

DEVELOPMENTAL COUNSELING WITH GROUPS OF GRADE-FIVE BOYS AND GIRLS

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Developmental counseling emphasizes the viewpoint that all young people are faced with a complex series of developmental tasks. If the counselor can help young people in understanding these tasks, explore with them the many alternatives in meeting each of these, it is expected that they will experience more success in handling these life situations. It is hoped that this kind of success will preclude the development of many adolescent problems and maladjustments.

Group counseling provides the opportunity for the students to discuss what is important to them through a relationship with an adult which is a non-threatening one, where the adult is not an authority figure. The counselor's function is to facilitate the development of the child through a variety of techniques. He will select the method or methods that seem most appropriate to the given situation.

The type of behavior expected of the students was discussed and agreed upon during the initial meetings. These "ground-rules" were kept to a minimum in order to facilitate interaction and discussion. Students were encouraged to assume responsibility for both their own and other members' behavior. Behavior considered appropriate to the counseling process was positively reinforced by the counselors.

GROUPS

The boys and girls involved in this study were the total population of two classes in a school in a poor socioeconomic area. Boys and girls met separately, about 6 or 7 in each group, once a week for 16 weeks, 40 minutes each time.

TOPICS

The students were encouraged to assume responsibility for the content of the discussion by initiating topics which they felt were important. The interest level of the student members was generally the criteria for maintaining or terminating the discussion.

The counselor's role was one of "facilitator" with regard to the content of the discussions. Within this role the counselor attempted to encourage and guide meaningful interaction and to discourage irrelevant discussion of such subjects as "gossip" and "fantasy."

The following general topics were discussed in the counseling groups. Although there were many variations of topics among the ten groups, this outline is considered representative of the areas discussed during the program.

1) *School*

The general school environment was a frequent topic initiated by the students. The main focus was on the difficulties, interests, and achievements within the

school environment. The primary aim was to gain increased awareness and understanding of alternatives for overcoming difficulties.

The discussion was generally concerned with the following:

- a) school achievement and subject content
- b) interaction with teachers
- c) student behavior within the classroom
- d) problems encountered by students moving from or to other schools and countries

2) *Peer group relations*

In addition to the opportunities for acquiring insight while interacting with group members, peer group relations were frequently a topic of concern:

- a) friends — characteristics of friends
— dynamics of friendship
— importance of friends
- b) specific personality types
— bully, show-off, isolates, teacher's pet
- c) acceptance of racial groups

3) *Specific personal problems*

The presentation of a specific personal problem by a member of the group usually emerged during the meetings toward the end of the program. At this stage, the other group members frequently provided emotional support to the student who was experiencing difficulty. When the other members disagreed with the student who initiated discussion of his problem, the exploration of various alternatives provided an opportunity for the student to gain a different perspective. Meetings which focused on an individual's personal problem seemed to create a greater feeling of group cohesiveness than many of the more general topics.

4) *Family interaction*

This area included the following general topics:

- a) general characteristics of parent-child relationships.
- b) conflicts between independence and dependence on parents.
- c) characteristics of sibling relationships.
- d) the responsibility of family members toward each other.

5) *Socially unacceptable behavior: smoking, drugs, and pre-delinquent behavior.*

Discussion of the following aspects of socially unacceptable behavior was related to the age level of the students.

- a) the influence of older youths who are involved in unacceptable behavior.
- b) the legal, personal, and social consequences of socially unacceptable behavior.
- c) the reasons for engaging in deviant behavior.
- d) the alternatives to engaging in deviant behavior in specific situations.

6) *Boy-girl relationships*

Relationships between boys and girls are considered as a separate section, since this topic was one of particular concern, especially to some of the girls' groups. This subject was often introduced in the form of questions to the counselors about the behavioral differences between girls and boys.

On one occasion a joint meeting of a boys' and girls' counseling group was initiated by a group of girls who expressed a desire to talk about the differences in attitudes and behavior of boys and girls. The two counselors who participated in this session agreed that the students were not sufficiently mature to interact in a mixed group, at least on this particular topic. The students also agreed that they preferred to meet in separate groups in the future.

7) *Puberty, sexual behavior, and birth*

Discussions related to puberty, sexual behavior, and birth were initiated by the students. Questions introduced by the students involved emotional, physiological, and social aspects within the broad area of sexual reproduction. The students' reactions to the sessions were similar in all of the counseling groups: surprise when they discovered that an adult was willing to discuss subjects of a sexual nature and that these topics could be dealt with in a serious manner.

