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Spotlighting Stigma and Barriers: Examining Secondary Students' Attitudes Toward School Counseling

Rick Auger & Nick Abel





Session Overview

- Adolescents and help-seeking: What do we know?
- Adolescents' attitudes toward receiving help from their school counselor: Barriers and opportunities
- Strategies for improving the likelihood that students will access your services



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Adolescents' Attitudes About Help-Seeking

- Adolescents, particularly boys, are generally unwilling to seek help for emotional problems from health care professionals
- Willingness to seek help for psychological problems decreases as children move into adolescence
- Broad research suggests that less than half of students are willing to see their school counselor



Adolescents' Attitudes About Help-Seeking

Barriers

- Concerns about counselors being negative/judgmental
- Concerns about confidentiality
- Concerns that the counselor couldn't help
- Desire for self-reliance
- Tendency to seek help from friends or family
- Stigma



Adolescents' Attitudes About Help-Seeking

Facilitative Factors

- Good listener
- Empathic
- Nonjudgmental
- Trustworthy
- Genuine



Students' Attitudes About Seeking Help from School Counselors

- 3,584 students from 12 schools in two states
- Grades 6-12
- 77% White, 5.3% African American, 4.4% Hispanic/Latino, .4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.8% multiracial
- Instrument: Online survey, administered by field coordinators



Key Results

- 9.3% did not know the name of their school counselor (20.9% of African American students)
- 11.4% did not know where the school counselor's office was located
- 27% did not know how to schedule a meeting with their school counselor
- Over 20% of students reported not meeting with their school counselor in the past year



For what reasons have you met with your school counselor?

	Number of Students	Percentage
Academic issues	1,644	45.9%
College/career issues	1,045	29.2%
Social/emotional issues	633	*17.7%
I have not met with my school counselor	1,194	33.3%

* 22.3% female; 12.1% male



For what reasons have you met with your school counselor?

	Middle School	High School
Social/emotional	27%	12.5%
Academic	13%	65%
College/career	2.5%	44%

Note: Middle school students far more likely to report zero meetings with their school counselor than high school students (48% vs. 17%)



Would go to your school counselor for the following issues?

	Mean
Change your schedule	3.47
Explore college options	3.42
A friend said to you they were thinking of harming themselves	3.08
Bullying	2.81
You've been feeling very sad lately	1.98

1 - Very unlikely 2 - Unlikely 3 - Undecided 4 - Likely 5 - Very likely



To what degree would these reasons stop you from seeing your school counselor for a personal issue?

	Mean
Would talk to a parent, friend, or teacher instead	3.17
I like to handle this stuff on my own	3.15
I don't know my counselor well enough	2.93
It's weak to get help for something like this	2.47
It's embarrassing or not cool to get help for this	2.43

1: Definitely wouldn't stop me 2: Probably wouldn't stop me 3: Not sure 4: Probably would stop me 5: Definitely would stop me



What would be the biggest reason you would NOT choose to see your school counselor when you had a problem?

4 Themes:

- Confidentiality
- Lack of Rapport/Connectedness
- Counselor Competence
- Counselor Availability



Excerpts from Students....

The situation getting worse or the counselor telling somebody else what I said. (confidentiality-competence)

If my school counselor told anyone and everyone what I said. (confidentiality)

I feel like she would tell people and she wouldn't be the best person to help me handle problems. (confidentiality-competence)

Biggest reason is it's hard enough to get time to go to the office and get an appointment let alone it takes forever before you can even get help because our counselor is so busy (time)



Excerpts from Students....

The biggest reason I would chose not to see the counselor would be that I do not know her very well and don't feel comfortable talking about my problems. (No Relationship)

The counselor is a stranger to me, not even sure who my counselor is. (No Relationship)



What would be the biggest reason you would NOT choose to see your school counselor when you had a problem?

- Confidentiality concerns
- Don't feel comfortable with the counselor
- It is weak to share personal problems with adults
- Prefer to talk to family/friends
- Don't want to miss class
- Counselor is too busy or don't know when the counselor is available



What could the school counselors in your school do to be more helpful to students?

- Be more visible/interact with students more
- Make it easier to make appointments
- Respond more quickly to appointment requests
- Be more friendly/less uptight/less judgmental
- Be more willing to talk about personal/social issues
- **Important:** Many students indicated that their school counselor does a great job



What could the school counselors in your school do to be more helpful to students?

4 Themes:

- 1:1 meetings
- Accessibility
- Explaining Roles/Responsibilities of the School Counselor
- Normalizing Help Seeking Behavior



Excerpts from Students

Be more willing to meet with people when they need it. (Accessibility)

Plan meetings with students every once and awhile to get in touch and see how their doing. (1:1 Meetings)

Yes, she could meet us in class show us how to plan a meeting and talk to us 1 on 1 about our personal life. (1:1 Meetings)

The school counselors to be more available to the students and notify them when they are available to talk. (Accessibility)

clear (Explaining Roles/Responsibilities of the School Counselor)



Excerpts from Students

Make sure that the students know what all the counselors can help with (Explaining Roles/Responsibilities of the School Counselor)

Tell the students how to schedule appointments (Explaining Roles/Responsibilities of the School Counselor)

I think they could make the location and name of the counselors more clear (Explaining Roles/Responsibilities of the School Counselor)



What could the school counselors in your school do to be more helpful to students?

“not telling other people what we say”

“Connect with more students”

“Tell the students how to schedule appointments”

“I think they could make the location and name of the counselors more clear”

“Make sure that the students know what all the counselors can help with”



What could the school counselors in your school do to be more helpful to students?

“Give students cards....with their name and contact info on it. Much like a business card with their name, room number, and a business phone number.”

”Watch for irregularities in grades; “straight A” students suddenly doing poorly in classes for extended periods of time”

“Be in her office more”

”not be in so many meetings”



What could the school counselors in your school do to be more helpful to students?

“have more scheduled meetings for students who don’t go and make appointments themselves”

“Not so hidden”

“reach out more”

“Stop reaching out so much. Tell people your hear to help and then leave them alone.”



What could the school counselors in your school do to be more helpful to students?

“It would be cool if they made more effort to get to know each student personally instead of just doing presentations. If the counselor walked around the school during passing periods and knew all of our names and like recognized each of us, then that would be coolio.”

“Maybe not have a room in the middle of the office because it could be intimidating.”

“Advertise their help more”

“Be cooler and younger.”



What could the school counselors in your school do to be more helpful to students?

“nothing, they rock”

“Nothing they are perfect”

“Keep being awesome”

“I think they’re fantastic as it is.”

“please don’t get rid of our counselors”



What could the school counselors in your school do to be more helpful to students?

“The counselors do the best they can. What we need is more school counselors”

“I believe the counselors do very well at equally meeting students’ needs. I believe we have too many students per counselor (400), so it is difficult for the counselors to personally attend to students’ problems. Hiring more counselors would solve this.”



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**Thank you for coming to our presentation,
and enjoy the rest of the conference!**

Send us any comments or questions you have:

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