

Benchmark Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Counseling Assignment

Annalise Shaffer

Department of Counselor Education & Family Studies, Liberty University

Author Note

Annalise B. Shaffer

I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Annalise B. Shaffer

Email: agiordano2@liberty.edu

Introduction

To work as a counselor successfully, effectively, and ethically in a school setting, professionals must have a deep understanding of various relevant topics. These include being knowledgeable about child development, upholding ethical standards, the recommended stages of individual counseling, various theoretical counseling orientations, creative interventions, confidentiality, frameworks for working with at-risk students, crisis planning, and suicide prevention and education. While this list is not exhaustive, these are the topics explored and discussed in-depth throughout the body of this assignment.

Developmental Considerations in Counseling

Typical Development

While each child's development is different, there are normative tracks, milestones, and changes for different age groups. For example, according to Erikson's developmental theory, early childhood is where a child will learn to have foundational levels of trust and during will develop a unique personality through experiences of autonomy, shame, doubt, initiative, and guilt (Ray, 2015). According to Piaget, another big change is that a child will gain the acquisition of a spoken and written language (Ray, 2015). According to Kohlberg's moral development levels and stages, middle childhood includes changes such as gaining an understanding of interpersonal relationships, being aware of group feelings and beliefs, and increased interpersonal conformity (Ray, 2015). In early adolescence, according to Greenspan's emotional development stages, children are able to self-regulate and concentrate without constant support, they can effectively organize their ideas and communicate them, and competition and disappointment can be faced without overaction (Ray, 2015). Mid-adolescence, again according to Greenspan, is when children learn to empathize with others, becomes less dependent their

position within a friend group, and establish their sense of independence from their parents and other adults (Ray, 2015).

Student Knowledge of Counseling

It is important to explain counseling to your students because there are many different details that need to be clarified. These details include the limits of confidentiality, the purpose of counseling, the rights they have as a student, and the expectations of a counselor. As stated in ASCA Ethical Standard A.1.a, school counselors are expected to “have a primary obligation to the students, who are to be treated with dignity and respect as unique individuals.” (American School Counselor Association, 2022). Students should be able to fully understand what their school counselor is there for and how they can utilize their services. In lay terms- in order to meet the needs of individuals with a varied range of cognitive, emotional, or social developmental levels- school counseling can be explained by saying its purpose is to work with students, teachers, parents, and other people to ensure that students are physically and emotionally healthy and are able to do their best in schools. As professionals, we are there to make the school experience safe and supportive (American School Counselor Association, 2022).

When explaining counseling to an individual from another culture whose first language is different from mine, I would take a number of considerations into account. First, I would think about how communication can be facilitated. Is there a school staff personnel who can translate? A family member? Is the family comfortable with this? If the family and/or student does not feel comfortable with someone translating, I can try to use an online translator. I should also be mindful of different cultural dialects within one language. I can try to understand and learn as

best I can. Learning major words and basic phrases beforehand could be helpful, as it may make them feel accepted and welcomed.

Individual Counseling Process

Application of the Stages of Counseling

The first stage of the individual counseling process is establishing rapport (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). When working with this specific client, Nancy, building rapport is extremely important, as it is foundational to the counseling process. This can be done by discovering and discussing details like Nancy's favorite hobbies, activities, and pastimes. I could also offer to do an activity with her, such as coloring or allowing her to use a fidget toy. The main focus is getting her to feel comfortable in my presence.

The next phase is resistance and reluctance, which can be a bit challenging (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). Nancy has experienced a lot of recent change in her life. Because I may not know how this change has affected Nancy just yet, I need to remain warm, supportive, empathic, caring, and nonjudgmental (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). It is important that I, as the professional, remember that any reluctance or resistance is not personal, for often times emotions and actions are the only things children feel as though they can control.

The third stage of the counseling process is intake and assessment (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). During this stage, I may get in contact with parents, teachers, and other outside resources (if a release of information is signed) to learn as much as I can about Nancy's current situation. Why was she referred? By whom? Because I know Nancy was recently adopted, I may try to learn information from her previous case manager as well as her adoptive family. It would be beneficial to learn information about Nancy's caregivers, her time in foster care, her current home life, and any relevant personal information.

After this, I can start the fourth stage of the process- developing an intervention that I think will best meet Nancy's needs. Based on the information I have gathered thus far; I can choose to implement a number of different types of exercises and activities that I believe Nancy will respond well to. Traditional talk therapy is not incredibly effective with children and adolescents, so other avenues such as "my invisible suitcase", art or music centered, writing centered, or games can help drive us into a deeper connection and conversation (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). The goal of any intervention in this scenario would be to explore why Nancy is having difficulties with her new adopted younger siblings.

