

BENCHMARK COMPREHENSIVE CHILD AND ADOLESCENT COUNSELING

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Component One: Developmental Considerations in Counseling

Case Study

“Larissa is a 14-year-old who was born in Mexico but has lived legally in the United States for the last 5 years. She asked to speak to the school counselor because she and her parents have been experiencing more conflict lately because she wants to do more with her friends, especially on weekends, and her parents want her to attend family functions with them. They say she can have her friends come to her house, but she is reluctant to invite them because her parents don’t speak much English. She says she wants to be respectful of her parents but thinks they don’t understand what it is like for her.” (Liberty University, 2022).

As the counselor, I see developmental and multicultural considerations in Larissa’s scenario. Knowing the cognitive, emotional, developmental, physical, and social factors in a student’s life is important. (Vernon, et al., 2019). This scenario has made it apparent that her heritage and culture play a vital role in her life, as expressed by her parents. Larissa is in the early adolescence stage of development, when students engage in self-identity searching, de-idolization of their parents, and want for autonomy. (Vernon, et al., 2019). This could be causing Larissa to react negatively to her parents because she wants more freedom, as per normal, in this developmental stage.

Her cultural considerations are that she spent most of her early developmental years in Mexico and learned the cultural heritage of her native country. Now she is living in The United States, where her peers have lived their entire lives, I suspect she is experiencing a difference in cultural expectations. For minority youth, “ethnicity can play a critical role in identity development...may moderate the impact of discrimination and prejudice on their self-esteem.

(Romero, et al., 2014).” (Vernon, et al., 2019). Counseling students with significant cultural backgrounds can be challenging, it is finding the balance between their developmental stage and culture.

Early Childhood

Early childhood ranges from ages two to five years old. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Preschool-age children are egocentric, meaning they are concerned with themselves and do not think of others around them. Play is an important social development skill for this developmental stage, as it allows them to interact with their peers and use their imaginations. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Vocabulary is expanding, and the world is a fascinating place; although their minds are vastly growing, they are unable to think broadly.

Middle Childhood

Generally, the ages of six to eleven. Middle childhood individuals have a better sense of self-understanding. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Socially, these children are starting to depend more on their friends, and the idea of having a best friend is important to them. Emotionally, they can recognize their emotions and can control them more than in early childhood. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Middle childhood is the development period when children are in a transitional period between preoperational and concrete operational thinking. This helps them understand more and can apply skills to relationships with friends. (Vernon, et al., 2019).

Early Adolescence

Puberty is a factor in the early adolescent developmental stage. The changes within the body during puberty can affect an individual's self, social, emotional, and physical changes. Peers play an important role in social development in early adolescence. This is when students rely on peer friendships but can also have a negative effect. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Students in early adolescence can be sensitive to peer rejection and other social irregularities.

During this developmental stage, early adolescents can feel very emotional. This is mostly related to puberty with the increase of hormones and changing their bodies. Children this age can “ride an emotional roller-coaster” (Vernon, et al., 2019), meaning they have heightened emotions and do not always have a healthy outlet to express their emotions positively. This can cause emotional outbursts or outbursts of anger.

Mid-Adolescence

Counseling mid-adolescents can be easier because they have reached formal operational thinking. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Three major milestones in mid-adolescence include self-development, the continuation of peer relationships, and fewer rapid mood changes related to formal operational thinking. They can start thinking more abstractly. (Vernon, et al., 2019). During mid-adolescence is typically the time when students are entering the first stages of transitioning to “adulthood.” They seek independence from their parents, and they can shift their personal views like; religion, politics, and sexuality and begin experimenting with new things. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Many new changes occur during mid-adolescence.

Component Two: Individual Counseling Process

Stages of Individual Counseling

“Nancy, a 12-year-old adolescent who was recently adopted from the foster care system and is having difficulties with her new younger siblings. Also, identify community

opportunities/resources that might enhance her transition to a new home.” (Liberty University, 2022).

