

Canadian Counsellor
 Conseiller Canadien
 1982, Vol. 17, No. 1, 20-28

THE COUNSELLOR AS A STRESS MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT TO SCHOOL STAFFS

FRANK VAN HESTEREN
University of Saskatchewan

Abstract

It is maintained in this article that the counsellor can make a valuable contribution to school staffs in the role of a stress management consultant. Possible stress management workshop components are described and guidelines are provided for consultation in a school setting. An attempt is made to familiarize prospective and practicing counsellors with recent literature, research, and resource materials that can make up the knowledge and activity bases of stress management consultation.

Résumé

On soutient dans cet article que le conseiller peut apporter une aide valable au personnel enseignant en jouant un rôle de consultant en manieiment du stress. On y décrit les composantes possibles d'un atelier sur le manieiment du stress en plus de fournir des jalons quant à la consultation dans un contexte scolaire. L'auteur vise à familiariser les conseillers en exercice ou qui s'y destinent avec la littérature récente, la recherche et le matériel disponible qui tiennent lieu de bases théoriques et pratiques de la consultation en manieiment du stress.

A considerable amount of attention has been given to stress in teaching in a variety of teaching related periodicals and magazines (Bardo, 1979; Hendrickson, 1979; Kossack & Woods, 1980; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Needle, Griffin, Svendsen & Berney, 1980; Styles & Cavanagh, 1977; Weiskopf, 1980) and books on the subject are beginning to appear (Hendricks, 1981; Truch, 1980). While the dissemination of knowledge concerning stress through the medium of the printed word has probably been of benefit to many teachers, relatively little attention has been

given to the role of the counsellor in this context. The position taken in this article is that counsellors, by virtue of their help orientation and professional training, are id suited to being of help to teachers with re to understanding and managing stress. Such involvement on the part of the counsellor is very much compatible with the currently high priority being given to the consulting function in both the United States and Canada (Carr, 1981; Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1975; Gallessich & Ladogana, 1978; Miles & Hummel, 1979; Van Hesteren, 1980) and, furthermore, with the current trend of "giving psychology away" through the medium of deliberate psychological education (Authier, 1977; Ivey, 1977; Sprint-hall, 1977; Van Hesteren, 1978).

Reprint requests should be sent to Frank Van Hesteren, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0W0.

Stress Management Consultation

The remainder of this article will focus on the role of the counsellor as a stress management consultant to school staffs. More specifically, it will: (1) describe possible content for inclusion in workshops designed to assist teachers in understanding and managing stress effectively; (2) provide guidelines and suggestions for counsellors interested in functioning as stress management consultants in a school setting; and (3) familiarize counsellors with recent literature and resource material that can form the knowledge and activity bases of stress management consultation.

Possible Components of Stress Management Workshops

Stress management consultation with school staffs can be effectively carried out through the use of a workshop format. What follows is a description of possible components of counsellor-led stress management workshops. The components are intended to be suggestive and represent an integration of the writer's personal experience and what the literature and the work of others in the area of stress management indicate as being worthy of consideration.

It should be kept in mind that it is certainly not being suggested that a particular workshop should include all of the content described in the context of the various components. What follows is intended to serve as a substantive idea base that can be flexibly and imaginatively used by counsellors in designing and implementing their own stress management workshops.

Component I: Identifying Sources of Stress in Teaching

The writer has found it useful to begin a stress management workshop for teachers by identifying and exploring various sources of stress in teaching.

After the topic of stress has been generally introduced, it has proven very worthwhile to involve the staff in a "Sources of Stress in Teaching" discussion activity. A worksheet is provided for participants which poses the following questions: (1) What teaching related situations do you find to be most stressful? (2) Why are the situations identified particularly stressful? (3) What are your typical ways of handling stressful situations in school? and (4) Do these ways of coping with stress work

well for you? Participants are first asked to think about and respond to these questions individually. They are then instructed to form small groups of approximately four to six members and encouraged to share responses to the first two questions on the worksheet. There are two distinct advantages to using this kind of activity at the beginning of a workshop. In the first place, it serves as an ice-breaker by allowing participants to interact informally, to share common concerns, and to learn that others are experiencing similar challenges in handling stress. Secondly, by establishing stress as a discussion focal point, it helps to create a receptive mind set for the stress related information that the counsellor will provide in the context of the workshop.

