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The Role of School Counselors in Curbing Behavior and Disciplinary Problems among Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

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Abstract

This article addresses the urgent need for school counselors to acquire additional cultural competence skills for working with culturally diverse school students. Behavior and disciplinary problems are increasing in many school districts across the United States. Both urban and rural districts are having similar problems with individual students displaying disruptive behavior in schools. This article discusses the factors that causes behavior problem among culturally diverse students and offers recommendations for addressing these problems.

One way for school counselors to assist culturally diverse students in reducing misbehavior in schools is to understand the cultural differences of all students. Students bring with them an assortment of cultural history, customs, traditions and backgrounds. They are loaded, in some cases, with insurmountable individual pain and disappointments. To assume that all students are alike, and one cultural standard fits every student, is illogical. School counselors should have a variety of tools to incorporate in working with diverse student populations. This requires counselors to, in the words of Stephen Covey (Covey, 1990), "sharpen the saw." In other words, they need to keep working on themselves, by improving their skills and increasing their knowledge.

One would think that with all the attention focused on cultural diversity over the last decade, and the vast number of professional development workshops on diversity that dot the educational landscape across the United States that by now, school counselors should be the number one experts in the field of diversity. However, in some instances, this is not the case.

Over the last decade, there has been a tremendous increase in the number of professionals gaining cultural competence skills. Nevertheless, the long awaited cadre of professionals acquiring cultural competence skills has yet to be realized. In the nation's schools, counselors

possessing this valuable training seem to be restrained and discouraged from using their cultural competence skills in a systematic manner. In some cases, the school culture, along with the attitudes of some school administrators, does not allow for true integration of culturally relevant education. Thus, school counselors continue to apply the same methods to all students instead of employing a customized approach that recognizes the uniqueness of each student, especially students that are from culturally diverse populations.

Professional associations across the United States that sponsor conferences, seminars and workshops often include training sessions in the program. And without fail, diversity training tracks are offered at these events. However, somehow, the number of culturally competent professionals is still not keeping pace with the demands placed on school districts witnessing vast growth in culturally diverse student populations.

Behavioral Problems Lead to Dropout

It is paramount to encourage school counselors to become proficient in cultural competence. It is becoming urgent in schools to address the needs of the 21 century diverse student population. The demographics of school counselors in 2006 report that out of 635,000 jobs in counseling specialties, 260,000 were in the field of educational, vocational, and school counselors.

Rehabilitation and mental health counselors constituted over 241,000 professionals. The largest numbers of counseling specialists are in fields working with school age children, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008-09). A closer examination reveals that not only are professionals in the counseling field working with school age children but a large majority of school counselors are working with culturally diverse children. This is additional evidence that more cultural competence training and greater attention should be focused on the role of counselors working with diverse student populations.

A tremendous amount of attention has been given to the behavioral problems of culturally diverse school age children, especially African American males. The behavior problems range from aggressive verbal and physical problems to smart-aleck behavior. Oftentimes, these unresolved behavior problems lead to adolescent boys dropping out of school. According to a recent study from The Center for Labor Market Studies at Northwestern University, the United States is in a drop out crisis.

The study reports that 7.6 million students dropped out of school this year, with African American and Latino males having the highest dropout rates. In 2007, an astounding 16% of persons between 16 and 24 years of age (nearly 6.2 million people) were high school dropouts. Among these dropouts, 60.1% were men, 18.8% were Black, and 30.1% were Hispanic. In addition: Nearly one in five U.S. men between the ages of 16-24 (18.9%) were dropouts in 2007. Nearly three out of 10 Hispanics were dropouts (27.5%), including recent immigrants. More than one of five Blacks had dropped out of school (21%)--versus a dropout rate for Whites of 12.2%. (2009, p.2.)