The first step in counseling individuals of any age is establishing rapport with the client. Paying attention to the client's needs and concerns but getting to know them personally. Establishing rapport with children can look different than establishing rapport with adults; for most children, it is crucial to find something to connect with them. Children are often more sensitive than adults and want to find someone who they can trust and is supportive. (Henderson, et al., 2016). For the student, Nancy, it is extremely important to establish that the counselor is someone she can trust. She is currently in the foster care system and entering a new family.

The next step in the counseling process is reluctance and resistance. Resistance is commonly used for “clients with low motivation.” (Vernon, et al., 2019). It is common for them to resist the counseling process when working with children. This can be connected to building rapport. If the client is comfortable with the counselor, then it can be easier for the counselor to provide services. Parents can also be reluctant to the counseling process, it is crucial to involve the parents also while protecting the confidentiality of the client. (Vernon, et al., 2019).

Thirdly, the next step in the counseling process is intake and assessment. This process can vary depending on the context, school, or clinical mental health settings. In school counseling, this can look like reviewing the student’s file or observing the child within their daily routine at school. Also, in the school setting, students can be referred to counseling by teachers or other staff in the school. The intake process in schools typically involves release/consent forms for parents to sign to allow the counselor to begin sessions with the student.

The fourth step in the counseling process is developing interventions. Basically, this is the step in the process when the counselor is working with the student to set goals and work

through the issues they may be having. Setting realistic goals and expectations for a successful counseling experience is important. These goals should be obtained by the counselor and the student collaboratively. The counselor should use what they have learned about the student by establishing rapport to integrate interventions in sessions. (Vernon, et al., 2019).

The final steps in the counseling process are termination and referrals. Termination of sessions can be intimidating for some clients. It is important to relay to the client that the counselor will check in and offer follow-up sessions when needed. In school counseling, there is not a long period of time where the student can meet with the counselor. Solution-focused brief counseling is commonly used in school because it focuses on finding solutions within a few sessions. (Corey, 2021). Referrals are made to outside agencies for the student to receive additional services outside school.

Outside community agencies I would recommend for Nancy would be peer mentoring agencies like the Boys and Girls Club. This could be a valuable resource for Nancy because she is entering a new foster home with younger siblings. Nancy is in the early adolescence stage, where she wants more freedom and time with peers. (Vernon, et al., 2019). An organization like the Boys and Girls Club would allow Nancy to create healthy relationships with her peers and mentors.

Explanation of Counseling Services

Many people have a skewed idea of counseling and how it works. Since entering my graduate program at Liberty, many of my family members and peers have asked for advice and, commonly, “Why do you want to do this?” I typically respond by explaining that counseling is a collaborative process. This process includes the client and counselor working together to reach the common goal of helping the client achieve their goals. Counselors are not advice givers,

counselors are helping professionals who assist clients in achieving their goals through different interventions and strategies to improve their daily lives.

Explaining the counseling process to those with different abilities and multiculturalism can appear different. For individuals with different cognitive, developmental, and social abilities, it is crucial that counselors explain the process in terms they can understand. Counselors should use language and terminology they understand when working with students, particularly younger students. This is also true for individuals with cognitive disabilities. In lay terms, “Hello, my name is Miss. Gerhardt. I am the school counselor, my job is to help you work through (whatever the concern is). We will work together to help you through this time.”

Working with students, particularly families with a different first language, can create new challenges. Counselors should be culturally competent and able to assist these students. Personally, I would have a consent form professionally translated for the non-English speaking students' families. The school district I am currently employed through has professional translators for our English as second language children, counselors should utilize the resources that their district offers to serve their students better.

ASCA Ethical Standards

The American School Counselor Association notes the importance of explaining counseling programs to students. School counselors focus on three areas for counseling services, academic, career, and social/emotional. (ASCA, 2022). It is important to explain counseling to students because the school counselor is a valuable resource to students of every age. The school counselor can help students understand emotions and healthy coping skills and help plan for their future. ASCA ethical standards state:

- “A.1.a Have a primary obligation to the students, who are to be treated with dignity and respect as unique individuals.” (ASCA, 2022).
- “A.1.c Support all students and their development by actively working to eliminate systemic barriers or bias impeding student development.” (ASCA, 2022).
- “A.1.e Provide culturally responsive counseling to students in a brief context and support students and families/guardians in obtaining outside services if students need long-term clinical/ mental health counseling.” (ASCA, 2022).

