

**Adlerian Consultation: A Model for School Counselors during the COVID-19
Pandemic**

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Abstract

Consultation is one of the primary methods of providing indirect student services and common practices of school counselors. Due to high caseloads and the stress of school shutdowns during COVID-19, consultation remains an important modality to serve teachers and support students. A case study is provided to demonstrate how school counselors can use the Seven Steps of Adlerian Consultation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: school counselor education, school counselor consultation, comprehensive school counseling, Adlerian consultation, COVID-19

Adlerian Consultation: A Model for School Counselors during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The American School Counselor Association ([ASCA], 2019a) recommends a student-to-school-counselor ratio of 1:250. The national average in 2020 was 1 school counselor to 430 students (ASCA, 2020). To address this large caseload, school counselors must rely on indirect services. Consultation can be an effective way of helping large numbers of students (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016).

Consultation in School Counseling

Consultation is an important service of the Delivery component of the ASCA National Model (2019a), and it is a necessary method for assisting large numbers of students (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016). Consultation involves the school counselor providing information and guidance to consultees who then provide direct assistance to students. This service can include data collection to properly assess student needs, educating consultees, and collaborating with them to develop interventions. Consultees commonly include parents, teachers, and administrators (ASCA, 2019a).

Consultation Support for Teachers during COVID-19

School counselor consultation may help prevent teacher burnout. This is especially important due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In a recent study, Chan, et al. 2021 utilized a mixed methods approach to examine teacher wellbeing and associated practices to support teacher wellbeing during the 2020 pandemic ($N = 151$). Half the teachers reported emotional exhaustion more than some of the time following school closings. Among the qualitative themes reported, working in a supportive school culture, experiencing connection and emotional support from colleagues, collaboration

related to distance learning, and training/resources connected to distance learning were identified as helpful to reduce exhaustion.

Current consultation literature during the pandemic addresses graduate consultation or counselor consultation training (e.g., Cholewa, et al., 2021; Fan, et al., 2021). Ayashiro (2021) conducted teacher consultation case study in Japan utilizing a two-circles method – counselor draws two circles to reflect dominant and alternative narratives discussing the problem with participants – to externalize the problem. The author suggested that the two circles narrative approach could be used to support a “school as a team” approach to consultation. No research in the United States has examined how school counselor consultation can assist teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this article is to fill the literature gap.

Adlerian Approach to Counseling and Consultation

Alfred Adler’s theory of individual psychology provides the basis for an integrative, encouragement-focused approach that stresses prevention and education. This theory focuses on mental health and wellness rather than mental illness, and strengths rather than weaknesses. Followers of this theory, known as Adlerians, place emphasis on developing a respectful therapeutic relationship and are both optimistic and future oriented. These characteristics describe what Adlerians have historically called *encouragement*, or the interpersonal modeling of social interest (Watts, 1999, 2019; Watts & Pietrzak, 2000).

The process of encouragement helps build hope and the expectancy of success in students and consultees. Adlerians use encouragement throughout the consultation process to help students and consultees create new patterns of behavior, develop more

encouraging perceptions, and access resources and strengths. Given the need for teacher emotional support, connection, and collaboration (Chen, et al., 2021), an Adlerian model is well-suited to support teachers during the COVID-19 environment. The Adlerian model is strength-based and encouragement-focused and is particularly useful as a foundation for consultation (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006).

Adlerian Consultation

Generally, school counselor consultation takes three forms: (a) single case consultation model, (b) consultation provided through teaching/workshop facilitation, and (c) group consultation (Brigman et al., 2005). For this paper, a single case Adlerian consultation model is described. This model was originally developed by Kern and Mullis (1993) as a five-step consultation model to help school counselors provide consultation in the high needs, fast paced environment of a school. It was subsequently expanded to seven steps by Dinkmeyer in 2006 to fully address concerns commonly found in schools.