Component II: Understanding Stress Related Concepts

Understanding what stress is and how it affects an individual physiologically and psychologically is an important first step toward effective stress management. It is critical, therefore, that any workshop dealing with stress in teaching have a component in which basic knowledge concerning stress related concepts is presented and discussed. In this context, the counsellor clearly assumes a teaching role.

Following are several aspects of stress which are directly related to the teaching situation:

Meaning of stress. Many people, including teachers, have misconceptions about what stress is and what its consequences are. It is necessary early in a workshop, therefore, to define stress and to explain some terminological distinctions that are made when the concept is discussed. Selye (1980) has provided an explanation of stress that serves as a useful starting point. He defines stress as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand" (p. 127). Selye (1980) distinguishes four basic variations of the stress concept. On the one hand, stress can be good stress (i.e., eustress) or bad stress (i.e., distress) while, on the other hand, it can be overstress (i.e., hyperstress) or understress (i.e., hypostress). Selye's concept of stress provides an excellent context in which to give some explanation concerning the physiology of the stress response.

Since Selye's definition of stress has such a heavy physiological emphasis, it may be

useful to provide some complementary but broader explanations of stress that make the concept even more understandable. Woolfolk and Richardson (1979), for example, define stress as "...a perception of threat or expectation of future discomfort that arouses, alerts, or otherwise activates the organism" (p. 8).

The general adaptation syndrome. Teachers are called upon to respond to many demands over the course of a school year. In addition to trying to live up to their often high expectations of themselves, they expend a great amount of energy in trying to meet the demands and expectations of pupils, administrators, colleagues, and parents. The "general adaptation syndrome," as developed by Selye (1974), is extremely useful in helping teachers to understand how high stress levels resulting from trying to meet such demands and expectations can affect an individual over an extended period of time. According to Selye (1974), the syndrome consists of three stages which describe how an individual copes with continuous exposure to sources of stress. These stages are the "alarm reaction," the "stage of resistance," and the "stage of exhaustion." With an understanding of these stages, teachers are in a better position to anticipate the long-term negative consequences of functioning at chronically high stress levels and to develop professional priorities and personal life styles that avoid reaching the state of burnout or exhaustion.

In the context of describing the "general adaptation syndrome," it is worthwhile to point out some of the negative consequences of continuous exposure to stressors over which an individual has little control. There are some research findings bearing on this topic that are directly relevant to the teaching situation. For example, Cohen (1980), after reviewing several studies, concluded that, "Overall it appears that exposure to unpredictable and uncontrollable stress is followed by a decreased sensitivity to others. This includes a decrease in helping, a decrease in the recognition of individual differences, and an increase in aggression" (p. 95).

Those readers who are interested in a more in-depth application of the "general adaptation syndrome" to the teaching situation are referred to an excellent article by Sylwester (1977).

Life events, stress, and sickness. In recent years, much has been learned about the rela-

tionship between the cumulative stress resulting from adaptation to a wide range of life events and the onset of illness. The knowledge that has been gained in this regard represents an important complement to Selye's work relative to the "general adaptation syndrome."

Holmes and Rahe (1967) have developed a "Social Readjustment Rating Scale" which is designed to provide an indication of the amount of adjusting an individual has had to do as a result of experiencing a variety of life events. Forty-three such life events are listed on the scale and each event is assigned a weighting which reflects the amount of adaptation required to cope with it. For example, the biggest weightings are given to "death of a spouse" (100), "divorce" (73), and "marital separation" (65), while relatively low weightings are assigned to "vacation" (13), "Christmas" (12), and "minor violations of the law" (11). It is suggested that the higher an individual's total number of life change units, the greater the likelihood of becoming ill. For example, a life change unit total score of 150-199 indicates a mild chance of having some kind of illness during the next year, a total score of 200-299 reflects a moderate risk, and a score of over 300 is highly predictive of physical or emotional illness (Goldberg, 1978).

