

Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Counseling

Christopher Vazquez

Department of Education, Liberty University

Author Note

Christopher Vazquez

Department of Educational School Counseling, Liberty University, Lynchburg Virginia.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Christopher Vazquez,
Liberty University, Lynchburg Virginia, 1971 University Blvd, Lynchburg, VA 24515. Email:
cvazquez11@liberty.edu

Developmental and Considerations in Counseling

■ In my career as a professional school counselor, I will encounter students like Larissa. Larissa is a fourteen-year-old who was born in Mexico but has since become a legal American citizen. Larissa has asked to speak with me about her home life. She has been experiencing conflicts with her parents. Larissa explains to me that she has been arguing with her parents a lot lately. The arguments stem from her friends at school. She wants to spend more time with them outside of school on the weekends, but her parents want her to stay home with them and partake in their family functions. She also explained to me how her parents tell her that she can invite her friends over to her house, but she is reluctant to do so. The reason being is that her parents do not speak English and she feels as though her parents do not understand what it is like for her. She wants to be respectful of her parents but is having a hard time finding the balance between honoring them and wanting a teenage social life.

As Larissa's counselor, I would make sure to address the developmental and cultural factors that are relevant to her situation. Even before any of that, I would check myself for counselor bias. Saracho and Evans (2021) discuss how developmental theories have played a vital role in early childhood education. They also go on to speak about how for these theories to be effective, counselors must continue to self-evaluate. This self-evaluation provides counselors with an open-mindedness that prevents them from becoming biased toward one's cultural ideology. Having checked myself, I would begin by explaining to Larissa how she can find a balance in her developing independence and respect for her Mexican cultural heritage. Once we had the first session together, I would ask her if she would be willing to have her parents and other family members attend a session with us. I know that family unity is important in Mexican

culture. Building upon her support system is a vital key for developmental growth in this situation.

Once Larissa's family has come to our counseling session, I would begin to describe to them the four stages of childhood development: early childhood, middle childhood, early adolescents, and mid-adolescents. Vernon and Schimmel (2019) discuss how these stages continue to change throughout the development of the child.

A student who is in the early childhood stage is between the ages of two and five and will go through three major changes: self-development, social development, and emotional development. During self-development, the child begins to understand that not everyone thinks the same way that they do. They also begin to learn more self-control so that they are not as frustrated when their needs are not met right away. As they continue to get older children start to develop socially. During their social development, they begin to engage more in play. Boys preferer to be with other boys and girls tend to play with other girls. Both genders are still learning how to share and oftentimes will still struggle with minor conflicts in their play times. The final change in early childhood development is emotional development. As they reach the age of five both boys and girls begin to understand the emotions of others better. They begin to see how others can be upset and will respond appropriately. They do this either through verbal expressions such as saying I am sorry or through physical expressions such as a hug.

The second stage of student development is Middle childhood. Middle childhood students are between the ages of six and eleven. They will develop through the growth of self, social development, and emotional growth. Children going through self-development begin to understand themselves better and can articulate the ways in which they see themselves. Vernon and Schimmel (2019) give an example of a little boy expressing how he is a fast runner. They

also say that around the age of eight is when a child's self-esteem starts to solidify. Their self-esteem is either high or low. School counselors must be on the lookout to help positively influence a child. Children in middle childhood continue to grow and begin to develop socially. Socialization with other students becomes a great issue for many kids. They start to change from an egocentric mindset to one where they can see the interests of others. Seeking approval from their peers becomes their number one priority. They add extra pressure on themselves by wanting to have a "best friend" and wanting to be accepted by all. This stage of life also produces gender distinction and segregation. Boys tend to become more physical in their forms of play while girls tend to be more indirect. The final change in middle childhood is emotional development. During this point in their lives, boys and girls can understand, control, and express their emotions. They are also better at being able to see the emotions in others. Vernon and Schimmel (2019) say that middle-childhood children learn more in-depth emotions such as shame, pride, and guilt. They also say that how a child develops emotions will show how they succeed in school.

Students entering early adolescence are more often than not between the ages of eleven and fourteen. It is at this time in their lives that most boys and girls begin to go through puberty. This plays a major role in their self, social, and emotional development. Self-development brings about self-rule. Early adolescents are beginning to search for their self-worth and are seeking independence from their parents. This causes many problems, including insecurity. They are of the mindset that their peers are always looking at them or thinking about them. This causes them unnecessary stress and anxiety. In addition to this kind of thinking adolescents also believe that they are unique and invulnerable. They believe that because of their "invulnerability" bad things only happen to others but not for them. This mindset produces negative and risky behaviors.