To get a closer picture of the problem among culturally diverse children, all one has to do is to examine the poverty rate and underemployment conditions of these families. In 2007, the family poverty rate and the number of families in poverty were 9.8 percent and 7.6 million, respectively. both statistically unchanged from 2006. Furthermore, the poverty rate and the number in poverty showed no statistical change between 2006 and 2007 for the different types of families. (2008)

School suspensions are up and the main culprits are drugs and violence. Robert Schpok believes that school suspensions produce poor results. He maintains that suspensions reward inappropriate behaviors by using out of school suspensions, "schools reward the child for an

inappropriate behavior by giving them a day or so off from school." (Schpok, 2007)

When one investigates the factors that cause poor behavior, it becomes clear that many of the problems that students bring to school, especially culturally diverse students, emanate from cultural, social and psychological situations. High poverty rates, neighborhood violence and broken homes fuel some of the behavioral problems that students carry with them into the school building. School counselors must have the tools to address these situations. School counselors with a background in cultural competence, will equip them with practical skills that can be employed in intervening in the lives of culturally diverse students.

Disconnect Among At-Risk Students and Adults in Schools

Many at-risk students are experiencing a life that is void of personal connections with caring adults. They lack a sense of belonging, a sense of strong family ties, and some at-risk students carry with them the painful memories of emotionally charged life experiences. They are hurting individuals without a support mechanism. Adolph Brown uses the metaphor of a wheelbarrow to describe the type of intervention educators should apply to at risk students. He suggests that when educators see young at-risk students having problems and creating behavior disturbances, they should take out their imaginary wheelbarrow and place that young person in it. Brown states, "Imagine parents and teachers using a wheelbarrow to carry the often-heavy load of our young people. The heavy load I refer to is the young person's lack of self-esteem, self concept, and a general feeling that they alone are unable to make a difference in the world." (Brown, 2008)

These students live in a world of confusion and lack of love. They believe that there is no hope, no reason to aspire for life's accomplishments or to have ambition. Eventually, these students rebel and they declare battles with adults. (Seita & Brendtro, 2005) maintains that in the United States, we are experiencing a society that is "producing packs of kids detached from adults." These young people find themselves disconnected from the community and schools. They roam and hang-out with other students at malls, parks, or just walking in the streets. These are the students that oftentimes get into trouble in school; they are the students that display behavior problems. These students are referred to the school counselor for intervention. Depending on the nature and severity of the problem, in some cases, the

school principal will suspend the student from school.

This is an overarching problem in schools today, as well as in society, and educators do not fully understand at-risk students; thus, educators fail to understand the needs of at-risk students, their behavior and their human needs. (Olive, 2007) believes that adults need to understand the behavior of students. Olive maintains that when adults accomplished this task, then adults and educators can facilitate positive behavior change in troubled youths. Olive gives two strategies for dealing with the behavior needs of at-risk students.

Two of the basic requirements for facilitating positive behavior and supporting behavior change in children and youth are (a) adults' willingness to be patient and reassuring and (b) encouragement from adults that children can learn more functional ways to get their needs met. (p.2, 3)

School counselors should get the necessary training that will prepare them to be agents of change in schools, working with teachers in finding strategies and interventions for managing classroom behavior problems. Counselors and educators can experience a feeling of helplessness and frustration trying to deal with discipline problems. (Fagen, 1980) suggests that there are strategies and skills that one can learn to help students gain desirable behavior in school. Among those strategies are the skills of "stating positive expectations," teachers highlight what the expectations are for positive behavior in school. The second strategy mentioned by Fagen is the "skill of modeling," where teachers should model desired behavior others are expected to exhibit. I believe that these strategies and skills work for school counselors as well, and all educators should employ these strategies in intervening with at risk students.

Focus on School Counselors Role Working in Diverse Settings

The focus of guidance and school counselors in assisting students from diverse cultural backgrounds must be placed on assisting them to succeed in school. This requires goals that will define the types of intervention that is necessary for working through the social challenges that these students bring with them to school. School counselors must work with school administrators and teachers to ensure that the school environment is conducive for every student to learn and to develop into productive individuals.

School counselors are important members of the school culture. They can enable students to succeed and

intervene in troubling situations by offering alternatives to conventional disciplinary practices. School counselors should operate with positive principles displaying their protean style for developing positive relationships with students. School counselors should use their listening skills to help student who are having problems adjusting to the school culture. Counselors can help students cope with an array of personal problems. The school counselor can communicate to students that there is hope and alternative solutions to solving what some students might see as insurmountable circumstances. And the school counselor can model cultural competence skills that are relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures. (Klotz, 2006)

Cultural Competence Strategies for School Counselors

School counselors can be effective help agents when dealing with school students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. One solution is to continue to gain insight and training in cultural competence skills building. Hopefully, the confidence gained by school counselors from such training will translate into building greater respect for culturally diverse students. The literature offers some practices that school counselors can use while working with diverse student populations. The following ten strategies can be incorporated by school counselors in their professional intervention with behavior problem students.