The Holmes and Rahe (1967) scale has been widely adopted and can be found in increasing numbers of stress related books (Howard, Cunningham & Rechnitzer, 1978; Schafer, 1978; Truch, 1980). While the scale could serve a very useful purpose in making teachers aware of the amount of change occurring in their lives, caution must be exercised not to take the life change unit scores at face value. A high score does not indicate or predict that a particular individual will necessarily become ill in the near future. Evidence is accumulating which indicates that a variety of identifiable personality and situational factors mediate the stress response, and that definite individual differences exist with regard to how people respond to events in their lives (Garrity, Somes & Marx, 1977; Gilbert & Mangelsdorff, 1979; Johnson & Sarason, 1978; Kobasa, 1979).

Signs of stress. It is not unusual for teachers to be functioning at high stress levels without being aware of it. As Lecker (1978) points out, we tend not to be conscious of where our "stress thermostats" are set and often become aware of our distressed state only after much

Stress Management Consultation

damage has already been done. It is critical, therefore, that signs or symptoms of stress be specifically dealt with in a workshop.

Goldberg (1978), in his book, *Executive Health*, provides a comprehensive coverage of stress symptoms. In addition to identifying general symptoms of stress, the counsellor should focus on selected symptoms that are especially likely to be manifested by teachers. Leffingwell (1979), for example, suggests that teachers may exhibit, among possible others, the following signs of stress: (1) Verbalizing protests in the form of rationalization e.g., "If the kids don't learn, it's not our fault."); (2) Excessive talking, usually in the form of rambling, defensive, non-problem-solving verbalization; (3) Emotionally withdrawing as if in a state of apathy when the real feeling is intense anxiety; (4) Lashing out verbally at students in inappropriate ways; and (5) Displacing aggression on family members when the threat of confronting a fellow educator is too great.

In the context of discussing signs of stress, it may be worthwhile to devote some attention to the Type A Behavior Pattern (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974). The fact that teachers are often prone to trying to accomplish too much in too little time makes this concept very relevant to the teaching situation. According to Friedman and Rosenman (1974), "Type A Behavior Pattern is an action-emotion complex that can be observed in any person who is aggressively involved in a chronic, incessant struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time, and if required to do so, against the opposing efforts of other things or other persons" (p. 67). Teachers tend to be very interested in the more specific behavioral characteristics which comprise the Type A pattern and in exploring the extent to which the pattern applies in their own lives. Considerable attention has been devoted to researching Type A behavior (DeGregorio & Carver, 1980; Frankenhaeuser, Lundberg & Forsman, 1980; Gastorf & Teevan, 1980; Pittner & Houston, 1980) and to developing effective means of modifying such behavior (Rosenman & Friedman, 1977). The knowledge that has resulted from such efforts could be very useful to teachers who are prone to Type A behavior.

Component III: Stress Coping Strategies and Suggestions

While it is important for teachers to understand stress and its effects, it is equally

important that they acquire a working knowledge of stress coping techniques that can be used both to prevent excessive stress and to handle stress well when it does become a problem. Fortunately, there are numerous stress management techniques and programs that are potentially useful to teachers.

Several stress management techniques which are compatible with the concept of "behavioral self-control" as interpreted by Thoreson and others (Thoreson, Kirmitt-Gray & Crosbie, 1977; Thoreson & Mahoney, 1974) show particular promise in terms of their usefulness for teachers. Included among these techniques are: "progressive relaxation" (Jacobson, 1938, 1978); meditation, i.e., the "relaxation response" (Benson, 1975; Goleman & Schwartz, 1976); "stress inoculation" (Meichenbaum, 1977; Novaco, 1977); "focusing" (Gendlin, 1978); and the "quieting reflex" (Stroebe, 1982). Such techniques are particularly appropriate in the context of a stress management workshop for teachers because they can be effectively presented in a didactic mode (Yorde & Witmer, 1980) and because they can be quite readily incorporated by teachers into personal stress management programs.

