

The School Counselor and Group Counseling

(Adopted 1989; revised 1993, 2002, 2008; reviewed 1999, 2008, 2014, 2020)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

Group counseling is a vital direct service to students and is an effective part of a school counseling program. It has a positive effect on academic, career and social/emotional development and should be supported by school administration and school districts.

The Rationale

Group counseling, which involves a number of students working on shared tasks and developing supportive relationships in a group setting, is an efficient, effective and positive way of providing direct service to students with academic, career and social/emotional developmental issues and situational concerns. Group counseling has been shown to be effective in improving study skills (Kayler & Sherman, 2018), underachievement (Berger, 2018) and school adjustment (Steen, Liu, Shi, Rose, & Merino, 2018). Group counseling can help reduce social isolation and negative emotions, as well as increase positive peer relations and a sense of belonging. In group counseling, affect, cognition and behavior are emphasized. The group creates a climate of trust, caring, understanding and support that enables students to share their concerns with peers and the school counselor. Group work in schools represents an integral domain in the ASCA National Model (Erford, 2019; ASCA, 2019).

The School Counselor's Role

The school counselor's training in group facilitation is unique to the school setting. School counselors provide group counseling services to students and utilize their specialized training to educate and inform school staff and administration on relevant professional group issues or topics. Group counseling services are based on individual student, school and community needs, which are assessed through student data, a referral process or other relevant data.

School counselors prioritize group offerings based on school data analysis. Group counseling should be available to all students in a pre-K–12 setting using data to inform decisions about group availability. School counselors have a responsibility to screen potential group members and address informed consent, purpose of the group, goals, limits to confidentiality and voluntary participation. Best practice will include parental/guardian consent and student agreement to participate (Falco 2011).

School counselors provide counseling sessions in small-group settings that:

- help students overcome issues impeding achievement or success
- help students identify problems, causes, alternatives and possible consequences so they can make decisions and take appropriate action
- are planned, goal-focused, evidenced-based and short-termed in nature

School counselors do not provide therapy or long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders. However, school counselors are prepared to recognize and respond to student mental health crises and needs. School counselors address those barriers to student success by offering instruction that enhances awareness of mental health and short-term intervention to include small-group counseling until the student is connected with available community resources. When students require long-term counseling or therapy, school counselors make referrals to appropriate community resources (ASCA, 2019) and maintain collaborative relationships with providers to align service coordination.

Summary

Group counseling is an efficient and effective way to meet students' academic, career and social/emotional needs. Group counseling makes it possible for students to achieve healthier academic and personal growth in a rapidly changing global society. Group counseling is an integral part of a school counseling program and should be supported by school administrators and school districts. The school counselor's training in group process benefits students, families, school staff and administration. Group counseling has a positive effect on academic achievement and personal growth.

References

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