Termination, the fifth stage of the counseling process, occurs when sessions are no longer going to take place. This could occur for multiple reasons, including Nancy's family moving, Nancy making significant progress, or the professional being away for an extended period of time. Whatever the case may be, this step must be handled with care to ensure Nancy's welfare. Strategies for a successful termination are discussed in the following subsection. Overall, it is important to make sure Nancy is a part of the process and knows what is going on (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023).

The last stage of the individual counseling process is making appropriate referrals (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). This step includes advocating for the client's care beyond the scope of my abilities, training, and expertise. For Nancy specifically, if she is still having difficulties adjusting to her new family and home life, I could refer a family therapist who specializes in adoptions and blended families. Other community opportunities/resources that might enhance her transition to a new home are sports that she can play with her siblings, clubs that include her siblings, and extracurricular classes such as cooking, dancing, painting, etc. I think it is also important to connect Nancy with other adopted children if possible, so she has a

community in which she can identify and feel a sense of belonging. Depending on Nancy's personality, it may also be beneficial to help her find activities that are solely for her- like school sports or clubs as well.

Termination

Termination can be one of the more difficult tasks when counseling children and adolescents. As the sessions come to an end, it is importance to handle termination with care and leave on a positive note- making sure to not negatively impact the child. Six strategies that can potentially help both counselor and student to end the counseling relationship appropriately are (1) preparing the client for the conclusion of counseling prior to the final session, (2) work on processing the client's emotions in regard to termination, (3) explore the presentation of negative emotions such as loss, agitation, anger, and anxiety, (4) help the client arrange other future counseling if needed, (5) prepare the client for "normal stumbling" that may occur after termination occurs, and (6) fading out counseling sessions gradually by increasing the elapsed time between sessions (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). The termination phase can be tough for both the professional and the client- depending on the depth of the therapeutic relationship. By implementing a unique combination of these strategies, both client and professional well-being are cared for.

Theoretical Approaches and Ethical Considerations

Personal Theoretical Orientation

Personally, I feel as though I will primarily use cognitive-behavioral and solution-focused theoretical orientations when counseling students. I feel as though I align most with these theoretical approaches because both foster respect, value the therapeutic relation, are culturally adaptable, and can be tailored to creating meaningful change in the future (Corey, 2020). In

cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), the overarching key concept is the belief that thoughts, feels, and behaviors are all connected and can impact each other. CBT aims to alter unhealthy thought patterns, therefore creating meaningful change on feelings and behaviors (Corey, 2020). A technique from this framework I could implement is the model to build resilience through four simple steps (1) search, (2) construct, (3) apply, and (4) practice. Solution-focused therapy is based on the beliefs that clients are the main agent of change and the outlook for the future is viewed through a positive frame (Corey, 2020). Techniques from this theoretical framework that I would like to use are scaling and miracle questions.

When using different theoretical frameworks, it is important to consider culture and faith. Both of these approaches are flexible, can be easily adapted, and allow for the integration of concepts and ideas that the client finds important and of value. Especially in solution-focused therapy, the high utilization of questions can allow the client and professional to build an understanding of the client's specific culture. Approaching issues of worldview and faith in counseling sessions could be done by first assessing the comfortability of the client when discussing these, discovering what the client believes and feels, and having meaningful discussion if the client is willing and able. It is important that I put my thoughts, feelings, and beliefs aside during this time, as I am here to serve the purpose of helping the client.

Utilizing a Creative Approach

One creative approach I could use with students in schools is therapeutic writing. I know that this approach will not be the best fit for all students- depending on age, personality, presenting issues, and attitude. However, I particularly like this creative approach because it can help me reach the students who are defensive or emotionally closed off. Often times, students are referred to professionals but do not walk to talk. It may be appropriate to use this approach when

students are having a difficult time articulating what they're feeling and experiencing. By not having to actually "talk" about things, students still have the opportunity to release emotions, share stories, and express themselves in a meaningful way. Therapeutic writing has been found to decrease psychological distress through variety of methods (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). These methods include journaling, writing letters, reciprocal writing, poetry, structured writing, and word clusters (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023).

Confidentiality

Breaching confidentiality is a hard situation for a counselor, but there are times where we are called to report specific instances and experiences that a child shares. According to the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2022) code A.2.f, breaching confidentiality is necessary when the professional is acting "to prevent serious and foreseeable harm to the student or others." Put simply, counselors must report instances of the child reporting to hurt themselves or others as well as if someone is planning to or actively harming the student. Counselors have to use their professional judgment as to what information qualifies under this code. This is when it may be appropriate to contact parents and make referrals as needed, ensuring to use the least intrusive methods, and respecting the student's rights (American School Counselor Association, 2022).

