operational Stage/Developmental FOR (Sobocinski, n.d.): It supports abstract thinking by requiring students to reflect on and translate their internal beliefs, values, and identities into meaningful “I am” statements. Frames of Reference • Psychoanalytic FOR (Sobocinski, 2024): Expressive activities, such as this one, fall under the psychoanalytic FOR. Furthermore, the students will explore underlying thoughts and emotions to develop greater self-awareness and positive thinking. • Psychodynamic FOR (Sobocinski, 2024): This activity focuses on Ego development in terms of self-identity, self-direction and motivation, self-awareness, self-management, and social identity and relationships. Models: • MOHO (Sobocinski, n.d.): Students choose and write their own “I am” statements, supporting volition by reflecting their individual values and interests, which increases motivation and engagement. Habituation is reinforced by each individual’s statements, as they support their role as a student. Finally, performance capacity is expressed through each student’s subjective experiences in the OT program. • PEOP (Sobocinski, 2024): Participation in this activity is influenced by the person (intrinsic factors) while in their role of
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	student in the OT program. Additionally, the occupation of creating and displaying affirmations is meaningful and purposeful, while the environment (extrinsic factors), including the classroom setting and group dynamic, promotes engagement, peer support, and successful participation. This aligns with the PEOP model, as it emphasizes the interaction of intrinsic factors, extrinsic factors, and occupation to support participation. • OA (Sobocinski, 2024): This activity engages the adaptation cycle as first-year OT students reflect on their developing professional roles while participating in the craft. The occupational environment (in the Tabletop Lab) provides both support and challenges, creating a pressure for mastery as students generate meaningful affirmations and complete the task. • EHP (Sobocinski, 2024): Supports the person in their second trimester of OT school by encouraging reflection through positive “I am” statements. The task of writing on pre-cut hearts, along with the context of shared academic experiences, further supports engagement and connection. The environment of a tabletop setup promotes structure and meaningful participation.
Rationale, Purpose and Goals	Rationale: Graduate students are more prone to anxiety; one study found they are six times more likely than the general population to experience symptoms associated with anxiety, 41% reporting anxiety (Young et al., 2023). These symptoms contribute to feelings of hopelessness and pressure, which are exacerbated by test anxiety, leading to both physiological and behavioral responses during exams, such as sweating, nail-biting, or, in severe cases, panic attacks (Absolutely Studying, n.d.). Test anxiety can also impair reasoning, increase heart rate, reduce study efficiency, and reinforce an external locus of control (Boslaugh, 2024). Low self-esteem is a strong predictor of test anxiety, further affecting academic performance (Von Der

	Embse et al., 2017). Conversely, mild test anxiety may have positive effects, motivating students to study earlier and potentially improving outcomes (University of Colorado Boulder, 2024). Nevertheless, given these challenges, interventions that promote self-reflection, coping skills, and self-efficacy are potentially critical for supporting first-year OT students' mental health and academic success, as research suggests that enhancing coping flexibility and self-efficacy improves students' engagement, persistence, and psychological adjustment under academic stress (Freire et al., 2020). Occupational therapists play a vital role in supporting their clients' mental health when clients show signs of anxiety and depression, as it directly addresses the occupation of health management (MGH Institute of Health Professions, 2025). Compared with the evolution of occupations across the lifespan, adulthood involves greater responsibilities and increased stress, as role and occupational balance may be explored in the pursuit of one's career (Villano, n.d.). Furthermore, supportive cooperative participation in homogenous groups is commonly effective, since "clients can relate to one another and are thus able to identify each other's social and emotional needs" (Brown et al., 2019, p. 417). In college students specifically, research has shown that self-affirmations positively affect general well-being, social well-being, self-perception, and sense of self-worth (Winerman, 2025). Positive self-affirmations are most effective when areas for growth are established, statements are framed positively, and they are specific and believable (Koosis, 2024). Purpose: This OT protocol, titled "Becoming Who I Am," aims to address increased stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy challenges by encouraging positive self-talk through the creation of self-affirmations during finals, with the hope that members will be
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	motivated by research to incorporate these affirmations during exam weeks. Goals: 1. Participants will be able to reflect on triggers that require them to generate “I am” statements. 2. Participants will be able to express self-affirmation in a creative and meaningful format. 3. Participants will be able to share their self-affirmations with the group. 4. Participants will recognize the impact negative internal dialogue has on performance.
Outcome Criteria	Outcome criteria will be used to determine if the group was effective and if the participant’s emotional well-being improved. Group progress will be measured using a self-report rating scale and therapist observations during the session. At the beginning of the initial session, members will complete a pre-test anxiety Likert scale (1-5) regarding whether they practice self-affirmations during midterm or final exams (1 = never, 5 = always). During the last session, the group will then be prompted to indicate if they have practiced self-affirmations during midterm or final exams, using the strategies provided by the group. If the group protocol is effective, participants may report actively coping with test anxiety during exams, since they will have been provided with at least five other strategies before the post-test that support coping skills for test anxiety. In addition to this scale, the therapist will complete an individual observation checklist to record active member engagement and knowledge of stress-related coping skills. These checklists will serve as an additional measure to determine the group’s outcome. The general hope and expectations for the group are that participants will be able to complete 12 different positive self-affirmations by the end of the group. It is also expected that at least two of five members will share at least three of their affirmations with the group, at least three of