Adlerian consultation shifts from an order and control-focused autocratic relationship, often prevalent in public schools, to a democratic relationship where the consultant and consultee are treated with mutual respect with the consultee as the situation expert (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016). Consultees may be teachers, parents, or administrators presenting a problem with an individual, situation, or both. The goal of consultation is to share information, observations, and concerns about a problem; create a tentative hypothesis to assess it; and collaboratively recommend solutions taking into consideration the uniqueness of the child, teacher, and educational context.

Seven Steps of Consultation

The Adlerian seven-step consultation process, developed by Kern and Mullis (1993) and refined by Dinkmeyer (2006) offers a practical application of Adlerian theory in school settings (Carlson et al., 2006; Dinkmeyer, et al., 2016). Determining the goals of student misbehavior, teachers become better equipped to adjust their own mistaken goals, including ineffective methods of discipline. Realizing the nature of mistaken goals or faulty assumptions also allows consultees the clarity to implement new solutions for changing behavior. Below is a case example followed by a description of each step of the consultation process. An example dialog illustrating how the school counselor addresses each specific step in the case example is provided.

Case Example

Sarah Smith, an elementary school counselor, presents her availability to teachers at the onset of the school year. Within two weeks, Sarah is emailed by a third-grade teacher. The teacher explains that they need support for an “unmotivated student.” Sarah returns the teacher’s email thanking them (henceforth *consultee*) for the consultation request and schedules a virtual consultation meeting.

Step One: Establish the Tone

Consultants aim to establish mutual respect, honesty, and equality with consultees (Carlson et al., 2006). It is essential to portray the consultation process as a synchronous effort; each party involved contributes toward a solution. Setting an egalitarian tone also aids in building rapport and decreasing resistance by allowing the consultee a sense of self-control in the process (Carlson et al., 2006).

Step One: Example

To begin the session, Sarah outlines the private nature of the conversation and limits of confidentiality. She reiterates that consultation is a mutually respectful, educational, and problem-solving process. Sarah asks the consultee to identify a singular troublesome behavior. The consultee states that the student's refusal to complete online class assignments consistently problematic. The following is a brief exchange between Sarah and the consultee:

Sarah: How is the student's refusal to complete online class assignments a problem for you?

Consultee: She's a smart student that doesn't apply herself. It's annoying because she has potential for great work, but she is completely unmotivated.

She's so lazy!

Steps Two: Specific Problem Description

In Steps Two, consultants encourage consultees to detail students' misbehavior with a specific example; particularly, consultees are asked to highlight, how the misbehavior is problematic for them (Carlson et al., 2006). Consultants ask consultees questions designed to focus the teacher on here-and-now of the misbehavior and the interaction between the student and teacher during the specific problem event: "What specifically did the student say?" or "How did you respond?" (Dinkmeyer, 2006). This compliments the Adlerian assumption that behavior is socially motivated: the student's misbehavior is likely correspondent to the manner of the consultee's own behavior (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016). That is, teacher feelings to student misbehavior yields cues

into the goal of the student misbehavior: attention, power, revenge, display of inadequacy. The following emotions are connected to student goals of misbehavior:

- attention to annoyance
- power to anger/challenged
- revenge to feeling hurt
- inadequacy to sad (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016)

Step Two: Example

In the second step, Sarah asks for a recent, specific problem:

Sarah: Within the past few days, can you give me a specific example of how the student not “applying herself” was a problem for you?

Consultee: She just turns off her monitor and doesn't complete the work. When I point out that her monitor is off and I cannot hear her, I hear nothing back. I also try to send her a message in the chat. Nothing. I know she's a capable young person! This is a problem because I must stop class to ask her to turn her monitor back on. She does not participate during guided practice either. All this is amplified by the fact that I recently received my yearly evaluation from administration. I lost points because all my students were not “on task” while my principal observed the class. In truth, the only student “not on task” is the one we are discussing now.

Sarah continues to get more specific information to determine the goal of misbehavior:

Sarah: Okay, I want you to think back to the recent experience when the student turned off her monitor and did not complete the work. I am going to ask you

about your feelings when you saw the student turn off her camera. Picture yourself in that moment as if it is happening right now.

