Benchmark Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Counseling

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Developmental Considerations in Counseling

Incorporating Developmental and Cultural Factors

In this case study, Larissa is a fourteen-year-old student who was born in Mexico but has been living in the United States for the past five years. She is experiencing increased conflict with her parents which has caused her to seek out the school counselor. The cause of this conflict is that her parents want her to attend family functions with them while she wants to spend more time with her friends. She is hesitant to invite her friends over to her own house as her parents do not speak much English. While she wants to be respectful of her parents, she believes that they do not understand what it is like for her.

In order to provide the best help for Larissa, there are many developmental and cultural factors to consider. For a student who was born in one place but living in another, like Larissa, the development of ethnic identity and acculturation is an important factor. Acculturation is the process of merging one's own culture with another (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). There are typically four patterns of acculturation: integration, or finding balance between the cultures; assimilation, replacing one's culture of origin with another; separation, rejecting anything outside of one's culture of origin; or marginalization, becoming alienated from one's own culture as well as any other. Differing patterns of acculturation between parent and child may be a source of conflict as it appears to be in Larissa's case. While their pattern of acculturation cannot be known for sure based solely on the information given, it would appear that Larissa is assimilating into American culture while her parents may be integrating. If Larissa is replacing her Mexican culture with American culture while her parents are combining the two, it is clear to see why they may have difficulty understanding each other's point of view.

At the age of fourteen, Larissa is developmentally towards the end of early adolescence (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). This is a time when adolescents explore and begin to form their identities. The process of acculturation will have a significant role to play in this time of Larissa's life as she begins to figure out how her culture fits into her idea of herself. The search for identity can cause some early adolescents to seek out independence and push their parents away. While adolescents want to be independent, they also seek social approval and may be extremely conscious of what others think of them. All of these developmental traits fit into Larissa's story of wanting to put space between herself and her family in order to spend more time with her friends. It also makes sense that she may not want to invite these friends over to her house as she may feel self-conscious about what her peers think about her parents not being able to speak English fluently.

These developmental and cultural factors can be incorporated into a counseling approach that respects Larissa's identity formation and individuality. Instead of assuming Larissa's pattern of acculturation and identity development, it would be best to ask her about it directly to have a better understanding of how she views herself. Latino youth are one of the largest growing minority populations in the United States, and with many in-group differences, it is best not to make assumptions about Larissa's heritage and how it impacts her (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). This goes along with her pattern of acculturation as the counselor cannot assume that she holds the same values that are typically attributed to Latino individuals, such as commitment to family and collectivist attitudes. Asking these questions and getting to know students individually is empowering and helps them to feel culturally understood.

Stages of Development

From the ages of two through eighteen, children typically go through four stages of development (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). In the early childhood stage, which is typically from the ages of two to five, children have an extremely positive self-image and are only capable of viewing the world from their own perspective. This is also known as egocentrism, which is a feature of Piaget's cognitive development theory that suggests that children believe that everyone's experience of life is the same as their own (Babakr, Mohamedamin & Kakamad, 2019). As children move through the early childhood stage, they become better at managing their impulses and begin to develop self-control. Towards the end of early childhood, their method of play changes from associative, which involves minimal interaction, to cooperative play. In cooperative play, children work towards a common goal and deal with conflict along the way. At this stage, children may express their emotions through actions rather than with words. Due to their egocentrism, they may have difficulty understanding others' emotions, but begin to be able to do so as they reach the end of this stage.

In middle childhood, which is from the ages of six to eleven, children reach many major milestones (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). In this stage, a deeper and more complex understanding of self is reached as children begin to recognize their competencies and compare themselves to others. Peer acceptance becomes more important as they move away from egocentrism to see things from others' perspectives. Emotional intelligence also grows as they better understand their own complex emotions as well as the emotions of others. Physical growth begins to slow down at this stage which gives children a better mastery over their bodies.

