

## Article 30

### **Three Tiered Model Toward Improved Self-Awareness and Self-Care**

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The American Counseling Association (ACA) 2005 Code of Ethics encourages counselors to practice self-care and strive toward self-awareness. When counselors engage in practices that foster wellness and awareness, they are better positioned to provide effective services to clients (Warren, Morgan, Morris, & Morris, 2010). The Introduction of Section C of the ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2005), indicates, "counselors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities" (p. 9). Furthermore, ACA (2010) offers support to counselors via their Web site ([www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)) by providing resources aimed at increasing self-awareness and wellness.

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) includes standards for counselor education programs that emphasize self-care strategies (Section II.G.1.d) and self-awareness (Section II.G.2.b., e.). Students in accredited programs should acquire a basic understanding of self-care strategies as they relate to the role of the counselor. Programs should also ensure students develop a keen sense of self-awareness and an understanding of the impact of attitudes and beliefs on the counseling relationship (CACREP, 2009). Draft #2 of the 2016 CACREP Standards also highlights the importance of self-care and awareness as components in counselor-training programs.

Weiss (2004) suggested counselors-in-training that learn self-care strategies benefit in educational pursuits and later as professional counselors. By focusing on self-awareness and self-care, counselors enhance their clinical effectiveness, as well as overall well-being, (Warren et al., 2010). Rowland (2009) suggested counselors can practice self-care and create "stress-free zones" by utilizing self-talk, meditation, or physical activity.

While ACA (2005, 2010) and CACREP (2001, 2009), including the 2016 Standards (draft #2), emphasize the importance of counselors developing self-awareness and self-care strategies, instruction and assignments focused on these critical aspects of development are often absent in the curricula of accredited programs (Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan, & Schure, 2006).

Counselor educators have made several attempts to directly infuse self-care and self-awareness in program curriculum. For example, participation in a course focused on personal growth through mindfulness led students to report significant changes in levels of stress, training, and personal life (Christopher et al., 2006). Yager and Tovar-Blank (2007) suggested ten strategies counselor training programs can implement to foster self-care practice and self-awareness among counselors-in-training. While there are various approaches for addressing self-care and self-awareness of pre-service counselors, none have become conventional components in counselor preparation.

Based on a perceived need for a universal approach to developing self-care strategies and self-awareness, this article offers a flexible, evidence-informed model for supporting the educational and professional pursuits of pre-service counselors. A detailed overview of the theoretical premise of the model is provided followed by a step by step presentation and case example. The model can be implemented in varied contexts and extended towards counselors of various developmental levels..

### **A Model for Self-Awareness and Self-Care**

This three-step model utilizes a developmental approach to enhance self-awareness and self-care of pre-service counselors. Additionally, this model is theoretically based in cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). CBT is an approach emphasizing the modification of thoughts in an effort to change emotions and behaviors (Longmore & Worrell, 2007). Each step incorporates an evidence-informed strategy utilized in CBT. Specifically, each strategy emphasizes self-monitoring while focusing on cognitive, emotive, and behavioral processes. Self-monitoring is an individual's ability to monitor, identify, and appraise one's reactions, whether cognitive, behavioral or emotional (Holifield, Goodman, Hazekorn, & Heflin, 2010). The strategies employed in this model include self-checks, self-talk, and self-journaling. Each strategy is presented in greater detail below.

The strategies and processes espoused in this model provide pre-service counselors ways to reduce or minimize stress incurred when providing counseling. Philosophically, the model highlights the importance of self-monitoring as a means of improving both self-awareness and self-care. In this model, self-awareness and self-care are facilitated when counselors identify and appraise cognitive, emotive, and behavioral reactions that present during and after counseling services. Through this process, pre-service counselors become keenly aware of who they are and/or who they aspire to be, while also determining what it takes to maintain their perceived self. While self-monitoring enhances self-awareness and self-care, it also heightens interpersonal skills such as empathy, which proves effective when providing counseling services (Crews et al., 2005; McMurran, Fyffe, McCarthy, Duggan, & Latham, 2001).