8) *Recreational activities*

The students frequently initiated topics related to sports, clubs, hobbies and other leisure activities. The sharing of recreational interests with group members seemed to be a meaningful area in relation to developmental goals. In addition to providing information which helped to acquaint students with each other, discussions of leisure activities also helped to create an awareness of and interest in the range of possible recreational opportunities. For some students, it appeared that discussion of their recreational accomplishments was one method of enhancing self-esteem and gaining recognition from other members. The general area of extracurricular interests, particularly team sports, frequently led to consideration of interpersonal relationships encountered during participation in recreational activities.

9) *Future academic and vocational goals*

The developmental counseling approach views vocational planning as an ongoing process, facilitating development from aspirations based largely upon fantasy to realistic academic and vocational goals for the individual.

The majority of the groups did not display an interest, as indicated by a lack of initiating relevant discussion, in long-range educational and vocational plans. The limited interest of the students in future goals may be explained in terms of their age level. The group setting may have been particularly helpful to those students whose level of vocational conceptualization seemed to be entirely at a fantasy level. These immature students were perhaps more able to bridge the gap between their fantasy orientations and those of the adult, by communicating with other students who had acquired a somewhat more realistic picture of specific occupations.

GROUP METHODS

The counselors agreed that some structuring of the group discussions helped to focus the attention and interest of the students. The following

methods were used to facilitate meaningful discussion and interaction: role playing, tape recorders, producing films, case studies, film strips, records, and books.

On several occasions the students, on their own initiative, structured the sessions by such methods as preparing role playing situations and by bringing literature or other materials to the group meetings.

INTERACTION PROCESS

The interaction process between group members seemed to be of greater importance than the content of the discussions in facilitating individual growth and understanding of others. The group experience was an active situation for learning interpersonal skills. Free discussion of topics chosen by the students required that they learn self-control to allow others the opportunity of expressing their ideas. Acceptance by other members enabled communication of feelings and ideas without fear of being personally rejected or evaluated in a negative manner. Greater understanding of how their behavior was perceived by others was developed by interacting with other students in a democratic atmosphere. As the students learned to listen to each other, they displayed more understanding and consideration toward others within the group. The group setting provided many opportunities for learning cooperative behavior.

The establishment of a relationship with an adult who was not perceived as an authority figure was a new experience for many of the students. Simply having an opportunity to talk and to be listened to seemed to be regarded as especially meaningful to the students. During the final group meeting when the students were asked for their impressions of the counseling experience, the majority of their statements referred to the interaction process rather than the topics of discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to identify the perceptions held by these children of their world, they are asked to do the sentence completion Attitude Questionnaire (used by Sears and Sherman in their study, 1964 p. 41, 51) both before and after the ten weekly counseling sessions. If the children are willing to answer such an instrument honestly, the results can be enlightening. A few of the sentence stems and random sample of completions are given below.

I want adults to understand that . . .

Girls

I'm not a baby
 I try to do it their way
 I'm shy
 the way we do it now in school
 I try to behave
 I'm good in school
 I'm not perfect
 I am very *polite*?
 I love them
 to believe me

Boys

I'm good
 I am not a slave
 I like them
 things have to happen sometimes
 I am a boy
 so that I can know what they mean
 when I get mad I get mad
 we like fun
 I can do things for myself
 I like them

I think the best way to get along with the teacher is . . .

Girls

be good
to listen and obey
to be like the rest of the class
and be normal
to stay shut up
work!!!
to be smart and nice
a nice thing to do
to be smart
to be calm
look at the good side of her

Boys

by listening to him
be nice to him
do what he says

be good!!!
politeness
to be nice to them
consontrite
great
to cooperate
to avoid them

When the teacher criticizes my work . . .

Girls

I dislike it
I don't like it
I feel like saying "Oh, be quiet!
Your stuff isn't so great either!"
it makes me embarrassed
I feel ashamed
I blush
real bad
I feel silly
I'll correct them
it makes me feel silly

Boys

I don't like him
I get heck at home
I feel like punching the teacher

I go crazy
I get mad
I try to improve my work
I correct it
I'm kind of unhappy
I will punch her in the nose
I do not like that

If I only had a chance to say what I think I'd . . .

Girls

have a better feeling
I want to be your friend
do it
like to say to somebody
be talking all day
be glad
say to much
be wrong
say why do girls not like boys
say it

Boys

talk about sex
say it
have a chance
feel much better
tell adults what I think
like to play hockey
think of girls
say it
I hate everybody
do it

Alternately, it is insightful to study the pattern of answers of individual children as indicated with the representative ones included here—Bill, Bob, Randy, Jean, Mary, and Dorothy.