- Partner with the principal and teacher leaders in assessing school-wide cultural competence. (Nelson, Bustamante, Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, 2008) Work in concert to make sure the efforts are of the counselor is in harmony with the school goals. Make sure that the school administrator encourages a sense that counselors play a role in the education mission on the school.
- Understand the history, traditions, and perspectives of specific student groups. Learn the culture of the diverse population that you are working with. Be aware of the appropriate use of language, eye contact and space and proximity. These cultural cues will assist in keeping tension at a low level and assisting the counselor in establishing trust.
- Take on the personal responsibility of working to consciously overcome stereotypes about populations of color. Start by investigating why you think that way you think about a person's background and culture, work backwards. Ask yourself what is the basis of the stereotype and why do you hold certain assumptions. Once these questions have been addressed, you can begin

to open up to a more accepting attitude about students that come from different cultures.

- Think outside of the box and acquire a more accurate or comprehensive knowledge of subject matter about different cultures. Build a repertoire of information sources that will give you accurate data about different cultures. Face your fears, challenge biases by learning more about populations that you know little about. Engage in a knowledge infusion into subject areas about cultural groups. Take a language class and study the dialects of various ethnic groups.

- Be empathic with diverse groups. Try to see life through their eyes, understand the challenges that some students are experiencing and offer a listening ear to their concerns. Don't be quick to assume that you know everything there is to know about their personal situation. Instead of being the expert, ask students to share their histories and stories. Examine their world view and listen and discuss ways to approach their concerns and needs.

- Don't become too emotionally involved in the struggles of diverse groups. Work to understand and to be a resource to students. Be close enough, yet distance yourself appropriately in order to establish respect for your professional services. Trying to be the best friend to students can sometime produce a backlash against the counselor resulting in losing ground and trust.

- Develop positive attitudes in your verbal and nonverbal interactions. Don't say one thing and give gestures that signal something entirely different from your words. Be consistent with what you say and how you say it. Let your personality be compatible with your facial expressions and body language. Effective communication is a golden gate that opens a very important relation with students. However, if they feel that you are betraying them in any way-they are very perceptive-you will lose their respect.

- Understanding racism and student resistance (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001). School counselors should take responsibility to overcome and challenge biases of all kinds, especially prejudice and racism. Racism is a sickness and prejudice is its symptom. School counselors must be equipped with the necessary tools to combat these societal ills if they intend to be effective working with diverse populations.

School Counselors as Academic Motivators

The problems are indeed great among students who have environmental challenges that seem overwhelming. However, school counselors can play a vital role in

encouraging students to take advantage of school resources to get ahead and to succeed. Counselors can talk with students and establish a relationship of trust with them. This relationship will allow the counselor to introduce the students to opportunities that they might not be aware of or not interested in. The counselor can introduce the students to community mentors and role models that can also talk with students to stir their interest in succeeding in school and in society.

(Butler, 2003) maintains that contrary to the naysayers, the African American youth can succeed in school. Butler sees the school counselor as a resource to African American students, helping them by providing academic guidance and support in a variety of ways. Counselors can talk with classroom teachers on behalf of students and work with teachers and administrators to develop innovative strategies that might capture the attention of the students and encourage them to concentrate on learning. Butler postulates that,

Such interventions might include peer instruction strategies, collaborative learning assignments and exercises, and self-instruction strategies. School counselors might also engage in advocacy for greater infusion of culturally relevant material into classroom curricula and for greater representation of African American administrators and teachers in school settings. (p.55)

(McCollum, 2006) believes that the battle for young African Americans minds is due largely to how society perceives the Black male. McCollum believes that educators should help African American males realize that acquiring an education does not make one "less black." School counselors in partnership with classroom teacher can assist not only African American males to realize that an education will give meaning to their lives, but that an education has no color. In other words, it's not a "White man thang." Counselors should be equipped to talk with these students or bring in a role model or a well respected member of the community to discuss education attainment with cultural diverse students. Furthermore, some researchers believe that the school and its personnel have a vital role to play in elevating neighborhoods into functional communities. (Anderson, 2001) suggests that schools and communities should develop a relationship that will promote learning experiences that students can use to better their own communities. Exposing vulnerable students to citizen education and civic activities in their communities will open their lives up to the realities of adulthood.