From the ages of eleven to fourteen, children experience early adolescence during which puberty takes place (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). Children begin to explore and form their identity at this age, incorporating their ethnicity and social influence. Their emotional lives are

fraught with difficult, intense, and oftentimes negative feelings that they may have difficulty controlling. Children experience extreme physical change, rapidly growing in height and weight as the changes brought about by puberty impact their brains. This extreme physical change combined with heightened emotion and higher importance placed on social acceptance makes this a difficult and often confusing time for children. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children at this stage move from concrete operational thinking into formal operational thinking (Babakr, Mohamedamin & Kakamad, 2019). In the concrete operational thinking stage, children can easily understand and think about concrete concepts but may have difficulty with abstract thought. In formal operational thinking, children begin to think more logically and deal with abstract concepts.

The fourth stage of childhood, mid-adolescence, occurs from the ages of fourteen to eighteen (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). As this is the final stage before young adulthood, children will work towards establishing identity, independence, and maturity at this stage. The transition from concrete to formal operational thinking that began in the previous stage will help children at this stage grow their relationships, stabilize their emotions, and make decisions about their future. Socially, children will begin to move away from trying to fit in as they assert themselves as individuals. They develop an emotional maturity that helps them to better understand and convey their emotions as well as be more empathetic toward those around them. Physically, children's pubescent growth spurt will either continue or begin to slow down as they enter mid-adolescence.

Resiliency

Resiliency is an individual's ability to cope and adapt through difficult situations, which may be influenced by certain factors in their life (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). Resiliency factors

are personality traits or abilities which may be influenced by protective factors such as having supportive parents. Social-emotional skills can be resiliency factors, as many of the collaborative for academic, social, and emotional learning's (CASEL) core competencies are also traits of resilient individuals *(CASEL'S SEL Framework*, 2020). CASEL's social-emotional learning competencies are self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness.

Self-regulation is a resiliency trait as well as a social-emotional competency that helps individuals control and regulate their impulses and emotions in order to form more stable relationships and display socially acceptable behavior (Vernon & Schimmel 2019). Being able to self-regulate is an important skill for students as it will help them to focus during class and overcome difficulties they encounter in school. Engagement in school, such as participation in extracurriculars, is another resiliency trait. The involvement in the school community and connection to other students helps to foster positive attitudes about school and socialization. This is connected to a third resiliency trait, which is connections and attachments. Supportive relationships with friends and family can help individuals cultivate resilience.

Individual Counseling Process

Individual Counseling and Transitions

In this case study, Nancy is a twelve-year-old student who was recently adopted out of the foster care system and is having difficulties with her new young siblings. Nancy's school counselor would begin the individual counseling process by establishing rapport (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). This stage is about building a trusting relationship with students who may be apprehensive and uninformed about the counseling process. The first session in particular should be about getting to know Nancy and letting her know that the school counselor is here to help

and support her. This phase of the counseling process is also when the counselor must discuss informed consent and confidentiality. Resistance and reluctance are attitudes that school counselors will encounter, especially for students who do not go to the school counselor on their own but are referred by school staff. Resistant and reluctant feelings may be fueled by the belief that the school counselor is a disciplinary figure, as well as by feelings of shame or embarrassment on the part of the student. Nancy may be resistant to the school counseling process and may feel that she is in trouble for having difficulty with her new siblings. These attitudes can be countered by the authenticity of the school counselor as well as the promotion of student advocacy and autonomy.

In the intake and assessment phase of the counseling process, the school counselor will obtain and review information about Nancy in order to plan personalized and effective counseling strategies (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). This is a collaborative process that involves talking to parents, teachers, and any connected outside mental health practitioners to learn more about the student and their problems. The school counselors may also conduct assessments to gather information that will help provide the best counseling possible for Nancy. These could be assessments such as suicide risk assessments or a depression inventory.

After intake and assessment, the school counselor sets goals with Nancy and develops interventions to help her reach those goals (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). In the process of developing interventions, the school counselor needs to consider their own skill level as well as the student's background and abilities. Some interventions that a school counselor may choose to implement are a creative arts approach including play or art therapy or structured exercises such as making lists or scaling. The school counselor should be constantly assessing and adjusting their interventions as they are implemented.