Social development continues to grow in early adolescents. It is during this phase of life that teenagers begin to develop cliques and unmistakable friend groups. These groups tend to come with an unspoken set of “rules” on how friends should act and how they dress. This leads to acceptance or rejection. How adolescents learn to deal with acceptance, rejection, and peer pressure will determine the risks they are willing to take to fit in with their friends. Emotional development is the final change in the development of early adolescence. During this time adolescence will experience many different emotions. They included but are not limited to shame, sadness, confusion, anxiety, guilt, depression, and anger. Adolescence often masks all these emotions through the expression of anger. Many times, adults often miss the underlying emotions that teenagers are going through. They only see the anger and reply in anger themselves. It is up to professional school counselors to be able to recognize those emotions in students. They must also have the patience to work with teenagers in this stage of life.

The fourth and final stage of student development is Mid-Adolescence. Students in this stage are typically between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. They are on the edge of exiting childhood and entering adulthood. This aging continues to provide growth which includes self, social, and emotional development. Adolescents in this stage start to grow by improving themselves. They are no longer concerned about what their peers think of them. They strive for more freedom and independence by doing the opposite of what others may tell them. They also begin to create a new identity for themselves which often includes concepts of religion, ethics, and sexual growth. Mid-adolescents are more sexually active during this time in their lives.

Tetering (2020) did a study that showed sexually active females in mid-adolescent have greater development of self than males do. Peer groups are still of importance to mid-adolescence, but it is not always a major priority. This is a sign that their social development is growing. They also

begin to acknowledge the fact that no one is perfect, and that all friendships and relationships have ups and downs. This causes them to become less exclusive and open to many different kinds of friendships. Emotional growth can be seen when mid-adolescents become less defensive and more empathetic. They are maturing to the point of being able to see things from someone else's point of view. They also are now capable to express their own emotions to others.

Larissa and her family benefit from learning about the four stages of childhood development. I hope that once they gained more knowledge about this subject, Larissa's parents will be able to see the problem from their child's point of view. I will do my best to explain to Larissa's parents that it is very common for a child in mid-adolescent to want more independence. It is a sign that she is maturing positively. She is a very resilient child. Throughout our time together, I will do my best to explain to Larissa's parents three resiliency traits that positively impact their daughter. They are self-regulation, proactive parenting, and community. Vernon and Schimmel (2019) help to break these down in greater detail. Self-regulation is the ability to show self-control and balance both negative and positive emotions. Proactive parents are at least one parent (or caregiver) that provides appropriate limits and boundaries but is not overbearing with control and is willing to listen to their child. Community is having positive relationships outside of a core family. I truly believe that once Larissa and her family understand the concepts of childhood development, they will come to a mutual understanding of one another. I hope this understanding will lead to healing and positive growth for the entire family.

Individual Counseling Process

In my career as a professional school counselor, I will have to provide individual counseling to young students. The stages of individual counseling presented by Vernon and Schimmel (2019)

have been a great insight into my educational journey. It has helped to prepare me to work with students just like Nancy. Nancy is twelve and has recently been adopted out of the foster care system and into a new family home. She is struggling with having new younger siblings in her life.

Now that Nancy has been placed in my care, I must make sure to help her transition into her new life as easily as possible. First, I will gain as much knowledge as I can about the foster care system. The more I know and can understand the place Nancy has come from, the better I will be able to assist her. Next, I will work on an intake and assessment form. Vernon and Schimmel (2019) state that an assessment starts the moment the counselor receives information about a child by reviewing a file, meeting with the child, or talking about the needs of a child with a teacher or parent. Since I have been given information about Nancy, my assessment has begun. The first thing I noticed during Nancy's assessment is safety. Children in the foster care system oftentimes never feel safe. They are always on the move from one place to the next and often hardships follow them. I want to create a safe place (physically and emotionally) for Nancy. To do this I must establish a strong rapport with Nancy. Vernon and Schimmel (2019) explain that the best way a counselor can build rapport with a child is by expressing integrity, thoughtfulness, and consistency. In addition to that, a counselor must do their best to follow through on their promises. In the case of Nancy, my approach will be to promise her that I will do my best to provide her with care and respect to the best of my ability. This is not a promise of healing her but a promise of being willing to listen and care for her. By doing this I am meeting the ASCA (American School Counselors Association) ethical standards for school counselors. The ASCA states that school counselors have a primary obligation to the students, to treat them with dignity and respect as unique individuals, and to foster and affirm all students and their

identity and psychosocial development. To help break the ice with Nancy I would start our session together by playing a picture-matching card game. The cards have pictures of people with words describing them. One card describes siblings. I take this card and start to talk about my siblings and how it can be difficult with them sometimes. This opens up a door for Nancy to discuss her feelings about her new siblings. Now that I know more about her situation, I would suggest she join a small group counseling session. The students in the small group have all been adopted out of the foster care system. This is a great resource for Nancy because it provides her with peers who have a common struggle and are in a safe place to work through their struggles together. Being able to express her feelings to others will help to enhance her transition into her new family.