School counselors in some situations serve as surrogate

parents. They are in many cases the only constant adult that cares. They are the ones who will give a vulnerable student a hug, and tell them that they are loved. The tragedy of some children is that they are without a caring adult in the home. Sure, there are grown ups in the child's life, regrettably, some of the adults are not good role models. School counselors must rise to the occasion, be helpful beyond their regular job responsibilities, and be an excellent listener to troubled school students. School counselors need to use their professional skills and training to provide students with the help they need in order to feel confident and worthy. The school counselor can at least, in circumstance that warrant, be the one adult that students look up to and trust. Mincy (1994) calls for adults to be effective confidants, guiding and serving as advocates for children. One of the basic ingredients for helping students with behavior problems is to demonstrate that counselors and teachers do care about students.

School Counselors as Cultural Mediators

Demographic shifts in populations in the nation's schools will dictate the more and more school counselors will become mediators working in diverse school settings to lend their professional skills to helping student develop, according to Portman (2009). Portman maintains that school counselors have been exposed to a number of multicultural and cultural competence training. This training has been assigned by counseling associations as rubrics for professional standards and counselors have participated in job embedded professional development training at conferences, seminars and workshops. He suggests that the counselor's next horizon is to serve culturally diverse populations as a cultural mediator.

Portman explains that the term cultural mediator is used in international setting when working with refugees and in cross-cultural settings. Portman's own definition of a cultural mediator is described as:

. . . cultural mediation in school counseling as an intentional process through which a school counselor, in the role of cultural mediator, engages in prevention, intervention, and/or remediation activities that facilitate communication and understanding between culturally diverse human systems (e.g., school, family, community, and federal and state agencies) that aid the educational progress of all students. (p. 23)

As a cultural mediator, the school counselor works as a shuttle diplomat for the student and the school. The counselor serves as an intermediate, a non judgmental agent that has the student's interest and well being in mind. This shift in the role of the school counselor requires a greater involvement of counselors in the overall purpose of the school. The counselor as a mediator becomes an active participant in the academic mission of the school. The counselor works closely with classroom teachers, connecting what happens in the classroom to what happens outside the classroom. The counselor serves as a member of the leadership team of the school administrator, working with the school administrators, school governing board and with families and parents. This new model for school counselors will require a different mindset among counselors. The counselors will have to want to be a major player in the lives of students. They must be willing to use intrusive intervention and active engagement in some students' lives, especially those students who are frequently getting in trouble. This elevated role for the school counselor will require additional training in organizational justice, social justice and community engagement.

The Portman's model of school cultural mediators entails the following ten functions.

1. Gather and examine demographic data on students enrolled in the schools in their community
2. Develop an awareness of cultural backgrounds of all stakeholders in the school, including students, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and neighboring communities (e.g., rival athletic teams, cooperative education programs)
3. Communicate with families and community organizations regarding cultural diversity
4. Seek further education in cultural competence and linguistic skills acquisition
5. Work and think "outside of the box" or be culturally creative to affect ongoing social constructions of themselves, students, parents, teachers, staff, and administrators
6. Facilitate access to helping resources and social service agencies
7. Help culturally diverse students gain intrapersonal skills to facilitate relationship building
8. Help culturally diverse students develop social mediation skills to gain knowledge of cultural tools

9. Create a supportive and encouraging culturally diverse school and community climate

10. Serve as an information hub for culturally diverse families. Portman (2009).

Conclusion

In order to address some of the disciplinary problems that are characteristic of students of color, school counselors should become cultural brokers. They should learn as much as they can about different cultures. The most effective school counselor should be willing to engage in community activities that represent the student populations at the schools where they are employed. Such involvement will allow school counselors the opportunity to gain insights into how culturally different populations see the world and embrace what is important to them. When this is done; when school counselors can enlarge their own lens, then without reservations, school counselors will realize that all cultures are unique, incorporating a combination of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors that are shared by all groups of people. Getting to know what is important to a particular cultural group of people will provide the foundation for understanding what strategies are needed in order to assist culturally different students, especially the ones that are locked out of society.

