Group Counseling for High School Students

Brittanie Mosbaugh

Ball State University
Group Counseling for High School Students

High school students are faced with a number of issues specific to their population. High school is a time for many transitions. For that reason, school counselors need to be prepared to assist students through these transitions so that the students are academically successful. One such way to help students during a transition is through group counseling. School counselors must lead small groups for counseling or classroom guidance, as outlined by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (American School Counselor Association, 2005). Although group counseling is an effective intervention, the culture in schools makes it difficult to implement groups (Ripley & Goodnough, 2001). In terms of effectiveness, Whiston and Quinby (2009) found that small groups are more effective than classroom wide guidance lessons. With that, it was also found that responsive groups are particularly effective at the high school level. According to the American School Counselor Association (2005), responsive groups address the immediate needs or concerns of students. Some of these typical groups would be study skills, divorce, senior transitions, or career planning groups (Ripley & Goodnough, 2001).

Kayler and Sherman (2009) conducted group sessions focusing on study skills for at-risk ninth-grade students. The students in this group were performing at the bottom fifty percent of their class. The group was mainly psychoeducational with a cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) influence. The counselors provided the students with information on goal setting, test-taking strategies, time management, study skills, organizational skills, and test-anxiety reduction strategies. The students were asked to share their feelings about school. The counselors leading the group gave feedback to the group and focused on how changing the feelings associated with school could also change their performance in school. The counselors focused on thoughts,
attitudes, and barriers to achievement and how to change those things in order to change school achievement. At the end of the group sessions, many of the students had an improvement in study skills. Several students even had a dramatic increase in their GPAs in the years following this group participation.

The American School Counselor Association (2005) points out that it is not the school counselor’s role to provide therapy. For that reason, group counseling in school is based on student needs tends to be mostly psychoeducational in nature. Kayler and Sherman (2009) used a psychoeducational approach for the group sessions on study skills and the transition for ninth-grade students, yet they also incorporated some aspects of CBT. This type of group was very effective for the participants involved. In a school setting, this type of group seems to be the best structure. Given the short amount of time school counselors have to conduct groups, groups should be very structured.

In high schools, having more than one counselor as the leader would most likely be very beneficial to the students. If it is possible to have two school counselors lead a group, it would help give fresh ideas to the group, as well as reduce counselor burnout and increase the visibility of the school counselor (Kayler & Sherman, 2009). By having the school counselor more visible, it would allow the students to better understand the role of the school counselor and be more likely to seek out the services provided by the school counselor. In the group setting, having the school counselor in a visible role would provide a safe opportunity for the students to express themselves.

Since the ultimate goal is academic success for all students, psychoeducation is a must. By providing psychoeducational materials to the students, the school counselor is giving the students the tools they need to be academically successful. Students need those tools to create a
foundation for success. Once the students have those tools, the counselor is then able to help change their attitudes and actions. Changing their attitudes is the first step in the cognitive-behavioral aspect of group work in schools. For example, if students think school is boring, challenging them to reframe their thoughts of school into something more interesting would allow them to have a more positive outlook on school. Once they have a better outlook on school, they can then take steps to change their behavior to reflect their new feelings. Having the knowledge and taking the necessary steps to change will allow the students to improve their academic performance.

Overall, groups in high schools are very effective, yet difficult to implement because of the time constraints for students. With that, it is important to have a structured group that will allow for change in the students. Most groups, especially those focusing on study skills, should relay on psychoeducational materials. In addition to the information given to the students, there should be a facilitative discussion on how change can occur. Students should be encouraged to reframe their ideas and attitudes about the given situation. Once their ideas and attitudes have changed, they should be given the encouragement to change their actions. The school counselor is responsible for providing the psychoeducational materials to the group. Furthermore, the counselor is responsible for keeping the group on task. The school counselor should also help the students change their behaviors so that they will be able to succeed academically.
References