Once Nancy and I have had a session or two, I would ask her if she would be willing to have her parents come and sit in on a session with us. When they are all together, I would describe to them Nancy's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Cognitive development is how a child's mind thinks. I would be helping Nancy learn to have a positive outlook on life by training her mind to dwell on positive things. Emotional development is learning about one's emotions and how to work through them so that they do not overwhelm one's life. Lastly, I would tell them that social development is how a child grows through interactions with their peers and other adults. I would be helping Nancy to build a strong supportive community with others in addition to those in her own family.

I must be culturally aware of others. Especially when working with students (or their parents) whose first language is different from my own. As a professional school counselor, it is my job to provide parents and students with the best form of communication. One way I can help

to do that is by learning a new language myself. Another way is by providing a translator to intermediate on behalf of the students or their parents.

One of the biggest struggles in counseling children and adolescents is termination. Termination is the end of counseling sessions. Termination is hard for both the school counselor and the student. Vernon and Schimmel (2019) explain that termination sometimes happens unexpectedly and that it is always good to frequently discuss termination. An example they give talks about termination with a student during their first counseling session. This helps to provide them with a big picture of counseling. A second example they give is to wait for a few sessions and then bring up the topic of termination again. This helps students to set a pace for their counseling journey. Having a “celebration” day is another way to discuss termination. This idea is to celebrate the student for overcoming their struggle. A fourth way to work through termination is to have a “refresher” policy. This concept is the idea that a student may always come back to you for help if they need it. It provides positive reinforcement for a student who may be afraid of relapsing back into their struggle. Corey (2017) suggests that students can deal with termination by creating a goal. Once a student reaches their goal then they may no longer need assistance from a counselor. This provides them with peace during the termination transition. Vernon and Schimmel provide one final strategy. They suggest that counselors begin to gradually phase a student out of counseling. This is done by increasing the length and time between each counseling session. This provides students with a way to monitor their progress.

Ethical Consideration and Theoretical Approaches

Every professional school counselor has a theoretical orientation that they use when counseling students. I preferer to use a combination of two specific theories. They are humanistic and holistic approaches. The humanistic approach centers on the idea that to fix someone you must

focus on the here and now. It ignores the past and focuses only on the present situation. This approach also focuses on the goodness of all people. Those who follow this theory believe that all people have goodness in them and that a person can fix their problems through self-actualization. If you know you have a problem, then you can fix it. Corey (2017) discusses how Carl Rogers was a great spokesperson for humanistic psychology. He used the concepts of the humanistic approach and added his own special set of skills. His form of counseling has helped thousands of people.

A holistic approach is a concept of taking the best parts of multiple theories and using them to help counsel someone. The key to this approach is to use the best tools situated for each individual. No two people are alike, so every counseling session will look different. Corey (2017) describes the holistic approach as understanding all aspects of oneself which includes family, culture, school, and work. Corey (2017) also talks about one of the founders of the holistic approach, Alfred Adler. Adler had a very hard life. He was sick as a young boy. He nearly died of pneumonia at the age of four. He also lived through the horrors of World War One. His life experience helped shape the way he saw the world. He used his past and present to help build a better future. He looked to his family, culture, school, and work to help provide him with the answers he sought in life. He believed that for a person to fix their problems they must have a goal. Once this goal has been set a person can reach it by exploring and developing their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Adler's work has been used to help many people, including children in educational settings.

I enjoy using both of these theoretical approaches because they offer great insight into helping children solve their problems. Like the humanistic approach, I do believe that there is good in most people, and self-actualization helps a student find their drive to succeed in life. I

also believe in the holistic approach. No two people are alike. There is not just one way to help someone, there are multiple ways to do so. I believe that a child can learn from their past mistakes to help improve their future. Looking to one's family, culture, school, and work help to create a positive support system for a struggling student.

