

Personal Theory of Brief Counseling in a High School Setting

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High school counselors face time constraints due to the ample number of tasks and duties for which they are responsible in their positions. They are not only required to provide direct services to students pertaining to career readiness, academics, and personal/social wellbeing, but they are also responsible for providing indirect services such as assessing school-wide needs, communicating with parents, disaggregating and disseminating data, and many more. Because school counselors are limited in the time they have to accomplish all the tasks for which they are accountable, they must find ways to provide direct individual services to students effectively and efficiently. For this reason, high school counselors should have a brief theory of counseling and subsequent techniques to utilize in a school setting. My personal theory of brief counseling is reminiscent of William Glasser's choice theory integrated with my own personal understanding of effective

counseling with adolescents and Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The theory is structured by five basic beliefs which address the wellness and prevention aspects of school counseling.

Five Basic Beliefs and Goals

The basic beliefs of my personal theory of brief counseling consist of the following:

1. The only person over whom an individual has control is him or herself.
2. There are situations over which we do not have control.
3. Past events influence an individual's growth and development but the individual has the capacity to move forward and not allow the past detain them.
4. We are driven by seven basic needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, cognitive, aesthetic, and self-actualization (Corey, 2014).
5. Needs may or may not be met but individuals can strive to meet them or have them met.

The goals of this theory are to:

1. Empower all students to reach their highest personal level of wellness and success in the career, academic, and personal/social domains.
2. Prevent or change behaviors in students that will inhibit growth and development in the career, academic, and personal/social domains.

The only person over which an individual has control is him or herself

This basic belief is empowering. True understanding of this statement allows the individual to feel they are capable of changing their behaviors. Students must comprehend that they possess the ability to change their behaviors in order to reach their goals and their personal potential. This is especially developmentally appropriate for high school students as they rely heavily on their peer groups for support and acceptance (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2016). Additionally, the school setting is where students may hear messages that elude to their failure and limitations due to factors outside of their control. When students are faced with this negativity, they often begin to believe these messages and act accordingly. Often, students with behavior issues blame others or outside forces for the way that they behave. When students believe they are capable of choosing their behavior, they begin understanding that there is no excuse for their negative behavior and they change. The role of the school counselor is to guide the student towards the understanding that they are capable of choosing their behavior.

There are situations over which we do not have control

Applying this basic belief to school

counseling is especially important in the moments in which the student does not have control. School counselors work with adolescents who are still under the guardianship of their parents, implying that situations in the home which extend beyond their control may exist. Students are also subject to not only local school rules and policies, but also the law. It is essential they understand that choice can be limited. Another important consideration is that of every-day life events. A student may be having a difficult day because of the weather or a flat tire they discovered on their way to school. Students must understand that they possess limited control over life circumstances such as these and must learn to choose positive behaviors. Understanding this basic belief is preventative and fosters wellness because students will learn to anticipate obstacles they cannot prevent and have appropriate coping skills instilled within them. The role of the school counselor is to assist students in finding ways to cope with the events over which they do not have control.

Past events influence an individual's growth and development but the individual has the capacity to move forward and not allow the past detain them

Students come from diverse backgrounds and life experiences which contribute to shaping who they are and help explain their behaviors. A student's past influences who they are, whether it be positively or negatively and it is essential for the school counselor to be aware of this. School counselors must realize that the difficulties students face in regards to their career, academic and personal/social domains could be due to their backgrounds. School counselors should demonstrate

sensitivity when addressing such issues and they should be briefly addressed if the student chooses; ultimately, the role of the school counselor is to assist the student in understanding that they have the potential to move forward and choose their behavior without allowing their pasts to detain them. This concept addresses prevention and wellness in that when a student understands that they are not a helpless victim, they are able to make positive choices in the career, academic, and personal/social (Mason & Duba, 2009). School counselors should also be aware that traumatic past events could have a lasting impact on a student and make referrals to licensed professional counselor or school-based mental health provider as needed. This basic belief would also be beneficial to communicate within the school environment. Often, teachers, administrators, peers, and even parents doubt the ability of a student based on their background. If school officials communicated this basic belief to their students and surrounding community, more would be motivated to achieve.

We are driven by seven basic needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, cognitive, aesthetic, and self-actualization

Maslow's seven basic needs address motivation and like Maslow, I believe individuals are motivated to have their basic needs met (Corey, 2014). These needs consist of seven major categories. Physiological needs are those such as shelter, food, water, clothing, air, warmth, etc. Safety needs address protection, security, order, stability, etc. Needs of love and belonging include friendship, intimacy, and affection from the different groups in which the individual comes in contact with (family, peers, teachers, etc.). Esteem

needs consist of self-esteem, achievement, mastery, etc. Cognitive needs address an individual's need for knowledge and meaning. Aesthetic needs are met through a search for beauty. Self-actualization needs are met when an individual sees their own potential, finds self-fulfillment, and seeks personal growth. For a student to be not only stable but also successful, they must be moving in the direction of self-actualization or already be in the process of becoming self-actualized.

