

Preface

Modern-day teachers, by necessity, do much more than present content and information to children. In fact, actual time spent lecturing represents less than half of the teacher's daily responsibilities. In addition to time in front of a classroom, you may be expected during a typical day to break up a fight; console a child whose feelings have been hurt; help a student resolve a personal problem; lead a heated discussion about a provocative issue; meet with a distraught parent; explain to two kids why their continued feud is not in their best interests; and offer comfort to a variety of others who are feeling sad, lonely, anxious, frustrated, angry, or depressed.

This reality is especially ironic considering the amount of time that teacher education programs spend on helping educators become experts in their content areas and proficient in the materials, methods, and management of pedagogical presentations. Although this training will indeed serve you well, you will often feel way over your head dealing with personal/interpersonal problems that you may never have anticipated.

In addition to their duties and responsibilities as classroom managers, teachers are called on to do a variety of things for which they may feel unprepared, such as the following:

1. Respond to children's emotional needs
2. Resolve personal conflicts and settle fights
3. Serve as surrogate parents and mentors for children who lack positive role models
4. Act as confidantes to students who are struggling with personal issues
5. Identify children suffering from abuse, neglect, drug abuse, and a variety of emotional problems, and make appropriate referrals when necessary
6. Assess children's developmental transitions and guide their continued physical, emotional, social, and spiritual growth, in addition to their cognitive development

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7. Lead discussions dealing with an assortment of emotional and personal issues
8. Participate in individualized education programs (IEPs)
9. Conduct parent conferences on the phone and in person
10. Function as problem solvers for those children in the throes of crisis

In short, even though they may have had precious little training in these specialties, teachers are often required to use a variety of counseling skills. They do this not only during planned interactions for which students and parents schedule meetings, but more often in the hallways, on playgrounds, during extracurricular functions, and in the classroom when lessons are taking place.

The intent of this book is *not* to equip teachers with the background or the skills to function in the role of a counselor or human relations consultant—that is what school counselors, psychologists, and social workers do. The reality of daily school life, however, is that teachers must often serve in helping roles beyond their responsibilities as content experts. As you stand before your classes talking about history or grammar, you cannot help but notice the children who seem tired or lonely or troubled. As you sit at your desk grading papers, you will be visited by children who trust you, children who want someone to listen to them and understand them. As you speak with parents or other colleagues about children in your charge, you will be required to demonstrate a high degree of interpersonal sensitivity and skill.

It is our hope, therefore, that this book will introduce you to the basic methodology of counseling skills. Although we cannot make a counselor out of a teacher in a format as limited as this (years of supervised practice are needed), we certainly can sensitize educators to the basic ideas and skills that are involved in responding to students' interpersonal, social, and emotional needs.

NEW FOR THE SECOND EDITION

In the second edition of this book, we have completely updated the content, focusing on several contemporary issues related to homelessness, dealing with grief and loss issues, confronting bullying and harassment, and motivating students who are disengaged. We have also considerably expanded the chapter on counseling in groups to describe many ways that the skills you learn can be used in the classroom to build a culture of respect and tolerance.

In addition, we have added a new chapter. "Counseling Yourself" focuses on ways that both new and veteran teachers can take care of themselves better and remain vitalized. It is one of the lovely benefits of

learning counseling skills that the methods work just as well for yourself as they do for helping others.

THE AUDIENCE

Counseling Skills for Teachers is intended for two audiences quite similar to one another. It can be used by the population of beginning teachers who are just launching their careers. Many school districts see the need to augment traditional teacher preparation programs with additional training in areas that are often neglected in universities. Among the highest priorities is ensuring that newly hired personnel are equipped with professional and personal survival skills that are likely to increase the new teacher's probability of success. Counseling and consulting skills certainly rate high on the list for beginning teachers, who are trying so hard to earn the trust and respect of their students.

The book can also be used as a primary or secondary text in a variety of education courses that include a component on "helping skills" for teachers. Indeed, many teacher preparation programs include a whole course on the role of educator as counselor/consultant. In other countries, training models exist in which counseling as a specialty in education is unheard of; teachers are expected to function as counselors in addition to their other responsibilities. After all, who spends more time with children and is better positioned to observe them on a daily basis?