Consultee: Okay.

Sarah: Are you there?

Consultee: Yes.

Sarah: Okay, you are providing instructions on an assignment and you just noticed the student's monitor went off. You point out that her monitor is off. Get connected to the feeling that comes up for you as you relive that specific moment. (Sarah uses intentional silence).

Consultee: Okay.

Sarah: Would you say that you are feeling annoyed, angry/challenged, hurt, or sad as you point out that her camera is off?

Consultee: Angry/challenged because this happens often (consultee gestures raising her hands). It's like she does not care or want to learn. She needs to be motivated.

Sarah: You do not sound angry now; more like indifferent. Would you mind saying exactly what you said to the student in the way you said it?

Consultee: (eyes narrow and points to the computer screen) "Look, you are missing important material that will be on our state standardized exam. If you do not participate, you will be lost and might fail. You must pass that exam to move up to fourth grade. Don't you want to move up with your friends?!"

Steps Three: Specific Problem Description

To confirm the misbehavior goal, a second problem example is requested. If the teacher describes a different goal of misbehavior in the second problem, the consultant uses the lesser problem to discuss the goals of student misbehavior – more about this in Step Four (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016). A second problem example may provide confirming evidence of teacher’s mistaken beliefs, faulty assumptions, or other social factors (e.g., classmate reactions) influencing the problem. Given that the Step Three process is the exact same for Step Two, there is not a need for a second detailed problem example.

Step Four: Goal of Misbehavior/Troubling Belief

Consultants help delineate the possible goals of the misbehavior (i.e., attention, power, revenge, inadequacy) illustrated in the previous steps (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016). Step four comprises an exploration of the student’s faulty assumptions (e.g., I must be the boss) and the consultee’s beliefs about teaching are explored to identify those discouraging to teacher-student relationships [e.g., students must cooperate with me; see Dinkmeyer et al. (2016) for more on teacher’s troubling beliefs]. Taken together, the student’s faulty assumptions and teacher’s troubling beliefs predict teacher behavior and the resulting student reaction. Furthermore, they offer insight into student goals of misbehavior.

Steps Four: Example

The consultee’s specific problem description and feeling state provides Sarah a window into the student’s goal of misbehavior. Sarah outlines the four goals of

misbehavior for the consultee: attention-seeking, power, revenge, and inadequacy (Dinkmeyer et al., 1979).

Sarah: If the goal is related to attention, you tend to feel annoyed by the student's behavior. When the goal is power, you feel challenged and angry. Revenge tends toward feeling hurt, while inadequacy conjures feelings of despair and hopelessness.

Consultee: That all makes sense.

Sarah: Before we move forward, it's important to make sure that the student has basic needs met along with adequate technology supports – computer hardware and internet access.

Consultee: Oh yes! They have reliable internet. I've met with mom numerous times virtually. Plus, all students in my class have a Google Chromebook.

Sarah: Okay. Given everything you have told me, could it be that the student's noncompliance with turning on her monitor and completing work in class be a result of a need for power?

Consultee: Yeah...maybe so.

Sarah: By extension, could it be that you have the belief that you must be perfect and therefore expect your students to be? You said that your evaluation was less than stellar because of the student and that you have tried everything you can think of to make her participate during the observation. Does that sound right?

Consultee: I'm not sure that I must be perfect, but student behaviors reflect my classroom management ability. If the class does not learn because I am dealing with a problematic student, what does that say about me as a teacher?

Sarah: To feel valued as a teacher, it's important for your students to reflect the work you put into them.

Consultee: Yes! More importantly, if students do not do the work then they will not be successful. You must prove your worth in life. That's accomplished by hard work, dedication, and finding motivation, even in the hardest of times.