The final steps of the individual counseling process are termination and referral (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). School counselors may reach this stage sooner than a typical mental health counselor as school counseling is a short-term, goal-oriented process. Having been adopted out of the foster-care system, Nancy may experience feelings of abandonment which make the termination process challenging. The process of termination should always begin as soon as possible to eliminate some of the difficulties experienced with it. Termination can begin in the very first session by explaining to Nancy that sessions will be limited, following up in each session by stating the number of sessions that are left. Given the short-term nature of school counseling, school counselors may also need to make referrals for students who need further mental healthcare. Nancy may benefit from a referral to a professional mental health counselor who can work alongside the school counselor to ease the transition into her new home. The school counselor could also create a group for adopted students in the school that Nancy could join to discuss her experiences and feel support from fellow students.

Explaining Counseling

According to the American School Counselors Association (ASCA), school counselors have an obligation to support student development and provide them with access to resources that will help them (ASCA, 2022a). Part of providing support includes explaining school counseling to students and explaining to them what resources they have available to them through the school counseling office so that they can utilize them. Many students may be unaware that they have a school counselor as a supportive resource available to them due to the former nature of the field and its emphasis on career guidance. To best explain school counseling to students across a range of cognitive, emotional, and social developmental levels, I would give ASCA's definition in simple language- a school counselor is someone who helps students

succeed (ASCA, 2022b). If it has to do with becoming a better student or individual- whether that be through learning to manage emotions, improving grades, or figuring out a career, school counselors help with that. In the simplest terms, school counselors help students when they need help. In order to explain this to someone with a different culture or language, I would first consider where they are coming from. If they come from a culture that does not have school counselors, it may be especially difficult but all the more important to explain to them the resource they now have. As this may be an unfamiliar concept, it may be important to explain the limitations or the boundaries within which a school counselor can help.

Termination

Termination can be a difficult process in school counseling, especially as it has to do with children and adolescents (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). Once a beneficial student-counselor relationship has been established, the student may have a negative attitude toward ending that relationship. For students who have had previous difficulty in their relationships with adults, this may be an extremely challenging process. The difficulty of this process can be mitigated in several ways as the school counselor appropriately brings the student-counselor relationship to a close. The first way is one that was discussed in the case study of Nancy, which is to start termination from the first session. By letting the student know that the student-counselor relationship has a specific endpoint, the difficulty of termination will not be further hampered by the student not realizing it was happening. Another way to ease the termination process is to help the student make a plan of what they will do once the student-counselor relationship is over. This will help them to paint a realistic picture of what life will be like without the help of their counselor and help prepare them to make good decisions. A discussion should also be had regarding the student's feelings about the termination of the relationship, which will help them

process and accept the termination. Termination does not have to be seen as a negative thing, marking the end of counseling sessions as something to be celebrated can give students a sense of pride and accomplishment. Termination is not only stressful for the student but possibly also for the school counselor. To alleviate some of the negative feelings associated with ending a counseling relationship with a student, school counselors should look for feedback from the student as well as from their fellow school counselors. School counselors can also ease some of their worries and further help students by connecting them to resources they need as they transition out of counseling.

Ethical Considerations and Theoretical Approaches

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical orientation that I am most drawn to and believe would be the most beneficial for counseling students is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). In CBT, the counselor's role is to help the client create change in their lives by identifying irrational thoughts and helping the client lead a more rational way of life (Corey, 2017). The aspect of CBT that I most appreciate is that it can be used with students from all walks of life, but especially with those who find themselves in situations beyond their control. While some theories focus on changing an individual's situation, many of the difficult situations that students find themselves in are beyond their control- especially as it concerns their home lives. CBT's focus is to change an individual's thoughts and feelings about their situation in life, instead of changing their situation (Corey, 2017). This aspect of CBT also makes it culturally accessible compared to other theories. The concept of irrational thoughts can be used to show students that there may be other ways of thinking. Instead of encouraging students to go against familial and cultural values and

beliefs when they encounter difficulty with them, CBT could be used to show students the value of considering other perspectives.

The separation of church and state as well as ASCA ethical standards prohibits school counselors from imposing their own religious views on students as well as referring or refusing service for religious reasons (Kimbel & Schellenberg, 2013). However, school counselors should not be afraid to talk to students about religious or spiritual issues if the student desires. Students who hold spiritual or religious beliefs may need to address this dimension of their lives, and if school counselors are careful to adhere to ethical code, they should do so. Religion and spirituality can be integrated into the practice of CBT through the concept of irrational thinking. The school counselor may help the student identify irrational lines of thought that may also go against the student's personal beliefs.

