

Signature Assignment: Comprehensive Exam

CPS 688: Counseling Internship I

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### **Introduction**

This case study pertains to a single student at a public high school in northern New Jersey. Over a three month period, from September to November, I met weekly one on one with this student on Friday. The student presented concerns regarding negative feelings towards school, unsatisfactory performance with coursework and issues transitioning into populated classrooms after coming from self containment for most of his/her? academic path. Utilizing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), the goal was to create sustainable problem solving skills while establishing a better sense of comfort within the student so the student would be able to successfully navigate these negative thoughts specifically about school.

### **Site and Setting**

The public, suburban high school is one of five schools in the school district which is located in a small suburban town. There are three K-5 elementary schools serving 800 students, one middle school, and the high school. The high school serves approximately 630 students. There are 60 staff members. The current senior class has 152 students, which affords a close knit relationship among staff and students. Many student's parents attended the high school. Similarly, a quarter of the staff are alums of the high school. According to the U.S Census, out of the 13,911 people stated to be living in this suburban town, almost 40% of the population is White, 35% Hispanic, and 11.4% Asian. The recent influx of families, including Spanish-speaking families has put a strain on cultural inclusion within the high school, since most of the staff are White middle aged women. There aren't enough staff that represent the cultural dynamic within the school population, forcing the few staff members who are Spanish-speaking to translate throughout the school. This also causes a further strain on the

counseling department as well. There are three counselors in the school counseling department, along with the director and a secretary. Two of the counselors are middle-aged White women and the other is a Hispanic male who was recently hired last year. His hiring has helped tremendously amongst the Spanish speaking families within the district, however, due to the lack of other representatives in the school, he's often translating for others in the office which then disrupts his responsibilities to his other students.

### **Student Profile**

The student is a 14-year-old male who moved into the district in September of 2012. The student originally came from New York, and attended a pre-school during his residence there. The student's parents separated at a young age, and he currently resides with his mother. On weekends he visits his father and stays overnight. The student has reported to me that he has a good relationship with both parents and has assured me that while the separation may have caused negative thought processes growing up, such as crying and outbursts towards both parents, just being able to still see his father has helped him cope with the divorce. The student has a younger sibling at the middle school. After a brief conversation with mom, she disclosed to me that she and her husband have a cordial relationship, with most conversations being about the children and ensuring their success academically and maintaining emotional stability.

The student has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that has been implemented since April of 2014. As part of the IEP, he receives pull-out resource replacement for math, English, and science. This allows the student to receive an individualized teaching model that slows down the pace of the material and focuses on repetition rather than an influx of curriculum-based

assignments. The student receives this individualized instruction on a daily basis and can receive instruction for roughly an hour. Per the IEP, when focused the student is highly capable of doing the work, and staying on course. Issues arise however, when subject matter does not appeal directly to the student, or if he feels he has no choices. When no choices are given to the student, past incidents have shown an increase in aggressive behavior and a reluctance to continue any work. The student has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), both in which contribute to the difficulties he has in classroom settings. For example, one teacher has reported that when the course material switches to another topic at the beginning of each week, the student tends to zone out, and focus on his laptop rather than paying attention to the lesson. This requires the teacher to have to redirect the student, and in some cases restrict the laptop use until after the lesson is over. However, by the end of the week, once the student feels more comfortable with the material, he's more alert in class and participates alongside the other students within the classroom.

Prior to the COVID pandemic, the student was placed in a self contained classroom, meaning limited peer interactions and more individualized instruction. During the pandemic, the student was given instruction virtually using Zoom as their primary application. In both self containment and during the pandemic, the student showed great progress both academically and socially. Teachers reported no major outbursts or disturbances during his time in middle school. Now being within his first year of high school, he has been taken out of self containment, and placed in the general education setting.

It is not clear whether the student receives counseling outside of school. I inquired; however, did not receive a response. Since starting our meetings/sessions, the student has shown progress in improving his academics. He has shared with me that he has improved his focus in

his more rigorous classes by eliminating distractions such as going on his laptop and opening tabs that are not relevant to the material being taught. Furthermore, we have been trying to eliminate the negative feelings associated with school by incorporating extracurricular activities into his weekly schedule. The student has expressed to me that he loves video games, and is willing to sign up for the video game club the school hosts after school. By joining the video game club, the goal is that comradery among fellow peers within their school will help improve the student's disposition towards school.