If the content the student is sharing does not meet that threshold, the counselor has an obligation to uphold confidentiality under code A.2.f (American School Counselor Association, 2022). To help students understand this concept, counselors are expected to explain confidentiality limits and obtain informed consent when possible, according to codes A.2.c and A.2.e (American School Counselor Association, 2022). It is important to note that the discussion

of confidentiality and consent will change with grade level, developmental ability, maturity, age, and other personal characteristics of the student.

Counseling At-Risk Children/Adolescents

Framework

When working with at-risk children and adolescents, a four-step model is followed. The steps include assessment, prevention, intervention, and social advocacy (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). Assessment can be defined as learning what exactly the student is struggling with, what he or she is going through, and identifying the most pressing issues at hand. During this stage, it is important to utilize a biopsychosocial approach (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). The next stage, prevention, is when the counselor works identify defensive and precautionary measures to avoid any further traumatization or adverse experiences (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). The intervention step is closely linked with prevention. Intervention is the step where action is taken to improve the situation at hand (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). There are a number of theoretical frameworks to utilize, and it is important to be mindful that every child will respond differently. The counselor is expected to implement what works best for the student. The final step, social advocacy, is where the counselor works to understand current social issues, the effects of intersectionality, and works alongside relevant community members to build a well-rounded support system for students (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023). Each of these steps should be addressed with students in this order, however it is important to note that they will overlap. Rather than looking at this model in phases, it is critical to understand that each step is an on-going process and is not limited to a specific amount of time or number of sessions (Vernon & Schimmel, 2023).

Depending on the presenting issues, different types of interventions can be utilized. Two types of interventions that could be utilized when addressing at-risk youth struggling with substance abuse and addiction are motivational interviewing and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) (Steele et al, 2020; Fadus et al., 2019). Although these interventions take different approaches, both have been utilized to decrease adolescent drinking behaviors and alcohol consumption. When at-risk youth are presenting symptoms of a depressive disorder, two types of interventions that could be utilized are rational emotive behavioral therapy and interpersonal therapy (Bernaras et al., 2019).

Crisis Planning and Management

A crisis management plan outlines how a team, or in this case a school, is called to react if and when a crisis situation arises. The purpose of a crisis management plan is to try to effectively identify the possible types of crises may occur, but also to consider the impact the crisis may have on the school (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2020). These plans include information on prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2020). The plan should identify the different types of crisis situations. The different types include facility, human, and environmental crises (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2020). On top of the types of different crises that could potentially occur, the plan must also include the different levels of severity (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2020). The plan will also cover the intentionality of the hypothetical crisis event as well as the availability of essential resources to mitigate the event (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2020). Details about plan activation, personnel in charge, and fundamental action steps are also provided (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2020).

Speaking of personnel, school-based crisis management teams typically comprise of law enforcement, school administration, health care services, as well as individuals externally

involved with the school such as emergency services, the board of education, etc. (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2020). School counselors specifically can fulfil leadership positions before, during and after a crisis occurs through planning facilitation, coordinating, responding to emotional needs of effected persons, and providing direct counseling during and after the crisis incident (Studer & Salter, 2010).

Suicide Prevention in Schools

Suicide prevention programs are important to have in schools because mental health issues of young children, adolescents, and young adults can feel monumental to this population. Without proper education and access to resources, students may feel as though they have no outlet. Looking at suicide data from 2022 to 2021, 13% of high school aged girls attempted suicide and 30% had seriously considered suicide (Pappas, 2023). More than 20% of LGBTQ+ attempted suicide, while 45% had seriously considered suicide (Pappas, 2023). These dismaying statistics represent an apparent need for intervention at all levels. According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, teachers, school mental health providers, school counselors, administration, and all other school personnel who interact with students have a responsibility in keeping children safe. All of these relevant parties should be involved.

Examples of evidence-based suicide prevention programs that a professional school counselor might use in their work with students are Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) and Signs of Suicide (SOS) (Brann et al., 2021). QPR has been found to be effective in improving attitudes and knowledge about suicide through preparing teachers and student peers to identify suicide warning signs, communicate support, and refer those showing suicidal signs to professional care (Brann et al., 2021). SOS is a hybrid program, combining curriculum and student screening, and

it has been associated with reduced suicide attempts as well as positive shifts in knowledge and attitudes regarding suicide (Brann et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Overall, it can be seen why it is imperative that school counselors are knowledgeable about topics such as typical child development, ethical standards and confidentiality, the recommended stages of individual counseling, theoretical counseling orientations, the inclusion of creative interventions, frameworks for working with at-risk students, crisis planning, and suicide prevention and education. Each of these topics carry a large amount of influence on how and why we choose to do this profession.

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