Ideally, workshop participants would be provided with an opportunity to practice at least one stress management technique which would be of immediate practical value to them following the workshop and which could be readily maintained and improved upon. It should be emphasized that counsellors who undertake stress management consultation with teachers should be aware of both the advantages and the possible limitations of various stress management techniques.

In addition to describing various specific stress management techniques, the counsellor should also emphasize the importance of proper diet and regular exercise in managing stress effectively.

A comprehensive program which includes several personal stress management strategies has been developed by Truch (1980). The program is identified by the acronym R.E.A.D., in which the letters represent, respectively, Deep Relaxation, Exercise, Attitude-Awareness, and Diet.

The R.E.A.D. program was designed with teachers in mind. It provides a very useful frame of reference within which to help

teachers in improving their stress coping capabilities and is illustrative of the kinds of content that might be considered by counsellors in planning a workshop. The program is comprehensive and flexible enough to allow for the incorporation of stress management concepts and techniques that the counsellor personally considers to be especially significant or useful.

In his own workshops, the writer has found it worthwhile to highlight the importance of attitudes, thoughts, and self-statements in determining how an individual perceives and responds to stressful situations. The irrational ideas described by Ellis (1962) have proven to be a meaningful focal point for discussing how unrealistic expectations and negative self-verbalizations can lead to high stress levels and ineffective coping. Irrational ideas (Ellis, 1962) which tend to be particularly troublesome for teachers include: (1) It is a dire necessity for an adult human being to be loved or approved by virtually every significant other person in his community; (2) One should be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving in all possible respects if one is to consider oneself worthwhile; (3) One's past history is an all important determiner of one's present behavior and that because something once strongly affected one's life, it should indefinitely have a similar effect; (4) One should become quite upset over other people's problems and disturbances; and (5) There is invariably a right, precise, and perfect solution to human problems and that it is catastrophic if this perfect solution is not found.

Teachers can be involved in an activity which encourages them to identify possible irrational ideas in their own lives, to become more aware of the adverse consequences of clinging to such beliefs, and to generate some ideas for developing a more positive mind set in stressful situations.

Much is presently known about how cognitive processes mediate the stress response and other feeling states (Beck, Rush, Shaw & Emery, 1979; Coyne & Lazarus, 1980; Folkman, Schaefer & Lazarus, 1979; Meichenbaum, 1977). Familiarity with such literature is invaluable in explaining to teachers how the way we think affects the way we feel and cope with stress.

The stress management component of a workshop can be concluded by making teachers aware of some excellent books on stress related

topics. Ideally, the counsellor would provide an annotated bibliography of such books and have selected copies available for teacher examination. The writer would recommend the following: *The aerobics way* (Cooper, 1977), *A new guide to rational living* (Ellis & Harper, 1975), *Burnout* (Freudenberger, 1980), *Focusing* (Gendlin, 1978), *Positive addiction* (Glasser, 1976), *The centered teacher* (Hendricks, 1981), *Rusting out, burning out, bowing out: Stress and survival on the job* (Howard, Cunningham & Rechnittzer, 1978), *You must relax* (Jacobson, 1978), *Human life styling* (McCamy & Presley, 1975), *Type A behavior and your heart* (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974), *Stress, distress, and growth* (Schafer, 1978), *Stress without distress* (Selye, 1974), *Breathing: The ABC's* (Speads, 1978), *Learn to relax: 13 ways to reduce tension* (Walker, 1975), and *Q.R.: The quieting reflex* (Stroebe, 1982).

Component IV: Making a Personal Stress Management Plan

Participants should be given an opportunity to individually reflect upon what has been learned and experienced during a workshop and encouraged to develop a personal plan for handling stress more effectively. Teachers might be asked to consider the following task: "On the basis of what you have learned during the workshop, develop a plan that will help you in managing stress more effectively." Participants should be instructed to develop some specific individual goals and to think of concrete, workable ways of reaching them. The plan should be realistic, simple, and straight forward. Teachers might be instructed, for example, to complete a sentence like, "Three things I will do during the coming week to improve on the way I deal with stress are...." The counsellor should encourage participants to make a definite personal commitment to implementing their plans and to reward themselves for following through.