Commented [SH1]: REDO

Commented [SH2R1]: WHAT IS YOUR IMMEDIATE STRESS RESPONSE ON A SCALE FROM ONE TO TEN

	five members will verbalize an intention to incorporate positive self-affirmations when experiencing test or performance anxiety in academic or clinical contexts, and at least two of five participants will engage in constructive peer interactions with at least one other member through commenting on their peer's work with minimal cueing. Together, these indicators will help determine the overall effectiveness of the group in promoting coping skills, participation, and supportive peer engagement.
Group Membership and Size	This closed group will consist of five members and will be offered only to those actively enrolled in their first year, second trimester of OT graduate school at Sacred Heart University. Members are expected to be between the ages of 21 and 28. Members will have demonstrated previous feelings of test anxiety during either the first or current trimester, making the group an appropriate fit as it focuses on positive self-affirmations that can help combat test anxiety.
Time and Place of Meeting	The group will meet for a 30-minute session in the Tabletop Lab at the Center for Health Education, beginning approximately 9:30 AM. Although the duration of the session was chosen based on time lab availability and time constraints, 30 minutes is appropriate considering the participants' feelings, attention span, and external forces causing heightened anxiety. The room is considered standard classroom size and will seat two participants at each table, arranged in a semicircle to ensure participants can see one another and their work, actively engage with each other, and see the facilitator. The room also includes cabinets and televisions that will not be used during the activity; however, a sink is available for participants to wash marker off their hands if needed. The door to the classroom will be closed to minimize distractions in the hall, as it is situated next to the nursing laboratory, but remained unlocked if participants need to step out. The room contains several windows for natural lighting and overhead lighting. The therapist will be available for any type of assistance during the activity.
Supplies and Cost	Looms: \$24.08 each (Walmart, n.d.) → Available in Tabletop for free

Commented [SH3]: Ensure this is what the nurses call their room

	2. Markers: \$6.64 for a pack of 8 (SSW, n.d.) → Available in Tabletop for free 3. Hole Puncher: \$11.99 for a 6 pack 4. Yarn: \$4.49 for 380 yards of white string (Michaels, n.d.) → Available in Tabletop for free 5. Construction Paper: \$17.79 for assorted colors, including 500 sheets (Amazon, n.d.) → Available in Tabletop for free 6. Scissors: \$23.43 each (Staples, n.d.) → Available in Tabletop for free
Method: Cole's Seven Steps	1. Introduction – Approx. 3 mins (Warm-Up): “The Weight of Stress on my Shoulders” → Members will be asked, “If your test anxiety were items in a backpack, what would you be carrying?” → Introduction - General Information: The facilitator will begin by introducing themselves, stating the name and purpose of the group, and reviewing the expected duration. They will also outline group guidelines, including confidentiality (what is shared in the group stays in the group) and encouraging participants to only share what they feel comfortable disclosing. 2. Activity – Approx. 14 mins (McAuley, 2025): Each member will be provided with several sheets of pre-drawn hearts on construction paper. They will individually be provided with a pair of scissors, a box of markers, a hole puncher, and a pegboard. The string will be attached to the pegboard for them due to the time constraint on the activity. Each member will be invited to create a positive affirmation wall hanging and write 12 different positive self-affirmations. They will do the following in order: → Write their positive affirmations on 12 hearts → Cut out their 12 hearts → Hole punch their 12 hearts → Knot their 12 hearts onto the string

Commented [SH4]: Ask if this is okay since I am precutting string/hearts

Commented [SH5]: Remove I's, and bullet

Commented [SH6R5]: ENSURE THIS WARM UP IS BETTER THAN THIS: **Warm-Up:** Members will verbalize one adjective that describes how they feel about the upcoming finals, and nobody can repeat the same adjectives.