Termination

Termination of services is a crucial step in the counseling process. The termination process can be intimidating for younger clients, so counselors should prepare in advance. (Vernon, et al., 2019). It is important to explain to the student from the start of counseling that the services will end. Also, the sessions will not be lengthy, and the counselor will only be able to meet with the student a few times. Counselors should reassure clients that the relationship is not over even though the counseling sessions are ending. This is particularly true in the school setting because the child will still be able to see the counselor within the school, and the counselor is available to check-in in with the student more than in a clinical setting.

Component Three: Ethical Considerations and Theoretical Approaches

Personal Theoretical Approach

I would use the theoretical approach in school: solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT). This theory allows the counselor-client relationship to grow and strengthen throughout the sessions. Also, this theory supports that the client is motivated to change, and they can find a

solution with the collaborative help of the counselor. (Corey, 2021). This theoretical approach can also be used with multicultural students because it is the idea that the client is capable of change.

Approaching the topic of worldview and spirituality can be difficult to discuss in the school setting. School counselors should be prepared to “address spiritual and religious issues in school settings when appropriate and necessary (Davis et al., 2011; Sink & Devlin, 2011; Smith-Augustine, 2011).” (Kimbel, et al., 2013). However, because of the age of the students, school counselors often work with parents and other family members. According to ASERVIC competencies, school counselors do not address working with students’ families about religious or spiritual views. (Kimbel, et al., 2013). Working in the public school system, faculty and staff are not allowed to speak of their own religious and world views. Researchers recommend that counselors are prepared to work with students of different spiritualities and worldviews, all part of being a culturally competent counselor.

When working with minors, many legal and ethical concerns must be addressed. The American School Counselor Association has standards to protect school counselors and better serve students. It is the school counselor's responsibility to explain the limits of confidentiality at a developmentally appropriate level and in different ways, like in classroom lessons, student handbooks, etc. (ASCA, 2022). School counselors collaborate with stakeholders, community agencies, and parents to refer students who need further assistance. (ASCA, 2022). Counselors are also responsible for informing parents of their child's foreseeable thoughts of harming themselves. (ASCA, 2022). The American School Counselor Association clearly states the guidelines for protecting students' confidentiality and when parents and other community agencies should become involved.

Creative Approach

Particularly, I enjoyed learning about different creative approaches to counseling. I believe that play therapy is a valuable tool, especially when working with younger students. Client-centered play therapists believe that communicating acceptance and belief in a child can increase the child's ability to problem solve. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Play therapy can benefit students who struggle healthily expressing their emotions by allowing them to use age-appropriate toys to express the scenarios and the ways they are feeling.

Component Four: Multicultural Counseling and Transition Program**Counselor Development**

Developing cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills is an ongoing process. It is crucial for school counselors to be aware of the different multiculturalism within their schools. I would want to be informed about different cultures and any prominent information that could be helpful in helping these students. Also, continuously attend trainings on cultural diversity and competence, so that, I can be a culturally competent counselor.

Interventions that can be implemented in a school counseling program are ensuring that the school is an inclusive environment and creating programs that can be used school-wide. Ensuring that the school environment is a task for everyone at the school, parents, and the community. Parents should be encouraged to teach their children to treat everyone with respect, even if someone is different than you. Once children are in the school, teachers, counselors, administrators, and other staff should promote an inclusive environment. Programs that can be implemented include the "development of goals, culturally relevant curriculum, pedagogy, strategic planning, as well as community bridging, awareness and advocacy. (Grothaus, et al.,

2020).” (ASCA, 2016). If implemented properly, the school can be a welcoming place for students of all multicultural backgrounds.

Counseling Interventions

Vernon’s *Counseling Children and Adolescents* text, in 2019, notes several counseling interventions that have been proven effective when working with multicultural students. I would implement creative arts, music, and storytelling/bibliotherapy. (Vernon, et al., 2019). These three interventions allow students to expose themselves visually and audibly to new cultures. Also, these interventions can be used in individual sessions as well. Counselors can use these strategies to help multicultural students open and express themselves.