A holistic approach opens the door to discussing the issues of worldview and faith with a student in a secular school setting. This is done by talking about a student's culture. Every student has a special and unique take on culture. Many cultures have an element to them which is known as spirituality. Spirituality is a form in which a person finds their support system. As a professional school counselor, it is my job to help build and cultivate a student's support system. McMahon (2018) discusses how a counselor needs to be open to the idea of spirituality in other people's cultures and how they must be willing to support a child's spirituality.

Professional school counselors must always consider ethical and legal issues when working with children. The American School Counselor Association provides ethical codes for school counselors regarding protecting children. They state that counselors must promote autonomy and balance in their desire to do good with their intention to not harm (ACA, 2014). This includes certain circumstances in which a minor may go to counseling without the consent of a parent. Vernon and Schimmel (2019) state that minors may receive counseling without their parent's consent if they are seeking help regarding substance abuse, sexual abuse, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and contraception. If a seven-year-old student is referred to me by his teacher, it is my responsibility to find out why. If the child does not meet the qualifications listed above, then I must inform his parents of his visit. I would start by asking them to fill out an informed consent form. This is a document giving the student legal permission to come to me to receive counseling. This form also talks about privacy and confidentiality for the student. I

would explain to the student and his parents that what is said in my office stays in my office unless the student has been harmed and will harm himself or will harm others. I will also explain to them that I will do my absolute best to continue to work with the student to the best of my abilities. The only way I would refer my student to someone else would be if his problems are absolutely outside the scope of my counseling abilities or if I had a prior dual relationship with that child.

In addition to ethical considerations, professional counselors must provide creative ways to approach children in counseling. Vernon and Schimmel give a list of creative ideas that include metaphors, music, games, and art. I would use art to help my students. As a child, I found that I could express myself through different art forms. These forms included painting, drawing, and building (sculpting). I want to provide these same opportunities for the students I will counsel. Another form of art that can be used is photography. Students can be given a task to take pictures of things that make them happy and things that make them sad. They will bring those photos with them to their counseling sessions and talk about them. This allows the student to begin to open up about their struggles.

Multicultural Counseling and Transition Programming

Professional counselors must develop their awareness, knowledge, and skills, regarding counseling diverse youth. I plan to do this by partaking in various youth activities within my community. Bartosh (2021) says that professional counselors who work in intercultural environments are connected to social-ethnic groups and their representatives. I can achieve this goal by volunteering to help with my local boys' and girls' sports groups such as basketball, baseball, and soccer. Having the opportunity to work with diverse youth outside of a school setting gives them a more excellent knowledge of their culture, spiritual, and religious beliefs.

Vernon and Schimmel (2019) give many examples of how to help counsel ethnically diverse children. Two ethnic groups that caught my attention were African Americans and Latinos.

African Americans make up about fourteen percent of the U.S. population. They have strong values of unity (Umoja), self-determination (kujichagalia), faith (Imani), and creativity (kuumba). I can use this knowledge to help better counsel both boys and girls of African American descent. When working with African American males I can remind them of Kujichagalia (self-determination) in helping them to achieve their goals. With females, I can speak about Umoja (unity) in helping them with relational struggles. I can also use Imani (faith) to help both grow in their spiritual beliefs.

Latino youth incorporate eighteen percent of the general U.S. population. Latinos have many strong values that help them grow in their student learning and development, culture, and spiritual beliefs. Their values include faith in their family (familism), respect towards others (respeto), and trusting one another (confianza). This knowledge is useful when working with Latino students. It provides me (their counselor) with an opportunity to help grow their social actions and self-advocacy skills. If Latino students can express themselves to their community by learning about their own culture, then they are well on their way to success.

Professional school counselors must be able to provide culturally appropriate interventions. Vernon and Schimmel (2019) provide excellent examples of such interventions. they are creative arts, music, storytelling, and bibliotherapy. Creative art is an excellent way to express one's emotions. All cultures throughout world history have used different forms of art to express their emotions and deepest desires. One way to use this with children is to allow them to paint a physical picture of the pain they are feeling. Music is another great tool to use with children. One way to use this in educational counseling is to have students create a playlist of

their favorite songs that represent their culture and community. Storytelling and bibliotherapy go hand in hand. Many cultures around the world have built their communities by passing down their history through spoken stories. Years later younger generations began to write down those stories to preserve them for future generations. One way to apply this to student counseling is to provide students with an opportunity to tell a story. This allows the student to be more comfortable in counseling and lets the counselor gain more insight into the life of the student.