Component V: Stress on the School Level

The primary emphasis in the workshop components described so far has been upon helping individual teachers to understand and manage stress effectively. In some situations, it may be desirable for the counsellor to assist the school staff in considering what might be done on the level of the school as an institution with regard to optimizing stress levels and job satisfaction.

Stress Management Consultation

The force field analysis technique (Collison & Dunlap, 1978; Eiben, 1976; Kimpston & Stockton, 1979) can be useful by making it possible for teachers and administrators to become aware of and to constructively analyze the factors in their situation that are either helping or getting in the way of maintaining a generally positive climate in the school. It should be emphasized, however, that sound judgment and sensitivity to situational factors in a particular school should be exercised by the counsellor before engaging a school staff in such an activity. The anticipated advantages should clearly outweigh any possible disadvantages if involvement in such an activity is to have constructive outcomes.

Following is an example of a force field analysis activity that counsellors might consider using or adapting when attempting to assist a school staff in optimizing the level of stress in a school.

WORKSHOP GOAL

To maximize the extent to which the school staff experiences an optimal level of stress and well being over the course of the school year.

1. What are the forces in our situation that are moving toward the achievement of this goal (enabling factors)?
2. What are the forces in our situation that tend to operate against the achievement of this goal (restraining factors)?
3. Decide which forces can be constructively addressed by the school staff on an individual and collective basis (i.e., What can be done to maximize the influence of the enabling factors and to minimize or eliminate the influence of the restraining factors?).
4. In your small groups, discuss what is helping or getting in the way of achieving the above goal and generate some constructive suggestions that can be implemented to realize the goal.

The first three questions in this activity should be done on an individual basis, while the last question is discussed in small groups and by the staff as a total group.

Participants are likely to come up with helping and hindering forces on a variety of levels. The most common of these tend to be the interpersonal, the organizational, and the resource availability levels. The interpersonal

level refers mainly to the nature and quality of the interpersonal communication that takes place among the teachers, between the administrators and the teachers, and between teachers and pupils. The organizational level refers to such factors as the administrative structure in the school, the timetable, and time allowed for lunch. Lastly, the resource availability level has to do with such factors as the quality of curricular material, the availability of supplies, and the amount and quality of consultative support. Typically, it is probably the organizational and the resource availability levels that can be most immediately and constructively addressed in a group setting. It is likely that changes for the better on these levels will result, at least indirectly, in improvements in the interpersonal context. Discussing the school working climate and the well being of staff members may be perceived as quite threatening by some participants. In certain situations, therefore, it may be most constructive to keep the focus of the workshop primarily upon personal stress management concepts rather than upon what can be done with regard to stress at the institutional level.

Component VI: Workshop Evaluation

It is important that participants have an opportunity to provide feedback for the counsellor concerning various aspects of a workshop. A workshop evaluation form developed by Zaffrann (1979) and adapted by Van Hesteren (1980) is very well suited to soliciting feedback about the kind of workshop components described in this article. The form permits the rating of various workshop dimensions on a scale ranging from "excellent" to "unacceptable". Examples of dimensions rated are: workshop organization, preparation, possibilities for practical application, and use of audience participation. Participants are asked to indicate whether the workshop has expanded their awareness of, and interest in, the topic and whether it may change their personal and job behavior. Questions of this type allow the counsellor to make some assessment concerning the impact that a workshop has had and whether or not participants are likely to implement the ideas and techniques examined. Finally, teachers are asked what they found to be particularly useful and if there is anything that they would change in order to increase the workshop's usefulness.

Feedback of this type can result in receiving suggestions and comments that are

very useful in improving various aspects of workshop implementation. Not least important, active feedback solicitation often results in a concrete expression of appreciation for a job well done on the part of the counsellor, with the result that his or her stress coping capabilities are bolstered!