### **Informed Consent**

According to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014), "Counselors have an obligation to review in writing and verbally with clients the rights and responsibilities of both counselors and clients. Informed consent is an ongoing part of the counseling process, and counselors appropriately document discussions of informed consent throughout the counseling relationship." Before providing counseling services, school counselors must receive an agreement (consent) from the parents or guardians of the student. This allows both the school professionals and the parents to gain a collaborative understanding of the services being provided along with the reasons behind the counseling in the first place. Informed consent is crucial to the counseling profession as it maintains the integrity of the counselor, and gives insight to the participant to the resources being given. Informed consent was also crucial for this particular situation because I wanted for the student to understand both the positive and negative implications of voluntarily participating in counseling. Not everyday will be a major breakthrough, and this journey is a process and not something that may render results in the first day. I wanted the student to understand the goals I had for them, their rights to confidentiality,

and that this process was voluntarily and could be exited at anytime. Within this particular setting, counseling services were written into the student's IEP. This allows for the student to receive weekly check-ins with either the child study team or an individual school counselor within the school to ensure the success of the student both academically and emotionally. A member of the child study team sent home a permission slip to the student's guardians, detailing that I would be meeting with their child on a weekly basis for this upcoming year. Once the consent form was signed, our initial meetings began the first week of school. During our initial meetings, I reminded the student of their confidentiality rights and that what was said in our meetings would stay between us unless information shared went beyond the scope of my duties such as statements regarding hurting himself, hurting others, or if harm is being done to him from others. If there was information the student wanted us to share to either a guardian or a supervisor, he would tell me before disclosing. Once this conversation was over, the student had an understanding that whatever he said within our sessions was safe and secure, and that if anything needed to be reported it would only be reported to people that needed to know and not outside sources. This provided the student a sense of comfort and would lay the foundation of our counseling relationship.

### **Treatment Interventions Modified**

Due to the recent rise in the Spanish speaking population in the district, the student meets the basic profile of most of the student's within the high school. However, even though most of his peers may share his ethnicity, being in a self-contained classroom for a majority of his academic career does create a behavioral and emotional difference than his counterparts. Because of the fear of injuring others, the student wasn't able to join a general education

classroom to take any regular education classes. This limited peer interaction has affected the social development of the student compared to his other peers who weren't placed in a self-contained classroom. We recognized the development of social skills between the student and the others within the school could cause an issue in formulating beneficial relationships. The impact of COVID and limiting students peer to peer interactions because of materials being taught through a computer also did not benefit the student either. During our sessions we focused on developing helpful social skills in order to begin the process of developing more peer interactions to hopefully change the negative feelings associated with school. We keep in mind the student's diagnosis as well. The lack of attention to certain school subjects and being easily distracted are things we are trying to correct as well by utilizing practical methods he can incorporate into his classroom routines that aren't disruptive to himself or the class.

### **Developmental Life Stage**

Eric Erickson, a German-American developmental psychologist, maintained that personality develops in a predetermined order through eight stages of psychosocial development starting with infancy and furthering into adulthood. (McLeod, 2018). Erikson felt that through each life stage, a person will go through both positive and negative experiences that will ultimately factor into their personality development. The current age of the student I work with, places him in the psychosocial crisis stage of identity vs. role confusion. Erikson defines this stage as a transitioning period into young adulthood and a further exploration of the self. Children in this stage are beginning to form their own identities and formulating plans for the future such as family, occupation, and housing. According to Bee (1992), what should happen at the end of this stage is, "a reintegrated sense of self, of what one wants to do or be, and of one's

appropriate sex role.” Erikson went on further to say that failure to establish a sense of identity within society, such as not knowing what career path one will follow, can lead to a person not being sure about themselves or their role in society. The student I work with is a freshman and concrete thoughts on career aspirations have not been fully constructed. However, the student has discussed at length the joy he finds in computer programming and software development. We are currently working towards adding classes within his schedule for next year that align with his possible career outlooks. We understand that the student’s placement in self contained classrooms and COVID-19 have played an instrumental part in his lack of social development. We are hoping as we continue counseling sessions to help build those skills and boost his self confidence with his abilities.

### **Issues Related to Environment**

As stated previously, this school year is the first time the student has been placed in a general education setting. Within our counseling sessions, the student and I have had meaningful conversations about the transition within our meetings, in which he has responded positively. In the beginning of the year, the student talked about feelings of anxiety and worriedness about beginning classes with others. He worried that he would have trouble making friends, keeping up with the curriculum, and building confidence within himself. According to the American School Counseling Association (2012), through individual student planning, school counselors assist students as the students evaluate educational, social and emotional goals. School counselors promote individual student planning by helping students develop individual learning plans, make the transition from elementary to middle, middle to high or make the transition from school to higher education or work. In collaboration with the child study team, the individualized



counseling plan has been focused on making the transition into a general education setting smooth, while also building self confidence and formulating tools in order to feel apart of the school community.