Commented [SH7]: Insert timing for each step

	3. Sharing – Approx. 5 mins: Members will be invited to share their products as a part of the activity. - Planned Question: What does your affirmation statements aim to address? 4. Processing – Approx. 2 mins: The therapist will ask guiding questions regarding how the activity felt for the different members. - Planned Question: If you are historically or currently experiencing anxiety, what would be in a backpack that symbolizes what you are feeling? - Another Planned Question Idea: How did it feel to reframe negative thoughts into positive ones? 5. Generalizing – Approx. 2 mins: The therapist will ask the members what similarities and/or differences they noticed between their peers' work to promote universality - Planned Question: What is one specific affirmation you feel would be most effective in decreasing anxiety? What is it, and why? - Other Planned Question Ideas: It seems like everyone here has a really heavy backpack. How will that affect you in your everyday life? If it is so heavy you cannot walk, what is going to happen to your body in the next 6 months? - Going forward, how do you plan on addressing test anxiety? - What can you use from what you learned from this activity that you can apply to your everyday? 6. Application – Approx. 2 mins: Members will discuss what they learned from the group and indicate whether they would use it in the future when test anxiety arises. • Planned Questions: How does your performance anxiety impact you in your role of student? Would
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Commented [SH8]: Should this be removed... instead, should I just make the sharing step a statement?

Commented [SH9R8]: If it can stay, does "your" need to be removed?

	you see applying self-affirmation methods during an examination or presentation? Why or why not? 7. Summary – Approx. 2 mins: The therapist will reiterate what occurred during the session, key takeaways, and thank the members for their time and participation.
Potential Limitations, Adaptations, Safety Precautions	Potential Limitations: 1. Despite the expected positive effects of this group on mental well-being, several factors may influence members' engagement within the session itself. 2. During the 30-minute session, limited time may reduce opportunities for members to fully participate in sharing and discussion. 3. In the moment, some participants may feel emotionally overwhelmed or may choose not to verbalize their thoughts, particularly when discussing personal triggers related to test anxiety. 4. Additionally, variability in members' prior use of self-affirmations may impact how natural or believable the statements feel during the activity. 5. Group dynamics, such as group cohesion, may also influence willingness to engage in real-time sharing and feedback. These factors may be observed directly through participation patterns, verbal contributions, and responsiveness during group activities. 6. Some participants may complete the activity to please the members and/or facilitator rather than taking the time to authentically reflect on their performance anxiety behaviors. [Adaptations]: Various adaptations, including grading up and down, could benefit different populations, functional levels, and/or service delivery contexts. For instance, to grade this activity up, the facilitator may consider providing the group with a peg board that has more pegs, to promote cognitive orientation and increase task complexity. Another way the facilitator may grade the activity up is to allow the members to attach

Commented [SH10]: Change since people are cutting things out

Commented [SH11R10]: Remove example prompt adaptations

Commented [SH12R10]: Be more specific

Commented [SH13R10]: If you notice group is feeling overwhelmed how can it be adapted? Maybe give 4 examples of statements in regards to self. Adaptation can be visual prompts. Grade up: roll play implementing I am affirmation what that looks like/when you may have to use it

Commented [SH14R10]: People may please rather than really do it

	the string to the pegboard themselves. To grade down, visual prompts and suggested affirmations may be given to reduce cognitive demand, supporting Toglia's Dynamic Interactional Approach (Sobocinski, 2024). Others may also prefer to learn through observation, an approach underscored by Bandura's Social Learning Theory (McLeod, 2025). Physical environmental adaptations may also be an important consideration when grading down. Increasing concentration may involve mitigating clutter or visual distractions, whereas turning lights down may be effective for participants who become overwhelmed by bright lights. Safety Precautions: Psychological safety precautions in psychodynamic groups include fear of judgment, group dynamics, historical or systemic factors, unclear guidance and intervention, and virtual shift in therapy settings (Prout, 2025).
List 3 populations, other than OT students, that could benefit from participation in this kind of group and briefly explain your reasoning. Describe applicable adaptations (if any):	1. Elderly people with dementia in residential homes (Help Dementia, 2025): Dementia impacts emotional and social well-being on top of memory. Positive affirmations could decrease symptoms associated with sundowning, enhance residents' quality of life, and reduce stress and anxiety. Additional benefits include improved emotional resilience, enhanced cognitive function, and positive relationships. Adaptations may include, but are not limited to, using thicker markers, large visual prompts, and larger pre-cut out hearts to support visual deficits associated with dementia. 2. Adults with a diagnosed mood disorder attending a mental health day care program (Video Affirmations, 2025): Paired with repeatable activities, positive affirmations distract the brain from self-doubt and force the individual to build on positive thoughts rather than those that are negative, making it extremely suitable for individuals with mood disorders. Adaptations for this population may

	include a range of sentence starters or example statements to support participants who may struggle to initiate self-reflecting thoughts due to low motivation or negative self-perception. 3. Children in a school setting diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (My World ABA, 2024): Students with ASD may struggle to socially and emotionally interact with others, impacting the individual's self-esteem and self-perception. As a result, using positive affirmations can support self-love, which is especially important for those with autism, as it helps establish a sense of identity, resilience, and positivity, thereby helping to combat the extra challenges they face in interpreting social situations and emotional cues. An adaptation for this group would be to decrease the task completion expectation to four hearts and incorporate sensory breaks to support regulation of the central nervous system (CNS), thereby promoting sustained attention and improved self-regulation.
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