### **Tier 1: Self-Checks**

Self-checks can be a first step in the self-monitoring process. Self-checks are brief opportunities to stop and check on oneself by cognitively thinking about emotional well-being (Baird, 2011). Self-checks are reminiscent of the “stop and think” process commonly referred to in CBT (McMurrin et al., 2001) and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (Ellis & MacLaren, 2005). Potentially stressful situations frequently occur when providing counseling services. Pre-service counselors are especially vulnerable given their developmental level. Therefore, it is important they find small incremental time periods throughout each day to engage in analytical and critical processing of events to increase awareness and reduce stress (McMurrin et al., 2001). Pre-service counselors can actively participate in the self-check process by initially planning and following through on hourly self-checks.

### **Tier 2: Self-Talk**

Self-talk is an ongoing process used to reduce negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors with the goal of providing oneself with positive verbal feedback (Trepal, Boie, & Kress, 2012). Self-talk is a useful strategy pre-service counselors can implement to combat negative thoughts stemming from field experiences. This strategy is readily available throughout the day and can provide motivation and/or reinforcement. “I” statements are a form of self-talk used to increase individual motivation. This particular form of self-affirmation can also increase positive self-connections (Trepal et al., 2012). Pre-service counselors might use “I” statements as one form of self-talk to increase motivation and combat feelings of incompetence.

### **Tier 3: Self-Journaling**

Self-journaling, or journaling, is written communication with oneself (Utley & Garza, 2011). It is an ongoing process used to analyze, diffuse, and assess thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Utley & Garza, 2011). Self-journaling provides an opportunity to reflect as a means of analyzing thoughts, behaviors, and emotions, while also learning from those same reactions (Utley & Garza, 2011). Additionally, self-journaling enhances the self-discovery process, which increases self-awareness and brings about individual change. Pre-service counselors are encouraged to develop creative self-journals. These journals can be mental maps, personal logs, and/or letters to oneself. In each case, these self-journals have the potential to bring about cognitive, emotional, and behavioral change.

## **The Role of Processing in the Self-Awareness and Self-Care Model**

The Three Tiered Model Toward Improved Self-Awareness and Self-Care (SASC) provides tools for pre-service counselors and counselors to utilize systematically to increase self-awareness and promote self-care. Self-monitoring, a core concept that stretches across each tier, plays an integral role in counselor development. This model also affords counselors the opportunity to process events and situations through cognitive, emotive, and behavioral means.

### **Cognitive Processing**

Cognitive processing refers to the practice of reasoning or applying rational thought in a particular situation (Resick, Nishith, Weaver, Astin, & Feuer, 2002). Self-checks promote cognitive processing and increase self-awareness. Once an individual is able to effectively identify their cognitions, the following questions may emerge: *“how did I arrive at these thoughts?”* and/or *“what steps can I take to replace these thoughts?”* Pre-service counselors are taught to ask themselves these types of questions, for example, after a counseling session to accurately assess their emotional state. These types of guided questions from the SASC model encourage reasoning through cognitive processing (see Appendix).

### **Emotive Processing**

Emotive processing refers to the practice of developing awareness of emotions, emotive triggers, and steps to cope, change, and/or reduce specific emotions (Baker, Holloway, Thomas, Thomas, & Owens, 2004; Guastella & Dadds, 2009). Step one of the SASC model asks questions such as *“How do I feel at this moment as a result of what occurred?”* By applying emotive processing, pre-service counselors are able to recognize their emotional state in order to appropriately affirm it or change it accordingly. After assessing emotions about a counseling-related experience, a pre-service counselor can determine steps to reduce or remove negative feelings.

### **Behavioral Processing**

Behavioral processing refers to the practice of processing actions taken as a result of a particular situation (Longmore & Worrell, 2007). During behavioral processing an individual might ask *“what caused me to respond that way?”* and *“what steps can be taken to remove or reduce this behavior?”* Pre-service counselors are taught to ask themselves these questions after a counseling session to accurately assess their behaviors. If behaviors are identified as counterproductive, they can explore ways change may occur. These guided questions support behavioral processing and ultimately facilitate behavioral change. Pre-service counselors can increase self-awareness and self-care practices as a result of effective behavioral processing.

