

Webinar Summary

The Alternative Peer Group (APG) is a recovery support model for youth who struggle with substance use disorders and mental health issues. Though not subjected to rigorous clinical trials, preliminary data indicate 2-year sobriety rates greater than 88% for adolescents who complete the program (Collier et al., 2014). APGs facilitate young participants' motivation for recovery by creating conditions that support their experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The APG model facilitates strong relational ties between recovering youth role models and newly admitted adolescents with no desire to change behaviors. These relationships increase the relevance and impact of long-term therapeutic services (Nash & Collier, 2016). Over time while participating in groups, sober social activities, and 12-step meetings with recovering peer role models, youth begin to value recovery over substance use (Nash et al., 2015; Nash & Collier, 2016). Qualitative data indicate that young people who participated in an APG maintained close ties with recovering peers and mutual support group involvement through young adulthood (Nash, et al., 2015). This presentation will describe the APG model and preliminary phases of a research project that aims to add to the evidence base for adolescent recovery and provide a mechanism for evaluating the impact of APGs and other adolescent recovery support models.

Participant Questions & Presenter Responses

Q1	<i>Any suggestions for how professionals can assist adolescents in achieving/sustaining their recovery process?</i>
Response 1	Research and experience shows longer treatment stays and after-care placements are associated with better outcomes. Our experience shows that motivation for recovery is enhanced by facilitating connection to a new group of peers who know how to have fun while sober and value recovery over substance use. Close personal bonds with people in recovery helps sustain the recovery process over time. The key is to keep parents in treatment too. Supporting parents to stick with recovery programs is important because it takes time for adolescents to change motivation and behavior. Parents need to hear this and be supported while their child may continue to act out or use.



Q2	<i>In what settings might the Alternative Peer Group (APG) be delivered (i.e., treatment or prevention program, Recovery High School or Collegiate Recovery program)?</i>
Response 2	The APG can be delivered in any setting that facilitates linkages with treatment and other recovery support programs. APGs need comfortable meeting spaces that youth can relax in as well as attend group meetings. Many APGs hold their meetings in churches or go to treatment centers for meetings. Social functions can occur at the APG or anywhere in the community. So, solving transportation issues is important.
Q3	<i>Does the Alternative Peer Group (APG) Model offer other recovery options other than the 12 Steps?</i>
Response 3	The initial APG in Texas was created to provide youth focused 12 step groups and sober social activities along with linkages to treatment and recovery services. Over time, other programs adopted the model and added clinical services (e.g. individual, family and group counseling, skills building and psychoeducation). All programs continue to offer youth and family 12 step groups and social activities. They vary based on the level of clinical services they provide. An APG could be created based upon recovery principles rather than the 12 steps.
Q4	<i>Is there a manual or other guidance document on how to replicate the APG model?</i>
Response 4	The Association of Alternative Peer Groups held a conference in February 2017 that covered the basics of building and sustaining an APG. Video recordings of that conference are available at this link: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzI4Q25oDCygaVab8zvzfKEoxBdMN483A An accreditation process is currently being created. However, consults from each APG in Houston are available to assist anyone who would like to create an APG in their area.



Q5	<i>Are Alternative Peer Groups (APG) self-governed? Do groups of peers meet on a regular basis? What other community-based services are linked to an APG?</i>
Response 5	No, APGs are not self-governed. APGs can be built on a non-profit or for-profit foundation but, an APG should be led by a professional who has experience working with youth and recovery. Groups of peers meet on a regular basis within the APG model. APGs can be linked to treatment centers, non-profit organizations with similar missions, recovery schools, and/or spiritual organizations in addition to community recovery supports.
Q6	<i>How are Alternative Peer Groups funded?</i>
Response 6	APGs can be run as a for-profit business or non-profit organization depending upon the needs and resources of the community. APGs in Houston, Texas are funded from a variety of public and private sources as well as fees paid by the APG client families.
Q7	<i>Parental involvement is a key element of the Alternative Peer Group Model. What recommendations do you have for youth who do not have parental support and/or are homeless?</i>
Response 7	All APGs have some clients that have poor family involvement. In these cases other parents, alumni and peers begin to act as surrogate families for these clients. APGs that serve many clients who do not have parental support work to incorporate community role models into the program to act as mentors/family surrogates for the clients. Many families who want to serve the community offer their home as a “host family” after being appropriately vetted and trained. APGs can be created as a part of or in conjunction with youth homeless shelters. Alumni can come back and serve as role models and mentors of programs such as these.

Q8	<i>Where might I find more information on the Alternative Peer Group Model?</i>
Response 8	<p>Collier, C., Hilliker, R., & Onwuegbuzie, A. (2014, November). Alternative peer group: A model for youth recovery. <i>The Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery</i>. 9 (1). http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1556035X.2013.836899</p> <p>Nash, A.J. & Collier, C. (2016). The Alternative Peer Group: A developmentally appropriate recovery support model for adolescents. <i>Journal of Addictions Nursing</i>, 27 (2).</p> <p>Nash, A. J., Marcus, M. T., Engebretson, J. C., & Bukstein, O. G. (2015). Recovery from adolescent substance use disorder: Young people in recovery describe the process and keys to success in an alternative peer group. <i>Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery</i>, 10(4). doi:10.1080/1556035X.2015.1089805</p> <p>The Association of Alternative Peer Groups website http://www.aapg-recovery.com/</p> <p>Generation Found: The Film http://generationfoundfilm.com/</p>

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