Legal and Ethical Issues with Confidentiality

When working with a seven-year-old student who is referred for school counseling by their teacher, there are legal and ethical principles regarding minors to be considered. According to Virginia law 8VAC20-620-10 B., students are not required to participate in any counseling program that their parents object to (School guidance and counseling services, 1996). If this student's parents have elected to have their child opt out of school counseling services, the school counselor would not be able to provide services. Informed consent and confidentiality should be reviewed with this student in a manner that is developmentally appropriate and clear. According to ASCA ethical standards section A.2., information must be kept confidential unless it is legally required to be revealed, or if revealing the information will prevent serious and foreseeable harm (ASCA, 2022a). When private information must be revealed, school counselors must do so in collaboration with the student if appropriate, and through secure means such as in-

person contact. As advocates for the students, the school counselors' primary obligation for confidentiality is to the student- however, parents and guardians do have the right to guide their children and make choices on their behalf. Before contacting the student's parents, such as in cases of serious and foreseeable harm, it is important for the school counselor to consider parental rights as well as the nature of the harm. If it is determined that a student's parents may be the source of the serious and foreseeable harm, it would be appropriate to contact child protective services instead. According to ASCA ethical standards section A.6., school counselors provide parents or guardians with a list of outside mental health agencies when their student needs additional support that the school counselor cannot provide.

Creative Approaches

One creative approach that I would use as a school counselor is play and games. Play and games is different from play therapy as play therapy requires specific training and certification. Play and games is appropriate for use with students from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). It is especially effective with young children as they do much of their learning through play. Counselors should ask older students if they would like to engage in play and games as they may consider it too childish. Play and games can help children express difficult feelings, develop communication and problem-solving skills, and facilitate normal development. In play and games, children can use puppets to act out real-world situations or play musical chairs to learn about feelings. I would personally use play and games as a way to improve the client-counselor relationship and decrease student resistance. I would also utilize play and games with young students as a way of keeping their attention and helping them focus during sessions.

Multicultural Counseling and Transition Programming

Multicultural Competence

School counselors can develop awareness, knowledge, and skills regarding counseling diverse youth by following a multiculturally oriented counseling philosophy. Two specific multicultural competencies that can be adopted by school counselors are cultural humility and cultural comfort (Watkins et al., 2019). Cultural humility involves examining one's own cultural identity as well as striving to understand others' cultural identities. Cultural humility requires an open mind, respect for others, and the ability to not make assumptions. Cultural comfort is feeling comfortable with discussing culture with students or clients. Working towards achieving these two competencies will help school counselors be more respectful of student culture, grow their knowledge of student culture, and increase their skills in dealing with the topic of culture in the counseling relationship.

Multicultural Counseling Interventions

As different cultures hold different values and beliefs, it may be necessary for the school counselor to adapt their interventions to the diverse backgrounds of the students they counsel. Cognitive behavioral therapy has been found to be empowering for students from diverse backgrounds as it views them as the experts of their own stories (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). For students from cultures that value concrete solutions, solution-focused brief therapy may be appropriate. Such cultures may want to view the school counselor as the expert who provides the solutions and being able to quickly set goals and find solutions may help with retention. Counselors may also want to implement meditation or relaxation practices for students from cultures who practice it. With all culturally focused counseling interventions, it is important not

to assume the student's cultural background or level of acculturation. Specifically assessing the student's needs and providing interventions to meet those needs is always the best practice.

Transition Programs

Transition programs help students move from one stage or period of their life to the next. Students with learning disabilities may have trouble transitioning into the postsecondary world if they do not believe that they can succeed or know what options are available to them (Vernon & Schimmel). School counselors can help with both of these things by providing a postsecondary transition program that empowers students with learning disabilities and teaches them about the opportunities available to them. Students with autism spectrum disorder function best with a consistent routine and may have difficulty transitioning from one grade to another. The school counselor can assist these students by creating a program that shows students what they can expect when moving up in school and gradually introducing them to the next grade level. Students who have recently immigrated to the United States may have several major transitions to make alongside the transition into a new school. The transition into a new culture and potentially a new language can be difficult, and the school counselor can help ease that transition by creating a transition support group for recently immigrated students.