Transition Programming

Transition programs are a vital part of a school counseling program. Counselors can use transition programs in multicultural aspects, transitioning from middle to high school, and transitioning to post-secondary opportunities. These programs are beneficial to students because they are specially designed for the school and are implemented by the school counselor for success in their next educational steps.

Component Five: Counseling At-Risk Children/Adolescents

Four Step Framework

Framework outlined for working with at-risk students include assessment, prevention, intervention, and social advocacy. Assessment is the starting point of the framework and allows the counselor to address the student’s initial concerns. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Prevention is finding ways to prevent thoughts or actions of the student. (Vernon, et. al., 2019). Intervention is exploring new ways and finding other resources to help the at-risk student. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Finally, social advocacy, is knowing how to be an effective support to the child and the family

involved. (Vernon, et al., 2019). The four-step framework can be used for at-risk youth who are experiencing substance abuse, mental illness, suicidal thoughts or actions, and traumas.

For students who are experiencing substance abuse, interventions I would implement are, the initial assessment and understand the students Adverse Childhood Experiences score (ACEs). The first step in counseling substance abuse is an accurate assessment of the situation. (Vernon, et al., 2019). The Adolescent Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI-A1) is a vital tool that counselors can use to have a better understanding of the situation. Vernon suggests that some questions should be added that allow the student to put into perspective how much they are using the substance. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Understanding the students ACE score is useful when determining the immediate exposure to the substance. If the student is exposed to substance in the home, then they are more likely to experiment with substances.

Students who suffer from anxiety or depression can benefit from school counseling. Assessment is a vital tool for school counselors when counseling students. The Beck Youth Inventory (BYI), can be useful as it is a few questions that the counselor can read to the student. (Vernon, et al., 2019). Creative therapies have also been shown to improve the symptoms of clients with anxiety and depression. (Vernon et al., 2019). Creative therapies allow clients to express their emotions through a creative outlet like music, play, photography, etc.

Crisis Management and Planning

Crisis plans are written documents that express the plan that the school will follow in the event of a crisis. Strong administrative support is crucial to the success of a crisis management plan. (Erbacher, et al., 2014). All school personnel should be educated on the plan and should be able to execute as needed. Suicide prevention plans are also included in crisis management plans. “Suicide prevention is a crucial piece to the school violence puzzle as the relationship between

school shooters, often referred to in federal documents as “attackers,” and suicide is very significant.” (Erbacher, et al., 2019). Suicide and school violence can be directly connected, based upon this evidence.

The crisis management team includes “include the right mix of school personnel, outside agency employees, and community members.” (Erbacher, et al., 2014). All these members are valuable to the development of the crisis management plan because they bring different perspectives and ideas to the plan. The crisis management team typical consists of a superintendent, liaison between the school, parents, students, medical, and counseling. Counselors’ role in the crisis management plan include, assessment, prevention, intervention, and social advocacy. School counselors are to assist students in need of services, prior to the event of a crisis.

The three tiers of crisis intervention include universal crisis prevention which is used for the entire student population. This tier also prepares and prevents a crisis. Tier two includes selective interventions for individuals who are considered moderate to high risk, this is where the school psychologist is involved. Tier three is for those extremely traumatized or have severe symptoms after a crisis. This tier also recognizes the long-term effects of traumatization. (Erbacher, et al., 2014).

Evidence Based Suicide Prevention

Counselors should recognize, assess, and educate on suicide and suicide prevention. School counselors should be aware of the warning signs and create a plan of prevention personalized for each student in need. It is crucial that counselors educate students, parents, stakeholders, community members, administrators, and other school personnel on the signs and effects of suicide.

Conclusion

School counselors play a vital role in schools. Highly trained professionals in human development, suicide prevention, transition programs, and student success. It is important for counselors to be aware of the multicultural aspects of their schools and how to assist all students. Counselors should be competent in their skills and the needs of their students at their schools.

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