Most often, students from different cultural backgrounds are seeking acceptance. They see themselves as being the odd person, and because the overwhelming majority population neglects to naturally integrate their cultural values into the mainstream customs and values, they feel isolated, in some cases they seem to be alienated from the customs, norms and practices of the majority. This social isolation results in cultural different students acting out and getting into trouble, oftentimes because there are no seemingly positive outlets that celebrate the things that these cultural groups value.

The overall practice is to track culturally different students, sending them to detention, suspending them, or assigning them to special education classes as a way of dealing with disciplinary problems. Imagine the difference it would make to culturally different students if caring educators and school counselors would take the time to reach out and understand the challenges that these students are confronted with on a daily basis. It is too easy for persons in the majority population to think that minority populations should conform to the popular norms and values of the majority. To expect all students to do things the same way and not to accommodate the

needs of culturally different populations is convenient; yet this seemingly convenient way of doing things has its obvious drawbacks.

It is important to emphasize that building trust and understanding among students that are culturally different takes lots of practice and time. It is not an overnight occurrence, however, when done; it will ultimately produce very positive results and improved human relations. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the school counselor serves as an intermediate, a non judgmental agent working for all students. School counselors in some cases take on the role of an adult authority figure and other cases the school counselor is seen among some students as a parent figure. The school counselor has the ability to create an environment for some culturally different students that will make their experience very positive. But of course, this requires a willingness to move out of one's comfort zone and to assume an understanding of the values of culturally different groups.

School counselors can provide support to culturally diverse populations by acquiring a more accurate or comprehensive knowledge of customs and practices about different cultures. Understanding what is important to cultural groups and showing respect for differences will provide convincing tools for school counselors when dealing with students from different backgrounds. Also, school counselors should be empathic with diverse groups and establish understanding with persons from different ethnic backgrounds, and try to see their perspective. When this is practiced, then a better understanding and a more positive level of communication can take place between counselor and student. And hopefully, the troubled student will embrace a trusting adult that is interested in helping not hurting.

The school counselor can serve as a support network to culturally different student populations by assisting them in understanding the expectations of school culture and helping them to adjust to the school environment. Likewise, school counselors can work with the majority population to help them embrace cultural differences. Together, working with all members of the school community-students, teachers, administrators and parents-allows school counselors to forge improved relationships with all stakeholders in the community. School counselors can make a difference in the lives of culturally different students. They help to reduce the disciplinary problems and reduce tension that causes disciplinary and behavior problems in schools.

4. behavioral control (i.e. aggression and substance abuse),

5. interpersonal relationships (i.e. trust and intimacy), and

6. biological processes (i.e. somatization and delayed sensorimotor development) (Margolin & Vickerman, 2007, p.615).

Attachment Issues

Any form of abuse can negatively impact the formation of secure attachments with parents and thus has impacts on future interpersonal relationships (Cohen, 2008). Violent acts promote higher rates of fearful or disorganized attachments (Cohen, 2008). Parental attachment becomes a mediating variable of family dysfunction, parental alcohol abuse, and the expression of interpersonal distress (Mothersead, Kivlighan, & Wynkoop, 1998). When attachment becomes severed or abnormally altered due to domestic violence, the mediation between the abuse and the internalization of distress is also changed. Domestic violence may also disrupt the ability to self-regulate and self-manage. Self-regulation refers to the process of systematic functioning that is adaptable to change (McKee, Zvolensky, Solomon, Bernstein, & Leen-Feldner, 2007).

Affect Dysregulation

The seriousness of the affect dysregulation caused by the complex trauma of domestic violence turns minor stressors or situations into feelings of serious distress (Margolin & Vickerman, 2007). It is common for survivors of domestic violence to operate as if they are in crisis at all times. Repeated exposure to violence in the home can lead to negative affectivity, the ability to experience an aversive emotional state (McKee, Zvolensky, Solomon, Bernstein, & Leen-Feldner, 2007). Negative affectivity forms the basis of coping and self-regulation processes. "Specifically, research suggests that negative affectivity is related to both: (i) negative mood states; and (ii) regulatory processes related to adapting to such states (e.g. escape, avoidance, rumination: Gray & McNaughton, 1996; Watson, David, & Suls, 1999" (as found in McKee, Zvolenskym, Solomon, Bernstein, & Leen-Feldner, 2007).