BOYS

- | <i>Bill</i> | <i>Bob</i> | <i>Randy</i> |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. I want adults to understand that . . .
when I get mad I get mad | I am a boy | I can do things for myself |
| 2. If I only had a chance to say what I think I'd . . .
like to play hockey. | say it. | tell adults what I think of them. |
| 3. Having to do what adults say all the time makes me . . .
very very very mad. | wish I was one. | mad. |
| 4. Because I'm not as smart as some of the other children . . .
I'll cry. | feel behind. | ignore them. |
| 5. When the teacher criticizes my work . . .
I will punch her in the nose. | I correct it. | I feel like punching him in the head. |
| 6. I feel having a special job in the room would . . .
make me feel happy. | be good. | be nice. |
| 7. I think the best way to get along with a teacher is . . .
to strap them. | to cooperate. | to be nice to them. |
| 8. The thing that most interests me is . . .
to tear down this school & build a pancake house. | flying. | electricity. |
| 9. When I work in committees or groups . . .
I always give the rules. | crack jokes. | don't know what to say. |
| 10. When other people's ideas are different from mine . . .
I like to put there faces in the mud. | I say they might work. | I tell them mine. |
| 11. I always say things to the girls that . . .
make them mad. | pleases them. | make them stink. |
| 12. When I watch one of my best boy friends winning in track events . . .
I always trip him. | I cheer for him. | I call him a big shot. |
| 13. The thing that would make me most self-confident is . . .
to play games. | electronics. | having my own record player. |

GIRLS

- | <i>Jean</i> | <i>Mary</i> | <i>Dorothy</i> |
|---|---------------------------|--|
| 1. I want adults to understand that . . .
I don't like them to call me FAT! I think it's rude. | I try to behave. | I'm not perfect. |
| 2. If I only had a chance to say what I think I'd . . .
say I'd DIE. | say to much. | say why do girls not like boys. |
| 3. Having to do what adults say all the time makes me . . .
feel kinda small. | feel like a baby. | mad sometimes. |
| 4. Because I'm not as smart as some of the other children I . . .
feel like a regular dope. | I feel I should try. | wish I where. |
| 5. When the teacher criticizes my work . . .
I feel like saying, "Oh, be quiet! Your stuff isn't so great either!" | It makes me feel silly. | I get embarrassed. |
| 6. I feel having a special job in the room would . . .
be fun. | _____ | be particularly nice. |
| 7. I think the best way to get along with a teacher is . . .
be like the rest of the class and be normal. | to behave. | look at the good of her. |
| 8. The thing that most interests me is . . .
talking. | animals. | art. |
| 9. When I work in committees or groups I . . .
like to be the boss. | try not to be noisy. | I feel safe with my friends. |
| 10. When other people's ideas are different from mine, I . . .
accept them. | don't object. | feel good. |
| 11. I always say things to the boys that . . .
make me look crazy. | makes them not too rough. | makes the girls laugh and talk about me. |
| 12. When I watch one of my best girl friends winning in track events . . .
I get sick. | I feel happy. | I don't care. |
| 13. The thing that would make me feel most self-confident is . . .
getting "A" on a hard test. | _____ | the other girls. |

After the counseling sessions these children reacted to their group experiences:

<i>Bill</i>	<i>Bob</i>	<i>Randy</i>
1. Counseling groups are fine but . . . most of them fool around.	I wish they were longer.	_____
2. The things we talked about were . . . sex.	good.	very interesting.
3. Most of all I liked . . . _____	the people in my group.	talking about education.
4. My group . . . was not bad.	was a good group.	_____
5. I feel that students need . . . fun.	music while they work.	counselors to under- stand better.
6. I hope that . . . we faint.	we have counselors again.	we have counselors again.
7. My parents feel happy.	nothing.	we need counselors.
<i>Jean</i>	<i>Mary</i>	<i>Dorothy</i>
1. Counseling groups are fine, but . . . we should have them more often.	they should continue with us next year instead of taking grade 5.	it wasn't long enough.
2. The things we talked about in our group were . . . realistic. I thought they helped me a lot.	interesting.	great.
3. Most of all I liked . . . doing things on the tape recorder.	doing acting.	doing plays.
4. My group . . . was pretty good.	_____	had all my friends in it except one.
5. I feel that students need . . . counseling groups so they can get together.	them so we can discuss problems.	a chance to talk to a grownup who pretty well understands me.

6. I hope that . . .

we could have counselors all the time. Nice ones like the one I had. they come again. there will be a counseling team in grade 6.

7. My parents think . . .

that there should always be someone at school when you have problems. this is a good idea. it is good for me to get together with another adult and talk things out.