Counseling At-Risk Children/Adolescents

Framework and Interventions for At-Risk Children

The 4-step framework for working with at-risk children and adolescents described by Vernon & Schimmel begins with assessment to determine a student's most urgent problems (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). At this step, the school counselor gathers information including symptoms of depression or anxiety, family history, career goals, and medical history. Following assessment, the second step is prevention, in which the school counselor prevents further trauma

by providing the student with the immediate support and resources they need. In the third step, intervention, the counselor will choose an approach that is best suited to the student's needs. The fourth and final component of this framework is social advocacy, which requires a school counselor to be knowledgeable about the social justice issues their students face.

To carry out the third component of this framework, intervention, with a student dealing with substance abuse and addiction, it would be necessary to ensure the student is receiving outside support. It is not appropriate for the school counselor to be the sole mental health caregiver for students with serious physical and mental health problems (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). School counselors can work in collaboration with outside mental healthcare providers to provide the best support possible for students. Play and games or other creative arts interventions are useful for students with substance abuse and addiction problems as they may have a difficult time expressing the complex emotions involved. Depending on the severity of the substance abuse problems within the school, the school may want to implement substance abuse intervention programs and groups led by professionals trained in this area. Having these programs in the school provides further interventions for school counselors to refer students to.

For students with depressive and anxiety disorders, it is also appropriate to collaborate with outside mental healthcare providers. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has been found to be an effective intervention for reducing anxiety and depression in students (Corey, 2017). Creative arts interventions are also useful for students with depression and anxiety (Vernon & Schimmel, 2019). Due to the abstract nature of the feelings involved, depression and anxiety may be difficult for students to express. Allowing students to physically draw how they feel may help them express these emotions and feel better understood by the school counselor.

Crisis Planning and Management

Crisis management plans are written documents created by a school outlining the school's response in the event of different types of crises (Erbacher, Singer & Poland, 2014). All school staff should be trained in the contents of this plan and should each have a copy in case the plan needs to be enacted. A crisis management team is a group of individuals whose job is to coordinate the response to a crisis and enact the crisis management plan. This team is typically comprised of school staff, relevant outside agencies, and community members. For example, a team may include the school principal, a school psychologist or counselor, law enforcement, medical staff, and community members who can facilitate communication between parents, students, and the school. Team members should be specifically selected for knowledge of crisis situations and personal traits such as level-headedness. Depending on a school's level of resources, a school counselor may be chosen to oversee meeting the emotional needs of staff and students during and after a crisis.

The three tiers of crisis postvention are universal interventions, selective interventions, and indicated interventions (Erbacher, Singer & Poland, 2014). Universal interventions are crisis prevention programs, crisis drills, and the creation and implementation of crisis plans and crisis management teams. Secondary interventions are interventions for specific at-risk groups, which may include providing support and resources for students who have experienced crises. Indicated interventions are the long-term follow-up efforts made to prevent further trauma for those who have experienced a crisis. Appropriate follow-up interventions for students who have experienced a traumatic event include grief counseling groups, individual professional counseling, and marking the anniversary of a crisis.

Suicide Prevention Programs

The signs of suicide (SOS) program is an evidence-based suicide prevention program that teaches middle and high school students to acknowledge signs of suicide, reach out, and tell a trusted adult (Volungis, 2020). As a universal prevention program, this is a school-wide program that all students can participate in. This program has been proven to increase student knowledge and decrease suicide attempts. Sources of Strength is another evidence-based suicide prevention program that recruits peer leaders to change student ideas regarding suicide and seeking help (Calear et al., 2022). These student leaders' model positive behaviors and promote the message of the program through posters, presentations, and awareness days. Sources of strength is an indicated prevention program as it seeks to reduce individual risk factors. These programs are important in that they reduce the risk of suicide among the student population. All students can be involved in these programs, including at-risk students as well as not at-risk students can increase the student knowledge base regarding suicide. School staff should also be involved in these programs to increase their knowledge of the signs of suicide and to show students that they are trusted adults.

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