Researchers have tested affect regulation of PTSD survivors (Dalgleish, Rolfe, Golden, Dunn, & Barnard, 2008). The study compared the role of affect regulation with executive control functions in a correlational design whereas trauma exposed participants (N=36) were instructed to generate memories from their pasts and to

avoid specific memories. A negative correlation between symptoms of posttraumatic stress and the number of specific memories retrieved supported the hypothesis that greater posttraumatic stress accounted for reduced memory specificity due to affect regulation (Dalgleish, Rolfe, Golden, Dunn, & Barnard, 2008).

Intrusive Memories and Rumination

Rumination triggers posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms (Kostanski & Hassed, 2008; Speckens, Ehlers, Hackmann, Ruths, & Clark, 2007). Research has shown that traumatic memories occur more vividly versus non-traumatic memories and are more sensory/experiential in nature (Berntsen, 2001). Intrusive memories consist of brief sessions of sensory experiences, whereas rumination is defined as a lengthy thought process (Speckens, Ehlers, Hackmann, Ruths, & Clark, 2007). The rumination leads to the sensory experience of flashbacks experienced by survivors of complex trauma. Research suggests the PTSD memories involve more emotion, smells, tastes, visual aspects, and physiological/bodily sensations in comparison with non-traumatic memories (Berntsen, Willert, & Rubin, 2003).

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, symptoms of PTSD can be exhibited through the following:

- Bad dreams
- Flashbacks, or feeling like the scary event is happening again
- Scary thoughts you can't control
- Staying away from places and things that remind you of what happened
- Feeling worried, guilty, or sad
- Feeling alone
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling on edge
- Angry outbursts
- Thoughts of hurting yourself or others (2009).

The symptoms of PTSD with children may be expressed in different ways such as:

- Behaving like they did when they were younger
- Being unable to talk
- Complaining of stomach problems or headaches a lot

- Refusing to go places or play with friends (NIMH, 2009).

How Can Mindfulness Help? The History of Mindfulness

Mindfulness has existed since ancient times and today is used for various applications from mental therapy, healthcare/pain management, a spiritual journey, to industrial/organizational applications. The history of Sati (mindfulness) dates back to approximately 2500 years ago. Sati is the original term stemming from the Pali language (the earliest Buddhist language) meaning awareness or skillful attentiveness (Kuan, 2008, p. 1).

According to Buddhism, human experiences occur in five aggregates (Kuan, 2008, p.8).

| The Five Aggregates of Human Experience (<i>Khanda</i>) |
|--|
| Material form (<i>Rupa</i>) |
| Feeling (<i>Vedana</i>) |
| Apperception (<i>Sanna</i>) |
| Volitional formations (<i>Sankhara</i>) |
| Consciousness (<i>Vinnana</i>) |

Specifically, Sanna (apperception) relates closely to Sati (mindfulness). Apperception as a function of mindfulness involves assimilation or comprehension whereas a person's perceptions can be identified. Three translations for Sanna include "conception, notion, or idea" (Kuan, 2008, p.13). "The fifth aggregate, consciousness, contains all the other ones and is the basis of their existence" (Hanh, 1976, p. 46). To get to that point, one must recognize all other aggregates.

One explanation of why mindfulness is effective can be summed up by an early Buddhist idea as follows: "What one feels, one apperceives. What one apperceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one conceptually proliferates. With what one conceptually proliferates as the source, apperception and naming conceptual proliferation assail a person with regard to past, future and present visible forms recognized by the eye. [The same is said of the other five senses, namely ear, nose tongue, body, mind-organ.]" (Kuan, 2008, p.p. 18-19). This reflection of mindful practices can be exhibited in such activities that appreciate the moment for the intrinsic feelings experienced such as mindful eating, mindful breathing, and overall awareness. As clinicians, we are aware of the connection between thoughts, actions and feelings and frequently draw on those connections with cognitive behavioral techniques. In order to break

the negative thought process and symptoms of PTSD it can be useful to practice mindfulness. Being in the here and now is a useful technique in and out of the therapy session.