Step Five: Goal Guidelines

Step Five provides prosocial opportunities for meeting student goals of misbehavior including positive attention, providing choices, refusing to give up or give in, being fair/refusing to be hurt, providing encouragement, and generating alternative solutions (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016). Positive attention requires catching students doing good and creating moments of positive student attention removing the need for minor attention-seeking misbehaviors (e.g., pencil tapping). Students seeking power will challenge and defy requests. Acknowledging their power by providing choices and creating moments of choice opportunity eliminates the need to defy authority figures. Refusing to fight or give into student demands reinforces respect and resolves power struggles. Being fair and refusing to be hurt alleviates the goal of revenge. Students with discouragement benefit from encouragement and discussion of their assets.

After mutual determination of the student's goal of misbehavior and the consultee's faulty assumptions, an exploration into alternative solutions unfolds. Specific techniques include eliciting prior instances when the consultee was able to overcome the misbehavior or exploring new interventions (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016).

Step Five: Example

At this point, both Sarah and the consultee agree that the goal of the misbehavior is power and brainstorm strategies based on Dinkmeyer et al. (2016) guidelines for reaching the goal: (a) choice-giving, (b) creating choice opportunities, (c) increasing opportunities for fairness, or (d) increasing encouragement. Additionally, Sarah asks the consultee how she has dealt with students not participating in the past. The following solutions are discussed: (a) acknowledgement of power and logical consequence: Tell the student that the consultee cannot control if assignments get completed, but if the student chooses not to complete the assignment, the student chooses to work on the assignment during class game time, (b) individual conference: meet with the student and collectively brainstorm strategies and “win/win” scenarios where both the consultee and student can get what they want, (c) ignore the behavior: complete attention will be given to other students that need support on their work, and (d) lunch connections: meet with the student twice a week and eat lunch with her to build a stronger personal relationship.

Step Six: Suggestions

Consultants assist consultees to create realistic methods when implementing tentative solutions (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016). Consultees may become discouraged if interventions are too idealistic; rather, solutions should be concrete and flexible enough to be tried and tested within a week. Further, the consultant inquires about potential solutions. For instance, the consultant might ask one of the following prompts: (a) “Would you be willing to...” or (b) “What would happen if you did...” (Dinkmeyer, et al., 2016, p. 254). Consultants avoid giving direct advice and suggestions.

Step Six: Example

Sarah asks the consultee to implement any one of the solutions mentioned. The consultee states that they will acknowledge the student's power and give choices. Sarah informs the consultee that the student's behavior is likely to get worse before it gets better and that the changes are only for one week only. Sarah avoids providing direct suggestions by asking the consultee to consider additional options (e.g., what might you do if you find that giving choices is not working?).

Step Seven: Closure

The seven-step process closes with a full review of the consultee's next steps. Consultants ensure that consultees have a fully accurate understanding of the goals of misbehavior and that solutions do not project ill-effective, reactionary behaviors (e.g., revenge; Dinkmeyer et al., 2016). Consultants encourage follow-up meetings to gauge solution efficacy and adjustments as needed.

Steps Seven: Example

In the last step, Sarah breaks the solution into concrete action for the consultee by asking what they will be specifically doing to acknowledge the student's power and give choices next week. A discussion and role-play ensue so that the consultee knows exactly what to do and say with the student when the problem behavior arises. Sarah sets up another meeting in one week to follow-up on solution effectiveness.

Limitations and Further Research

The use of consultation is presented as a way of easing the burden of school counselors by providing an effective way to involve teachers in the process of helping students (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016). However, it is unknown what impact the use of

Adlerian consultation will have on school counselor workload. Further research is needed to explore this topic. Additionally, further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of the Adlerian consultation for school counselors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Future researchers could correlate student data (absences, disciplinary referrals, nurse referrals, report cards, etc.) with the number of Adlerian consultation meetings (e.g., individual teacher, teacher group).

Conclusion

Adlerian consultation offers a standardized and pragmatic method to address personal, social, and educational student concerns with teachers. It is consistent with the ASCA National Model (2019) and can help address ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors (2014) while fostering prevention and intervention strategies through a supportive team-based approach (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016). A supportive team-based approach meets the emotional support, connection, and collaboration needs of teachers (Chen et al., 2021) that may prevent teacher burnout.

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