Needs may or may not be met but individuals can strive to meet them or have them met

Needs are not met in the same ways for each student, but if needs are not being met, the student faces difficulty. The role of the school counselor is to assist the student in finding where they are in the process of having their needs met, which needs have not been met, and how they can have their needs met. The seven basic needs allow for the counselor to have a concrete way of evaluating and understanding the needs of their students. The school counselor also plays a role in assisting the student in understanding that they can strive to have their needs met because they can choose their own behaviors.

Special Considerations of the Five Basic Beliefs

While the five basic beliefs should be effective in most students' circumstances, there are special cases in which school counselors should respond to with a distinct sensitivity. School counselors should address the first basic belief (The only person an individual has control over is him or herself) with caution with students with impulse control issues, autism spectrum disorder, schizophrenia, medical

issues such as seizures, and other issues that prevent a student from choosing their behaviors. Not handling these issues with sensitivity could cause harm to the student in causing them to feel helpless and disempowered. These are also scenarios in which it may be beneficial for the school counselor to explain the second basic belief (there are situations we do not have control over). When addressing the seven basic needs with students it is important for the school counselor to consider those students whose needs may not be met due to circumstances outside their control such as socioeconomic factors.

Brief Counseling Techniques

The following techniques are based on the five basic beliefs of this brief counseling theory and assist the school counselor in helping students both effectively and efficiently. The techniques are based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, William Glasser's choice theory based reality therapy, and personal techniques I have found effective in working with adolescents.

Establishing Rapport

In a recent study by Williams et al. (2015), low-income students reported that they deeply valued their school counselor establishing a caring relationship with them. In order for counseling to be effective, the school counselor must have a relationship with the student. To establish this relationship, the counselor must be attentive to the student. The counselor should not be multitasking but be maintaining eye contact with the student and ensuring the student that they have the counselor's attention. The counselor should also refrain from judging or criticizing the student, regardless of their behavior (Banks, 2009). The counselor should also

consider beginning the conversation with the student with a topic of interest to the student that is unrelated to the problem. This will help them feel more comfortable discussing the presenting issue.

Assessing Needs

One way to accomplish assessing the student's needs is by using the seven basic needs. It may be helpful for the counselor to have these needs posted in their office for students who have visual learning preferences. Students can view the needs and explore where they are currently in having their needs met and discuss the needs still to be met. This process allows the counselor to understand the level of disclosure the student is comfortable with and how willing they are to change behaviors (Banks, 2009).

Guide Student to Assess Change

In this technique, the counselor relates the behavior to be changed or need to be met to the problem. The counselor should guide the student to assess what they would like to see change or what needs they need met for their problem to be solved. The student should be asked what they are doing about the problem currently. This helps establish an understanding between the parties of what is not working to be sure to avoid the unhelpful behavior in the future (Banks, 2009).

Guide Student to Evaluate Current Behavior

The counselor should ask the student to evaluate their current behavior and explore how the current behavior has helped or hurt in solving their problem or having their needs met (Banks, 2009). This guides the student to understand that new behaviors could be set in place to ensure the student's success in solving their problem

or having their needs met (Banks, 2009).

Guide Student to Establish Goals

The student should now have certain behaviors they would like to change to solve their problem or have their needs met. Because their time with the counselor will be brief (spanning only a few sessions), the goal should be directly related to the behavior needing to be changed and should be simple and measurable. For example, if the student's belonging needs with peers are not being met, a simple and measurable goal could be for the student to join a club and begin attending the meetings bi-weekly for the remainder of the school year.

Encouragement

Time with the school counselor should always end with encouragement and a reminder that the student only has control over him or herself. Encouragement from the counselor allows the student to understand that there is someone in the school building that is for them and willing to help them have their needs met. Reminding the student that they only have control over him or herself empowers the student to believe that they are capable of achieving their goals and that they do not need to be concerned about issues outside of their control.

Case Study

Jeannie is a fifteen year old high school sophomore who is on the varsity basketball team. Jeannie has been sent to the counseling office by her teacher because she is consistently not turning in her homework. This is of particular concern to her teacher because Jeannie is not passing her tests and consequently, may not pass the class. Jeannie is worried this may mean her coach will not keep her on the

basketball team.

According to my personal theory, my first step would be to establish a relationship with Jeannie. I would first speak to her about basketball and how she began playing. This would show Jeannie that I am genuinely interested in her and her presence in my office. Next, I would speak to her about her needs by showing her a poster of the seven basic needs and explaining to her what each of them mean. I would allow her to determine which of her needs are currently not being met. Jeannie may disclose that she feels her esteem needs are not being met because she feels she cannot master the material in her math class. This would show me that she may not be completing her work in class because she does not grasp the material. I would then guide Jeannie to assess change and hopefully she would be able to discern that she needs to change her behavior by not only turning in her work but also asking questions in class, finding a math tutor, and attending tutoring sessions with the teacher. Jeannie would then evaluate her current behavior by explaining what is not working with what she is doing. My hope would be that Jeannie would understand that her current avoidance behavior in not completing her work is hurting her, not helping. Once Jeannie evaluates her current behavior, we could then formulate a plan of action through the establishment of goals. Jeannie would have to create her own simple, measurable goals, but I could help her with some ideas such as attending tutoring or extra help sessions three times per week.

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