Buddha says: "Monks, when an uninstructed ordinary person comes into contact with a painful feeling, he sorrows, distresses himself, laments, weeps [...], and becomes bewildered. He feels two feelings: a bodily one and a mental one" (Kuan, 2008, p. 26). The physiological response of feeling within the body (such as pain) cannot be avoided; however, the mental feeling (such as pain) can be avoided (Kuan, 2008). Mindfulness practices enable clients to effectively deal with mental pain and suffering, in turn promoting liberation from unhealthy negative reactions/responses.

The Construct of Mindfulness

As a construct, there exists agreement that as a domain it involves human cognition and its processes (Hayes & Plumb, 2007; Sternberg, 2000; Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006; Linehan, 1993; Kuan, 2008). Mindfulness means having contact with the present moment in such that descriptions of thoughts, feelings, and other events are nonjudgmental (Hayes & Plumb, 2007; Linehan, 1993).

Some researchers have referred to mindfulness as a muscle that can be strengthened through practicing self-control exercises that can in turn increase an individual's capacity for self-control (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2007; Linehan, 1993). This strengthening of the mind and self-control can in turn reduce and regulate intrusive thoughts, such as ones recalled by domestic abuse survivors resulting from trauma. Thus, a mindful disposition can create optimal functioning and promote well-being.

Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman (2006) suggest that there exists an axiom of mindfulness. The axioms represent the fundamental components of mindfulness. (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006).

The Mindful Skillset

Survivors of domestic violence can benefit from mindfulness techniques due to the crisis survival skills they learn to incorporate into daily living. Linehan (1993) suggests two core skills of mindfulness as "what" and "how" (pp.63-69).

What skills include developing a lifestyle of developing awareness. They include learning to observe, describe, and participate. Observing refers to recognizing events,

emotions, and other behavioral responses and manipulating them whereas to keep experiencing pleasure or avoiding pain. Describing refers to labeling individual responses or events into words. This is important in developing proper communicatory and self-control skills. The person must learn to not judge what is happening in the moment by their perception, but rather by what actually occurs. The third aspect refers to participating in the moment without self-consciousness. The present experience involves attending only to the current activity of the moment (Linehan, 1993).

How skills include the way the person performs, attends, describes, and participates (Linehan, 1993). These include being nonjudgmental, focusing on one thing at a time, and doing what works for the person in the current situation. A person should see something as it is without placing a positive or negative connotation. Awareness focuses the mind on the current activity without distraction. This requires the person to keep control and focus (for example not worrying about the past or future while performing a task). Being effective refers to alleviating perfectionist tendencies in exchange for carrying out the necessity of the task itself. Self-trust is among the overall goal of this premise.

Mindfulness Interventions

Mindfulness interventions include such practices as breathing exercises, the use of imagery, meditation, muscle relaxation, mindful eating, sensory awareness activities, and/or observation without judgment. All of these techniques or simply one could be used with survivors of domestic violence. It may reduce stress, improve overall mood, increase self-trust, and possibly reduce rumination and intrusive memories that are characteristic of domestic violence survivors. Survivors of domestic violence and those with symptoms of PTSD often learn to operate in crisis mode- continuously feeling on edge and hyper vigilant waiting for the next incident to occur. Here and now techniques can help the client to begin to stay in the moment and assess events individually, thus beginning to regain a sense of peace in their lives.

The following resources are recommended readings for teaching mindfulness techniques to clients dealing with the effects of domestic violence:

Aronson, H.B. (2004) *Buddhist practice on western ground: Reconciling eastern ideals and*

western psychology. Boston , MD: Shambhala.

Harvey Aaronson discusses the different ways the words

"ego" "anger" and "attachment" are used in Eastern and Western psychological traditions. This book could aid the therapist in understanding these traditionally Eastern ideals.

Cohen, D. (2004). *The one who is not busy.* New York, NY: MJF Books.

Darlene Cohen includes mindfulness practices and exercises in this book that provides case studies and also mindfulness techniques that can be implemented/used by readers. This is a concise, but to the point read, concerning mindfulness and its everyday uses.

De Mello, A., & Stroud, J.F. (1990). *Awareness .* New York, NY : Doubleday.