Suggestions for Workshop Organization and Implementation

Following are a number of considerations that should be kept in mind by counsellors when planning and conducting stress management workshops for teachers.

1. While it may seem obvious, counsellors, as a first step, should take personal stock of their own knowledge of stress related concepts and stress management techniques before undertaking consulting work in this area. Counsellor competence is a key to both planning and successfully conducting a stress management workshop.
2. Prior to selecting specific content and techniques, workshop goals should be determined. The nature of such goals will depend upon the needs of workshop participants, time constraints, and the counsellor's professional competencies and limitations. An example of a workshop goal pertaining to stress at the school level has already been provided. Further examples of possible goals are provided by Sparks and Ingram (1979) who use the following goals in a workshop that has been successfully conducted: 1) to reduce isolation; 2) to identify sources of job-related stress (self-awareness); 3) to identify sources of job satisfaction and job-related strengths that may be drawn on to increase participants' satisfaction with their work; and 4) to formulate a tentative plan and action steps to prevent or alleviate stress. Counsellors should be sensitive to the individual and collective needs of the school staff so that the content, techniques, and activities selected for a workshop might be optimally useful to participants. Conducting a needs survey or meeting informally with teachers and administrators prior to putting on a workshop might be helpful in this regard.
3. Although ideally a workshop would include all six of the previously identified components, the actual number of components included will obviously depend upon the amount of time available to conduct it. It is estimated that an

adequate handling of all of the components would require, at minimum, a half-day (i.e., three hours). If a lesser amount of time is available, particularly careful attention will need to be given to the selection of workshop components. If only two hours were available, for example, only the components dealing with understanding stress related concepts, stress coping techniques, making a personal stress management plan, and workshop evaluation might be included.

4. A balance should be struck between the presentation of information and participant involvement in small group activities and skill practice. Care must be taken to remain sensitive to the ebb and flow of participant involvement. Information overload is a workshop pitfall that counsellors must be particularly careful to avoid.
5. A deliberate attempt should be made to build elements of humor and fun into various workshop components. The writer has found the use of carefully selected cartoons and posters to be a highly entertaining and effective means of illuminating selected stress related ideas throughout a workshop.

Conclusion

In order to be effective as stress management consultants, counsellors need to become thoroughly familiar with the stress knowledge base that already exists and be prepared to keep up with new knowledge that is being gained at an accelerating pace. It seems that counsellors are increasingly being called upon to function as consultants in areas that may very well not have been part of their formal training. This situation clearly indicates a need to provide counsellors with ongoing opportunities to become knowledgeable and updated in areas in which they are expected to serve as consultants. If counsellors are to take seriously the mandate of "giving psychology away," they must first feel that they indeed have something of substance and value to impart. It is hoped that the content and the references included in this article will be of benefit in this regard to counsellors interested in functioning as stress management consultants.

The deliberate and systematic dissemination of stress related knowledge and the teaching of stress management skills are relatively new phenomena in the educational

Stress Management Consultation

context. In the writer's opinion, it is important that increased attention be given to researching and evaluating the short and long-term effectiveness for teachers of various stress management techniques and programs. In the future, counsellors may be able to make a valuable contribution in this regard.

Finally, but not least importantly, counsellors need to take steps to ensure that their own personal needs and sense of well being are attended to. Increasing attention is being given to the problem of counsellor stress and burnout (Boy & Pine, 1980) and literature is available that is particularly useful to the counsellor in handling stress and keeping a positive work perspective (Bugental, 1980; Heath, 1980; Thoreson, 1980; Welwood, 1979; Wrenn, 1980). Counsellors quite literally need to practice in their own lives what they preach to others in the stress management workshops they conduct!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frank Van Hesteren is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan. He received his Ph.D. in Counselling Psychology from the University of Alberta in 1971 and has had professional experience as a teacher, a school counsellor, and a counselling psychologist in private practice. His article in this issue reflects a continuing interest in developmental counselling and "giving psychology away" through the medium of psychological education.