### **Theory**

One of the most important elements in school counseling is being able to successfully utilize theory based intervention techniques in order to help students successfully navigate through school and life pathways. After a collaborative discussion with the child study team and the student's parent, it was determined that brief-solution based meetings combined with action plan goals that can be used in everyday life were the right fit in order to help the student succeed. Based on Beck (2011), "Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a form of psychological treatment that has been demonstrated to be effective for a range of problems including depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol and drug use problems, marital problems, eating disorders, and severe mental illness." Cognitive behavioral therapy is based off the notion that psychological problems are derived from unhelpful thinking and learned patterns of behavior. The treatment itself focuses on changing harmful thought patterns by utilizing problem solving skills and building confidence within one's confidence in one's own abilities. Within our initial meetings, I noticed the student tense up when talking about school. I asked questions focusing on his views of school and why it angered him so much. He discussed that school has always made him feel isolated because of his classroom placement (talking about the self-containment classes), and that he has always felt capable of being able to do more but not having the drive to want to complete assignments to the best of his abilities. The child study team and I decided it would be in the best interest of the student to focus on the present and helpful skills to combat the thoughts about the past. I began utilizing action goals that the student could use in moments

where he felt anger or anxiousness towards school. We began incorporating breathing techniques in moments where he felt angry in class. These techniques such as simply focusing on deep breaths while counting to 30 in his head might help calm his thoughts.

Another goal was changing the perception of the student's situation. Instead of focusing on the negative's that have plagued the student's cognitive thinking prior, the student would instead focus on the growth they have had since then. As a part of the action plan goal I wanted the student to write down three positive things from the week before our meetings. This would help establish mindfulness within the student, and find positives within the week. As the weeks passed, the student grade began to improve, and his disposition towards school began improving. In addition, the student began finding it difficult to only share three positive moments from the week and began asking to increase the maximum he could share with me.

### **Group Intervention**

Within the student IEP is a recommendation for group intervention, however that group has not been initiated up to this point. If given the opportunity, I believe the student would benefit greatly from group intervention. According to Brigman, G., & Goodman, B. E. (2001), "group counseling is considered a primary role of school counseling...groups allow counselors to help more students. Most school counselors off groups on topics that represent the most frequent presenting problems or needs of children and adolescents." Groups allow counselors to target a specific population of students to deliver a personalized intervention plan based on the student's needs. This allows for counseling services to be administered to more students at one time. Activities such as role playing, board games, and interactive based programming allows for students to have peer communication and feel more comfortable in a group setting. Obviously

self containment along with COVID have caused issues with properly setting up a successful group that addresses the social development skills needed for the success of the student.

However, plans have been made to facilitate a group within the next upcoming marking period once student's return from holiday break.

### **Assessment**

The student would benefit from an anxiety assessment. By utilizing an anxiety assessment, results could render indicators that help further identify the student's issues in everyday life. The purpose of these assessments could also help benefit the student and counselor, as it can lead to helpful recommendations and individualized planning that could help further the student's growth. According to the National Center for School Mental Health (2018), to implement an appropriate school-based screening tool, a school should consider what student's needs are essential to assess (symptoms of depression or anxiety, mental health, etc.), whether they have an adequate system in place to conduct screening and follow up, how long a tool takes to administer and how much it costs, whether the tool comes with access to training or support for staff and whether the tool is reliable, valid, and evidence-based. According to mental health surveys, students have been more anxious than ever. Today's students are overwhelmed with multiple pressures. Outside the academic requirements of school, a student's life can be a constant revolving door of expectations and responsibilities. Maintaining healthy relationships with peers, balancing extracurricular activities, and keeping up with responsibilities at home are all contributing factors to anxiety among students. The recent prevalence of social media has also led to increased anxiety symptoms among students. The idea of "keeping up" amongst individuals on a social network has led to the loss of self-confidence among young teenagers, causing even more symptoms of anxiety and even depression. While there isn't an official

assessment or diagnosis of the student, I do feel the student exhibits some symptoms that suggest he may be experiencing anxiety. For example, when talking about his past, he often loses focus and begins concentrating on other things, such as the straps on his bookbag or keychain. I believe by providing the student with an appropriate anxiety assessment, services and practical skills can be utilized to benefit the student and help ease the symptoms he may be experiencing. A possible anxiety assessment that could be beneficial for the student is the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 Item Questionnaire (GAD-7). I chose this one because it would give us a baseline as to how the student is feeling. It is also based on a two week period, so the student would be able identify the feelings a lot easier, rather than a questionnaire based on a summary of life experiences.

