

# Skills-Building Groups for Children & Teens Foster Confidence

**Psychologist Dr. Tsila Kirsh Provides Group,  
Family & Individual Services**

**By Melissa O'Brien**

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Being a kid today can be tough-a lot tougher than it was even twenty years ago. Today's kids are bombarded with negative messages from multi-media sources and from their peers about body image, drugs, violence and sex. They are exposed to many adult issues at an early age and oftentimes struggle to find - and feel comfortable with - their own unique identities.

After reading about the tragic death of New Tampa Neighborhood News office manager Julie Rinaldi's 17-year old daughter Sarah from a drug overdose last year, New Tampa clinical psychologist Tsila Kirsh, Ph.D., was inspired to expand her practice last fall and created a comprehensive skills-building group for children and teens. Dr. Kirsh is the owner of New Tampa Psychological Services, Inc., located at 15310 Amberly Drive, Suite 250, in the Palm Lake at Tampa Palms office building.

"Seeing what kids face today breaks my heart," says Dr. Tsila (as she is known to her patients). "The amount of drugs in our schools, the pressure to have sex at an early age, the (erroneous) message that you need to look and be perfect are all factors that can make growing up a trying time. My daily interaction with area families and school professionals convinced me that there was a definite need in our community for group therapy eared toward improving the overall self-esteem of teens and even re-teens."

So together with mental health counselor Elizabeth Paul, M.A., Dr. Tsila created the “Girl Power Hour,” two empowerment groups where girls ages 8-11 and 12-&-u can talk together about issues such as social skills and relationships, assertiveness, peer pressure, bullying, anger management, goal setting and personal development. Two coed “Social Skills” groups have been added to this year’s calendar, one for boys and girls ages 8-11 and one for age’s 12-&-up. The coed groups focus on peer interactions, problem solving, impulse control, appropriate group behavior, sportsmanship and communication skills.

“I see these groups as an investment in our children and our families in New Tampa,” says Dr. Tsila. “Through a variety of methods – like expressive art, writing in journals and group discussion of thought-provoking reading materials – we are able to help teens improve their communication skills with family members and their peers, address self-esteem problems and discuss issues like peer pressure and conflict resolution.”

Elizabeth is the group facilitator for the groups and collaborates with Dr. Tsila about what each session’s topic and assignment should be.

“The group we ran in the fall was for girls,” says Elizabeth. “We had a wide variety of pre-teens and teenagers. It worked very well with the older girls acting as positive great role models for the younger ones. Everyone had different experiences and came together to discuss the unique experience of being a girl. We talked the difficulties, but also about making the most of the experience of being a girl. Each girl had something to share with the group. They shared stories and offered one another support and congratulations.”

Because of the response to the fall group, Dr. Tsila and Elizabeth decided to incorporate more groups of children, including boys. There are groups scheduled to begin starting Tuesday, February 20, with different meeting times for each (see below).

In addition to her group therapy, Dr. Tsila provides expansive psychological services for children, adolescents, adults, couples and families. She provides psychological and psycho-educational evaluations (needed for some students to enter Hillsborough County’s Academically Gifted Program) and customized psychotherapy.

“When I work with an individual, I also usually work with their family,” she says. In addition to psychotherapy, I also provide psychological testing for conditions such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). I truly put my heart into my work. I care about every single child that I have seen and family that I have worked with. I always see the individual in front of me as a unique human being struggling to grow. I don’t like to label people – but to tap into their strengths and resources and try to bring out the best in them.”

Born and raised in Israel, Dr. Tsila says that she has been working with kids for most of her life.

“Throughout my upbringing, I was around kids and came from a large family,” she says. “I worked as a counselor for the Israel Scouts (a kind of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts for Israeli kids). When I was 16, I was sent by my hometown of Beit Shemesh to our sister city of Indianapolis, Indian, to work with youth.”

After serving two years in the Israeli Army (a requirement of every young Israeli), Dr. Tsila worked with American youth visiting Israel while attending her first year at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She then transferred to Georgia State University in Atlanta, where she received her Master’s and Doctorate degrees in Clinical Psychology. Her post-graduate residency was at the James A. Haley Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital in Tampa.

Dr. Tsila and her husband Jeffrey liked the Tampa area and moved to Tampa Palms in 2000. She has been affiliated with the University of South Florida for three years, where she was a staff psychologist working with the USF staff, faculty and their families. In addition, before starting her practice in New Tampa in 2004, she worked as a consultant to different area private schools and was employed for two years in Pasco County public schools as a clinical psychologist.

“Coming from a big family, I have always been very community-oriented,” says Dr. Tsila. “Everyone knew everyone and helping one another, as well as depending upon one another, as well as depending upon one another, was encouraged. I think part of the problem for teens in New Tampa is that there are not many places for them to go. I am a believer in creating a park for our youth. Some of our tens have to drive too far away to do their roller-blading or their skateboarding. Why should they have to be so far away? I think that what this community needs is more safe areas for our kids to play. I would like to see a community center for our children and youth and more groups for local teens.”

“I appreciate what Dr. Tsila has done for my daughter,” says Colleen (who asked not to use her last name). “She has seen my daughter one-on-one for a year and a half. My daughter feels so much more comfortable discussing things with Dr. Tsila. Sometimes, it is easier for a child to talk to someone other than her parent. Dr. Tsila listens and encourages my daughter and offers her life enhancement tips to help her get along in the high school social scene.”

Colleen also says her entire family has a comfort level with Dr. Tsila.

“We would recommend her to others,” she says. “She has our daughter’s best interest at heart. My daughter likes the fact that Dr. Tsila was in the Israeli Army. It says a lot about feminism. And, when my daughter was in the “Girl Power Hour,” it was very empowering for her. Kids today don’t want to be different than

their peers and the group therapy reinforces that they are not the only ones who need help dealing with the pressures in today's society."

The "Girl Power Hour" (for girls only) and the coed "Social Skills" groups are open to kids ages 8-11 and 12 & up. The groups begin the week of Monday, February 19. While there is a cost involved, Dr. Tsila can work with parents if cost is an issue.

**For more information about New Tampa Psychological Services,  
call (813) 312-1005 or visit [www.drtsila.com](http://www.drtsila.com).**