Anthony de Mello uses humor, compassion, and insight in this text. The author mixes Christian spirituality, Buddhist parables, Islamic sayings, Hindu breathing exercises, and psychological implications/practices.

Epstein, M.(1995). *Thoughts without a thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist perspective.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Mark Epstein integrates Object Relations psychoanalytic theory and Buddhist psychology in this text.

Germer, C. K., Siegel, R. D., Fulton, P. R. (2005). *Mindfulness and psychotherapy.* New York , NY: Guilford Press.

This book can guide the therapist by discussing the practical application of mindfulness techniques (in easily understood nature) from cognitive, humanistic, and psychoanalytic theories/applications.

Goleman, D. (2003). *Destructive emotion, and how we can overcome them: A dialogue with the Dalai Lama.* London, Engand: Bloomsbury.

This book integrates Western scientific understanding with Buddhist psychological practices. It is an easy read.

Hayes, S.C., Follette, V. M., & Linehan, M. M. (2004). *Mindfulness and acceptance: Expanding the cognitive-behavioral tradition.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Theory and research relating to the new mindfulness-based cognitive therapies that have been developed recently.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness.* New York, NY: Dell Publishing.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you*

are. New York, NY: Hyperion Press.

Kabat-Zinn first conceptualized and presented mindfulness in a way that made it comprehensible to mainstream western therapists.

Linehan, M. M. (1993). *Skills training manual for treating borderline personality disorder*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

This book is a step by step guide for teaching clients four sets of skills: mindfulness, interpersonal effectiveness, emotion regulation, and distress tolerance. Mindfulness is regarded as the core skill upon which the other three depend. It is useful for substance use. It includes useful, clear cut handouts that may be readily photocopied.

Merton, T., & Thich, N. H. (1971). *Contemplative prayer*. New York, NY: Image Books.

Thomas Merton (western Monk) integrates the Christian contemplative tradition with what he has learned and experienced from the Eastern Mindfulness tradition.

Segal, Z.V., Williams, J. M., & Teasdale, J. D. (2002). *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression: A new approach to preventing relapse*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

This book is a great start for anyone coming from the CBT tradition. It includes a detailed CBT based discussion of the process of mindfulness and how it works. This work includes illustrative transcripts and a wealth of reproducible materials, including session summaries and participant forms.

Siegel, D. (2007). *The mindful brain: Reflection and attunement in the cultivation of well-being*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.

Thich, N.H.(1991). *Peace is every step: The path of mindfulness in everyday life*. New York, NY : Bantam Books.

Conclusion

We suggest that practitioners incorporate mindfulness practices in their work with domestic violence survivors. The effects stemming from the daily war zone of domestic violence are serious and debilitating in nature. Survivors become drafted in the middle of a battle, which becomes a battle to survive. Domestic violence touches the whole family. It is not only between spouses, it is a family affair. Those who have suffered abuse include parents, spouses, children, and even grandparents. Domestic violence does not discriminate according to

age, sex, sexual preference, or a particular socioeconomic status. The one aspect in common between all survivors is that they had an abusive partner. Thus, clients need reparation and to find a renewed strength in order to overcome the scars that the domestic violence/abuse has left.

Mindfulness exercises and techniques become a therapeutic tool that can help heal the wounds left by the domestic violence war. Mindful practices can strengthen the mind and enhance an overall sense of well-being that can improve clients' quality of life, mood, and mental strength. Clients become empowered to move toward peace.

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Words of Wisdom by Benjamin Franklin

They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety. Quoted from the *Historical Review of Pennsylvania*, by Benjamin Franklin.

God helps them that help themselves. Quoted from *Maxims prefixed to Poor Richard's Almanac*, 1757.

Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise. Quoted from *Maxims prefixed to Poor Richard's Almanac*, 1757.

Plough deep while sluggards sleep. Quoted from *Maxims prefixed to Poor Richard's Almanac*, 1757.

Never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today. Quoted from *Maxims prefixed to Poor Richard's Almanac*, 1757.

Remember that time is money. *Advice to a Young Tradesman*, 1748.

Our Constitution is in actual operation; everything appears to promise that it will last; but in this world nothing is certain but death and taxes. Quoted from a *letter to M. Leroy*, 1789.