### **Prevention & Intervention Plan**

The high school is filled with diversity, and its close knit community allows for students to form strong bonds with one another. Student's who were raised in the district, to students who have just transferred in from a different country all have opportunities to successfully acclimate into to the school community. However, this is not the case for all students, and some struggle more than others to properly fit into the community, especially as freshmen In this particular instance, I feel a peer program would benefit the student greatly in communicating with peers while learning social development skills. Peer programs in high schools are helpful for all directly involved in the organization. Teachers hand pick student leaders within the eleventh and twelfth grade populations that would run weekly meetings with freshman students in order to help them transition into the high school. The student leaders would go on two retreats focused on training, leadership building, and helpful intervention strategies in order to properly appeal to the freshman population and their needs. Once back from retreat, student leaders will meet

weekly with a select group of freshmen and facilitate group activities amongst them in order to build comfortability amongst the group and develop peer to peer interaction. Group activities would consist of communication amongst peers, problem solving, and goal-oriented tasks. I believe being around peers who may have similar experiences, hobbies, and future aspirations would benefit the student tremendously. One of the biggest benefits of the peer program is the facilitation of the program is all student oriented which takes off the pressure of having to be lectured by an adult. Due to COVID-19, the school program has been halted, however this upcoming school year they are hoping to bring it back because of the success it has shown in the past.

### **Personal Strengths**

Working within this high school has made me reflect on my own personal strengths. Strengths such as building relationships with students, finding my own voice as a counselor, and communicating with fellow colleagues are just a few of the noticeable highlights of my time. My background in working with kids goes back to my time in middle school assisting my mother with tutoring her own students. Even in college, I worked at an after-care program helping facilitate programming to middle school aged students. However, this past year has been my first experience working with high school students, so this obviously brought feelings of anxiety due to my lack of experience. Nonetheless, working within the high school has brought on feelings of happiness and great pride in the counseling profession.

One of the benefits of working within the guidance department has been the accessibility to students and their needs. Because I am located in the front of the school counseling office, I am usually the first line of help students come too before even seeing their own counselors. As a

result, , I have begun creating meaningful relationships with a handful of students. Students feel comfortable with discussing a variety of topics ranging from school to life advice, which in turn helps establish trust. I have had a number of students come to me with personal triumphs, college acceptances, and ways in which they followed my advice and applied it to their everyday lives. I often find myself smiling throughout my day because of the impact I am making.

Working as an intern with professionals that have had more years as a counselor than I have been alive can cause some anxiety. In the beginning of the year, there were moments where I began to question my own abilities and second guess myself. However, my supervisor advised me that mistakes are welcomed, and that everyone within that guidance office went through the same professional pathway as I have. At some point everyone was an intern and had to find their own counseling voice. This advice, along with collaborating with fellow school counselors within the department led to me building confidence within myself and allowing myself to realize I belong to be here rather than being a burden. Being able to communicate with school counselor's with more experience has opened my eyes to countless new ideas and perspectives I never considered before.

### **Areas of Continued Development**

Even with the successes I have had, there is always room for improvement. Being more proactive incorporating parent's, leading discussions rather than following, integrating more creative ways to appeal to a larger population of students.

While the discussions I have with students are going well, I have not had an opportunity to communicate with many parent's. Outside of the students who I meet with on a weekly basis, there is not a lot of opportunities to communicate with parents directly on a student's behalf. I'm

thankful for the opportunities such as 504 meetings or IEP meetings that fellow counselor's have let me sit on, however, I would like to lead those conversations rather than feeling like a bystander as the conversations progress. Parent involvement is a crucial component of school counseling because it allows for consistent communication with all parties involved to know what services or accommodations are being given to a student. Even random calls to parent's keeping them up to date with their child's achievements and progress could go along with building trust with parents along with boosting the morale of a student.

Being a lead in discussions I feel would help benefit my confidence and voice as a school counselor. In the initial meetings with the student, I noticed myself taking a backseat when collaborating with the child study team. This of course is a natural response, since the child study team has more knowledge of the student and this being my first one on one interaction with the student. However, moving forward now having the understanding of the process and more hands on experience working with a student I would love to be more vocal and lead discussions.

I have never been very creative and designing activities and things of my own has never been a strong suit. However, I realize with over 500 students in a school and only three counselors finding a creative way to communicate important information to students is needed. For example, a counselor within the building designs these beautiful bulletin boards throughout the guidance office that displays information for all students such as important deadlines, college acceptances, career goals/fairs, and helpful life tips. To work on my creativity, I have worked closely with the student assistant counselor (SAC) on creating "Stall-Ledgers", a document of self-help tips that we hang in the bathroom stalls for people to read as they go to the bathroom. This has been well-received among staff and students within the school and is something I hope to continue as I progress.

Add your reference page/bibliography for all your cited works.

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