OVERVIEW OF CONTENT

This book is derived from a previous volume, *Teacher as Counselor*. We changed the title to *Counseling Skills for Teachers* in 2000, and we also changed some of the content in order to focus more specifically on the skills of helping others rather than the role of functioning in the capacity as a counselor. For this new edition, we have added considerable material on integrating counseling skills and strategies not only in one-to-one problem-solving interactions but also during normal activities in class in which opportunities arise to help students personalize content.

We have also done the following:

1. Expanded the section on assessing and diagnosing problems
2. Included the use of counseling skills in the hallways, playgrounds, and other informal interactions
3. Presented applications of skills to resolving discipline problems and critical incidents that arise in class
4. Mentioned ways that content can be learned from process activities

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5. Emphasized making adaptations to cultural differences in using counseling skills
6. Presented cutting-edge brief therapy techniques
7. Discussed how to make effective referrals to other professionals

The first chapter sets the context for what will follow, discussing the variety of roles that teachers play in a school and in students' lives. Whether serving as a coach, club sponsor, playground monitor, mentor, or adult model, you will find opportunities every day, if not each hour, to apply counseling skills in your work.

Chapter 2 helps you look at the big picture of how and why counseling works to help people change their behavior. You will learn about the most important ingredients of any helping strategy, regardless of personal style and theoretical orientation. A number of concise checklists are provided to guide your efforts in applying counseling skills in your work and life.

All teaching and counseling efforts begin with some sort of assessment in which relevant problems are identified and intervention strategies are planned. The basics of diagnosing emotional disorders and student problems are described in Chapter 3 to help sensitize you to the kinds of issues you may encounter.

Chapter 4 forms the heart of the book, describing both the process of counseling relationships and the skills involved in moving students from a stage of confusion to some sort of problem resolution, or at least some degree of understanding. In this chapter, you will learn the basics for creating and maintaining solid helping relationships with students, as well as skills for listening, responding to feelings and content, setting goals, and initiating an action plan.

Chapter 5 applies these skills to classroom or group settings in which you might initiate counseling-related activities as part of your normal curriculum. In addition to including more attention to process in your classroom, you will also learn ways to apply counseling skills to critical incidents and discipline problems that occur frequently.

Chapter 6 examines a crucial but neglected area of most teacher training: how to conduct an effective parent-student conference, using the helping skills previously presented. Practical dimensions of structuring meetings will be described, as well as suggestions for dealing with problems that occur.

Chapter 7 discusses the ways that you can recruit the assistance of other specialists and experts to make your job easier, as well as to ensure that students receive the help they need. It is not enough to merely refer a troubled student for counseling, since most don't follow through with the advice, no matter how well intended. You will learn how to consult with other professionals to coordinate efforts for the good of students.

The concluding chapter describes ways that you can apply the concepts in this book to enrich your own life and improve your own personal functioning. This is useful not only to minimize stress at work but also to vitalize your life.

A NOTE TO READERS

The subjects discussed in this book do not lend themselves to learning by passive means. Although reading chapters about helping skills will enable you to conceptualize how and why various counseling strategies are applied, there is no way that these complex behaviors can become part of your own interpersonal style without considerable practice. This personal integration can take two basic forms:

1. After each idea is presented, ask yourself how you can make it part of your life, how you could use the techniques to enrich your own relationships.
2. Find opportunities to practice new skills in enough situations so that they will become a natural part of your interpersonal style.

At the end of each chapter, we have included a list of suggested reading, should you want to learn more about a particular subject. Of even more importance, we have provided a number of activities that you might complete if you want to apply what you learn to real-life situations. This kind of practice is, of course, one of the most important concepts of effective education: If we expect to influence the way students think, feel, and act, we must develop structures in which they can apply what they learn in multiple situations. This certainly applies to your own attempts to master a set of very difficult skills in a very short period of time.

With sufficient time, energy, and commitment on your part; with a systematic study of helping skills; and with supervised practice in applying them, you can become proficient at integrating counseling and consulting skills as part of your daily teaching roles.