## **Application of the SASC Model**

Counselor educators should consider scaffolding the SASC model during field placement experiences (i.e., practicum and internship). During practicum, instructors can introduce the SASC model to pre-services counselors. As such, initial instruction should focus on outlining the philosophy, goals, and objectives of the model to ensure that students have a clear understanding of its purpose. Instructors should introduce the model’s steps incrementally, allow for practice of each step individually, and offer an opportunity for students to discuss their engagement in each step. For example, the instructor may introduce the model during week three of the practicum semester. Students are encouraged to utilize step one throughout the week while at their practicum sites. Students would discuss their experiences and incorporation of step one during the next class meeting.

Once students establish an appropriate level of comprehension and routine in step one (Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts, & Wardle, 2009), the next step is added and the same process is completed. This model allows for the application of self-awareness and self-care skill and development often described in developmental models (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Once the model is fully implemented, pre-service counselors are more knowledgeable about their skills, better understand how to cope with stressful counseling experiences, are confident in their ability to use the model, and motivated to continue use of the model to promote self-awareness and self-care.

The degree of support provided to pre-service counselors during practicum often dissipates in internship. During internship, students are expected to demonstrate more advanced levels of competencies related to self-awareness, coping skills, and self-care. Limited time is spent discussing the implementation and utilization of the SASC model during internship because the goal for students is to become more autonomous (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Discussions often focus on the effectiveness of the model and how the model was used to process emotions, behaviors, and/or thoughts throughout the internship experience.

To extend the model, counselor educators might consider working with pre-service counseling students to develop a self-awareness and self-care plan (Appendix A). Self-awareness and self-care plans can be established at the end of practicum once students become familiar with the SASC model and its importance in ensuring success as a counseling practitioner. The plan could be as diverse as the student. These plans are individualized and can be developed collaboratively between the student and practicum instructor. However, students should use the plan as a chance to analyze opportunities for growth (weaknesses), define and state problem(s), identify how the goal will be obtained, and outline specific exercises that might be helpful in reaching the outlined goal. Encourage students to revisit goals routinely and to modify them when necessary.

The process of scaffolding provides pre-service counselors an enhanced level of learning and engagement. The model and steps can be tailored to meet specific needs of pre-service counselors. Tailoring the model to student needs makes learning intentional and increases opportunities to achieve developmental goals and milestones.

### **Case Example: Effective Use of the SASC Model**

Elizabeth is a third year graduate student in a Counselor Education program. This year, Elizabeth will be completing her field placement courses (i.e., practicum and internship) in preparation for graduation and entrance into the workforce. Although Elizabeth is excited about being able to practice what she's learned over the past 2 years, during group supervision she admitted that she is experiencing a great deal of anxiety about the effectiveness of her clinical skills. The university supervisor learns that Elizabeth identifies as a perfectionist and that her site supervisor had to conduct a session with a client when she "froze." When it was time to greet the client and provide her with information about confidentiality, Elizabeth disclosed her "mouth became dry, she could not think of anything to say and instead sat staring at the client in silence." Disappointed and embarrassed, Elizabeth is reaching out to her university supervisor for guidance and help.

Based on what Elizabeth has presented, the university supervisor spends the next 4-6 weeks working with her to utilize self-care strategies to decrease anxiety, while also enhancing self-awareness. Utilizing the SASC model, Elizabeth is initially encouraged to participate in self-checks. Elizabeth is advised to incrementally check in with herself cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. For example, Elizabeth might participate in self-checks while she is observing her site supervisor providing counseling and again while her site supervisor is observing her providing counseling. Elizabeth might extend this process by self-journaling about her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during these different experiences. Next, Elizabeth brings her journal to group supervision and shares her experiences, leading to further self-discovery.

Through this process, Elizabeth determines that she is measuring her ability to provide counseling services to that of her site supervisor. By doing so, she feels inadequate and often tries to compensate by attempting to mimic what she observes from her site supervisor. Elizabeth learns that mimicking her site supervisor lacks creativity and authenticity; it does not work. Understanding Elizabeth's dilemma, the university supervisor encourages her to continue to self-monitor by using self-checks. The university supervisor advises Elizabeth to use self-talk to redirect negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors when inadequacy and anxiety emerge.