An attempt was made to evaluate possible change in attitudes as either a positive or negative direction by examining the sentence completions after the group sessions. Out of the fifty items, the average change in a positive direction was 6.5 items, negative 1.5. In no item did change judged as negative outnumber that rated as positive. The sentence stems where at least 25 percent of the students indicated a positive change were:

When the teacher criticizes my work
 When I speak in front of the group
 The things I like to do best in my spare time
 I think I can do better than others
 When I talk about girls, I
 I think the best way to get along with the teachers is
 When the teacher disagrees with me, I
 I think people of a different skin colour

The sentence stems exploring attitudes toward the group sessions included the results in Table I.

TABLE I
 STUDENT RESPONSES TO GROUP SESSIONS

Stem	Response Classification	Total Group N=42	Girls N=22	Boys N=20
1. My group . . .	Positive response			
	(good, enjoyable, interesting)	28	15	13
	Negative response (did not like it)	4	2	2
	Critical response			
	(to the behavior of other members)	4	0	4
	(No response)	6	5	1
2. Counselling groups are fine but . . .	More counselling requested			
	(this year and next)	24	14	10
	No more counselling requested	2	2	0
	Behavior of other group members criticized	4	0	4
	(No response)	12	6	6

3. Most of all, I liked . . .			
Discussion of specific topics	12	9	3
Role playing	5	4	1
Tape Recording	11	5	6
Films	3	0	3
People in group	4	3	1
(No response)	7	1	6
4. Since the group began, I have been more able to . . .			
Talk with others, discuss freely	27	15	12
Understand other better	8	2	6
"Have fun; miss work"	4	3	1
(No response)	3	2	1
5. I wish . . .			
More counselling (now or future)	29	17	12
To discuss other topics	5	1	4
Change of group membership	5	2	3
(No response)	3	2	1
6. I feel that students need . . .			
Counselling	15	10	5
To talk together	7	4	3
To understand others	2	0	2
To have an adult relationship	2	2	0
(No response)	16	6	10
7. The counsellor . . .			
Positive attitude towards (nice, kind)	40	22	18
(No response)	2	0	2
8. The others in the group . . .			
Positive attitude expressed towards other group members	22	14	8
Critical attitude expressed towards other members (bossy, too talkative)	8	5	3
(No response)	12	3	9
9. I hope that . . .			
we can have more counselling	36	19	17
(No response)	6	3	3
10. The things we talked about were . . .			
Description of Specific topics	12	8	4
Positive Expression of attitudes towards topics	20	7	13
Negative Expressions of attitudes towards topics	2	2	0
(No response)	8	5	3
11. My parents feel . . .			
Positive attitudes towards counselling groups	26	14	12
Negative attitudes towards students	3	0	3
Positive attitudes towards students	1	1	0
(No response)	12	7	5

At the commencement, mid-point, and conclusion of the work with the small groups, each of the two grade 5 teachers was interviewed separately. Their evaluations were:

1. The small size of the group and the close interpersonal relationships established were very advantageous.
2. The close interpersonal relationships between student and counsellor were encouraging a greater closeness between student and teacher. Increased freedom of communication with an adult was evident.
3. There was improved participation by students in the classroom, but how much of this was directly attributable to the small groups was unknown. General growth and maturation had no doubt also improved this ability.

REFERENCE

- Sears, Pauline S., & Sherman, Vivian S. *In Pursuit of Self-Esteem*. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1964.

DEVELOPMENTAL COUNSELING WITH GROUPS OF GRADE-SIX AND -SEVEN BOYS AND GIRLS

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The purpose of this study was to develop, through small group participation, a greater sense of individuality and independence among elementary school children, ages ten to fourteen. It was also hoped that students would develop qualities of leadership and become more knowledgeable, understanding, and accepting of their own and others' strengths and weaknesses through involvement in regular, small, unstructured, group-counselling sessions.

DESIGN

All the grade six and seven students (53 in all) in a suburban school participated. They were divided by sex and grade to form two groups of grade-six girls, two groups of grade-six boys, two groups of grade-seven girls and two groups of grade-seven boys.

Four of the groups were to be "unstructured" (group centered) and four to be "structured" (leader centered) in the first few sessions and then gradually to be changed to a less structured situation. In the "unstructured" groups, the students would be expected to initiate all topics and assume the leadership roles in discussions; in the "structured", the students would initiate most topics but the counselor would assume responsibilities to keep the discussion on the topic, to summarize as necessary, and to control obviously distracting noise or activity.

For a period of six months, weekly meetings of forty minutes duration were held.

Evaluation of outcomes was based on reactions of both the students and staff.