School counselors must be equipped with providing transitional programs for students. Three transition programs that are beneficial for students are students with special needs, students moving up into another grade, and students moving away to a new school. Students who have special needs should have access to programs that help them grow and become as independent as possible.

Students moving up into a new grade level may have some anxiety about doing so. This is often the case for students moving up from elementary school to middle school. The fear of change and the unknown is often crippling for younger students. A counselor can help with this transition by having older students who have adjusted well come and share their experiences with younger students. This helps build community and provides peace of mind for younger students. Seeing their older peers doing well provides them with the hope that everything will be ok.

One final way a counselor can support a child through transition is by helping a child who is moving away to another school. This can be achieved by finding out the name and location of the school the child is transferring to. Once they know this information the counselor may call the school and ask to speak with their school counselor. Letting the student know that they are doing this provides them with a sense of peace and not one of abandonment. Hopefully,

the new counselor will be welcoming of the new student and make the transfer as pleasant as possible.

Counseling At-Risk Children/Adolescents

A professional counselor must be prepared to help At-risk children and adolescents. One way to do this is to have a framework from which to start. Vernon and Schimmel made a simple four-step framework for counselors to use to help at-risk children. The four key points are assessment, prevention, intervention, and social advocacy.

Assessment is the place to start in this framework. Assessment helps to set a baseline for counselors to work with when helping their adolescent clients. It is also a continuous process that helps prevents the counselor from getting sidetracked during the student's counseling journey. To keep the assessment process running smoothly counselors must continue to other sources of information on their clients. This includes a complete family history and seeking out medical history from the client.

Prevention comes next in the framework. Prevention is finding programs to help prevent the problems of a child before they even happen. Vernon and Schimmel suggest that counselors use the Essentials of Childhood. It is a program created to help prevent and eliminate child maltreatment. It provides children with safety, stability, and nurturing. This is done by finding key stakeholders in a community (people with influence and power) and having them understand and help meet the needs of a child.

Intervention is the third component of the framework. Intervention goes hand in hand with prevention. Once a counselor finds a way to prevent a problem, they must intervene to stop problems that already exist. One way a counselor can do this is by considering using creative arts

in their interventions. Creative arts help to meet a wide range of needs that a child may be facing. It also covers many diverse cultural backgrounds.

The final part of this framework is social advocacy. Vernon and Schimmel describe social advocacy as knowing how to be an effective support system for one's community. This is accomplished by counselors who are willing to continue to educate themselves on specific social justice issues their clients may be facing and are willing to advocate alongside them.

Many interventions can be used to help at-risk children and adolescents. If a child is suffering from substance abuse and addiction the first step a counselor can take is to get an accurate assessment of the student's problem. This can be achieved by asking an overestimation question to the student. Vernon and Schimmel gave the example of a counselor asking a student if they drank about fifteen or twenty beers during a party. This shocked the student and allowed him to answer with a more honest number. This broke down the barriers between the student and the counselor. It also created a safe place to discuss the student's struggles. Another common struggle at-risk children face is depression. One way a counselor can help a student with depression is by using adventure therapy (AT). AT involves getting outside and being in nature. Another tool a counselor may use to help a student fight depression may be to not tell a student he has depression. Instead, explain to a student that what he is feeling is common and that you will be willing to help him overcome it. This gives the student hope that they are not alone in their struggles.

■ Crisis planning and management are two very important parts of a professional counselor's job. A crisis management plan is very important because it is a guide to help counselors in the event of an emergency. Erbacher (2015) described a crisis plan as a written document that is developed at either the district or school level. The plan defines different crises and details planned

responses by school crisis teams. A crisis management team is a group of individuals who come together to help write and enforce the crisis management plan. The team often includes teachers, educators, school staff, and people from the local community. The school counselor's role on the crisis management team is to provide support for the needs of the staff and the students during a time of crisis. One way to do this is by working through the three tiers of crisis postvention. They are the universal interventions, selective interventions, and indicated interventions in the following months. Erbacher (2015) explains that these tiers help counselors monitor students at each level to see who requires more in-depth support.

Students who experience a traumatic event may need help from a school counselor. One way a school counselor may help is by using an ACE test. Adverse Childhood Experience study is a tool that helps to describe a child (or adult) who has gone through a traumatic event or life. ACE also describes students who have attempted suicide. Two suicide prevention programs that professional counselors may use are The Signs of Suicide and The Kentucky Experience. These two evidence-based programs have been helping students for over fifteen years. It is important to have suicide prevention programs in schools because it protects all students and helps to build a better community. Those involved in the program should be a collaboration of student parents, teachers, administrators, and other educators.

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