### **Discussion**

Pre-service counselors can benefit from self-monitoring models aimed at improving self-awareness and self-care strategies. The proposed Three Tiered Model Toward Improved Self-Awareness and Self-Care (SASC) provides a process to assist pre-service counselors improve both self-awareness and self-care during field experience courses (i.e., practicum and internship) and beyond. The SASC model provides pre-service counselors with a process for resolving conflict, enhancing counseling skills, and coping with complicated issues in counseling settings (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Counselor educators utilizing the model emphasize analytical and critical thinking skills to promote improved self-awareness and self-care among their students. The model offers ongoing support to students throughout field placement experiences.

Pre-service counselors who are not accustomed to intentional self-monitoring might find this new approach challenging (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Initially, pre-service counselors might forget to monitor, instead becoming engrossed in the counseling practice. The self-check stage of the model provides an ongoing and instant reminder to monitor or check-in with oneself throughout the day. Each step in the model offers prompts, providing questions that pre-service counselors can ask themselves. These guided questions are used to facilitate cognitive, behavioral, and emotional processing.

The self-awareness and self-care plan (Appendix A) provides pre-service counseling students with essential components to consider when caring for oneself in stressful personal and professional situations. Pre-service counseling students should consider how they will cope with difficult situations during field placement, what support systems they have in place, or how to develop support systems and the role those support mechanisms will play when attempting to deal with stressful situations. Lastly, developing outlets to deal with stressful situations is also a crucial component of a self-

care and self-awareness plan. Extending the model supports the scaffolding approach employed from practicum into internship.

The SASC model promotes the development of pre-service counselors by offering a step by step process for increasing self-awareness and skill mastery. The model provides a process that pre-service counselors can easily learn and apply during field experiences and throughout their career (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). When considering the vast number of developmental models, emphasis is placed on awareness (e.g., self and others) and coping as being fundamental to pre-service counselors growth and development in the profession (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). This model addresses key concerns identified among pre-service counselors (see Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). If this model is implemented in a linear manner during practicum and advanced during internship, pre-service counselors will likely be better equipped to provide effective counseling services upon graduation.

The SASC model fosters the personal and professional development of pre-service counselors. It can facilitate self-awareness and growth as well as enhance the developmental level of pre-service counselors.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Three Tiered Model Toward Improved Self-Awareness and Self-Care**

Pre-service counselors will engage in the three step self-monitoring process during field placement. The process is utilized to assist pre-service counselors become more self-aware, while also teaching them a process to ensure self-care. Below is a brief description outlining each phase of the three-step process.

#### **Step 1: Self-checks (Building self-awareness and self-care)**

Participate in ongoing self-checks by asking yourself the following questions after each counseling session:

- How do I feel at this moment as a result of what occurred?
- What steps can I take to remove or reduce these feelings?
- Use self-motivating statements.
  - How can I prevent these feelings from reoccurring in similar situations?

#### **Step 2: Self-talk (Maintaining self-awareness and self-care)**

Utilize self-talk to maintain keen self-awareness and improved self-care by asking yourself the following questions when you are alone or meditating:

- What is it that I feel?
- What caused me to feel this way?
- What steps can I take to remove or reduce these feelings?
- Use self-motivating statements (“I” statements).

#### **Step 3: Self-journaling (Sustaining self-care)**

Write targeted (themed) journals that highlight stressful events, log the process of removing or reducing the emotion, the timeframe for emotion removal/reduction, and lessons learned (new ways of thinking; new strategies for coping), and setbacks.

**Format for Targeted (Themed) Journaling:**

**Theme:**

What caused me to feel \_\_\_\_\_?

Discussion:

What steps have I taken to remove/reduce \_\_\_\_\_ feelings?  
What was the timeframe?

1.

Timeframe:

2.

Timeframe:

3.

Timeframe:

New Ways of Thinking (reframing thoughts): What lessons did I learn?

What might I do differently next time?

New strategies for coping:

Setbacks encountered:

### Self-Awareness and Self-Care Plan

This plan is used to establish and work toward meeting goals for improved self-awareness and self-care.

Opportunity for growth: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I. Goal:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Coping Strategies:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Support System(s):

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

Outlets:

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

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