

THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF PAIR COUNSELING: A DYADIC DEVELOPMENTAL PLAY THERAPY FOR AGGRESSIVE, WITHDRAWN, AND SOCIALLY IMMATURE YOUTH

Michael J. Karcher
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Michael J. Karcher is now at the College of Education and Human Development, University of Texas at San Antonio. Parts of this paper were presented at the 27th International Congress of Psychology, Stockholm, Sweden, in July 2000 and the American Counseling Association annual conference in March 2001. The author thanks Hardin Coleman, Sara Karcher, and Marie Suizzo for comments on earlier drafts of this paper, and acknowledges the contributions of members of the Wisconsin Pair Counseling Research Group and the Group for the Study of Interpersonal Development, Harvard University to the development of pair counseling and pair therapy.

Abstract: *Pair counseling is a short term, dyadic play therapy for youth who have problems making and maintaining friendships. Pair counseling reflects an integration of principles and techniques from play therapy, developmental psychology, and counseling psychology. In this article an overview of the principles and practice of pair counseling is presented. The children best served by pair counseling and the goals are described. The structure of the session and recommended play activities are presented. The theoretical model of perspective taking is introduced and linked to the techniques and activities that are used by*

Correspondence should be addressed to Michael Karcher, College of Education and Human Development, University of Texas at San Antonio, 501 West Durango Blvd., Office 4.314, San Antonio, Texas 78207. E-mail: mkarcher@utsa.edu.

counselors to structure pair counseling. Finally, five principles guiding the practice of pair counseling are described and illustrated using case transcripts from a larger study.

Aggressive, withdrawn, and socially immature youth are among the most commonly referred for treatment but are challenging to treat both individually and in groups (Kazdin, 1987; Sweeney, & Homeyer, 1999; Weisz, Weiss, Han, Granger, & Morton, 1995). Their problems reflect delays in normal development, which threaten their social success in peer group contexts. Pair counseling provides an alternative play therapy for those youth whose aggressive, shy, or socially immature behavior limits their ability to make and maintain friendships. Pair counseling is a structured, developmental play therapy in which two children are paired in a counseling relationship that centers around reciprocal peer play. The counselor's goal is to facilitate the children's interactions while they engage in both therapeutic and more common play activities (e.g., puppets, art, games) and to help them recognize what facilitates and what hinders the development of their friendship.

Goals of Pair Counseling

The main goals of pair counseling are to help children learn how to become better friends, establish and maintain enduring relationships, and negotiate more effectively within relationships. The pair counselor's role is twofold: first, to help the children manage the basic relationship functions of intimacy and autonomy and, second, to help the children use age-appropriate social skills. To promote each child's social skills the counselor must ensure that intimacy and authenticity develop in the pair's relationship and that sufficient opportunities are present for the children to resolve interpersonal conflict and develop friendship skills (Selman & Schultz, 1990). These goals are achieved through peer play, guided reflections, and developmental activities that promote social understanding and social skills.

Indicated Clients

Developing and maintaining successful relationships with peers is a critical skill for children between the ages of 8 and 14 (Selman, 1980; Sullivan, 1953). This makes pair counseling an especially appropriate

play therapy for elementary and middle-school-aged children who demonstrate social skills deficits, peer relationship problems, and social isolation. Children typically are referred for pair counseling because they lag behind their peers in their acquisition of friendship-making skills. Such problems are particularly common among aggressive and withdrawn youth who are often found to be lacking in their ability to take the social perspectives of others.

Perspective taking is the core human ability to understand the thoughts, needs, and beliefs of individuals other than oneself (Selman, 1980). It reflects the ability to stand in another's shoes, and informs the interpersonal understanding that children use to guide their behaviors. Emotionally disturbed, aggressive, and socially withdrawn youth often reveal large discrepancies between the complexity of their perspective taking and the maturity of their typical negotiation strategies (Beardslee, Schultz, & Selman, 1987). Compared to their peers, youth with behavioral and emotional problems often underutilize their perspective-taking abilities and use immature negotiation skills to resolve interpersonal conflict (Leadbeater, Hellner, Allen, & Aber, 1989). Therefore, pair counseling can be especially helpful for such youth.

Children are paired in terms of their similarities and their differences. Children of similar ages are matched to increase the likelihood that the children are similar in their cognitive abilities. When one child is more cognitively mature than the other, the more mature child may either shame or act as co-therapist to the less mature child. This situation tends to impede relationship development between peers. Children of the same sex are matched to encourage them to practice peer rather than romantic relationship skills. There is no evidence that pair counseling is more useful for boys than girls, though the manner in which boys and girls approach pair counseling appears to differ (Schultz, 1997; Watts, 1997).

Some differences, however, are necessary to evoke conflict and contrasting problem-solving approaches between the children. Typically a child whose social problem-solving approach reflects impulsivity, aggressiveness, and other acting out behaviors is paired with a child who is more withdrawn, shy, and lacking in assertiveness. For example, a bully might be paired with his or her victim because they use opposite interpersonal negotiation strategies. Interpersonal negotiation strategies

(INS) are the actions that individuals use or propose to use for resolving interpersonal conflict in relationships (Selman, Beardslee, Schultz, Krupa & Podorefsky, 1986). Some children tend to act in rigidly *self-transforming* ways by fleeing, giving in, or allowing themselves to be manipulated or controlled by others. Other children seem predominately to enlist *other-transforming* negotiation strategies. They fight, threaten, cajole, and manipulate others to conform (or transform) to meet their own needs (see Table 1).

The goal is to match a child whose immaturity reflects a *flight* negotiation style with a child who resolves problems with a *fight* negotiation style (see Table 1). By pairing opposites in this way, the counselor can praise both children's competencies (e.g., restraint or assertiveness) and encourage each child to practice the positive aspects of the other's negotiation style. Pair counseling can be more difficult when the paired children use similar negotiation styles. For example, when two acting out youth are paired together in therapy, they seem to validate one another's fight style, which undermines effective intervention (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). However, when children are encouraged to interact with a child who negotiates differently than they do, they are more likely to have the limitations of their approach revealed through their inevitable conflicts. Similarly, cross-cultural pairs also appear to have benefits in terms of promoting cross-cultural competencies and intergroup understanding (Karcher, 1996; Karcher & Nakkula, 1997).

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PAIR COUNSELING SESSION, COUNSELOR STRATEGIES, AND PLAY ACTIVITIES

Pair counseling play sessions include several structured opportunities for social negotiation (Appendix 1). The partners in the pair decide together which of several provided activities they will engage in during that session. This negotiation follows guidelines that are similar to those for group play therapy (O'Connor, 1991): (a) the pair decides together and has to agree on what to play during the session; (b) whatever the pair chooses, they must do it together; and (c) the children may not hurt each other, the counselor, or the property in the room. These three guidelines are the primary rules that govern their play.

Pair counseling also provides structured opportunities for the pair to reflect on their social interactions. Each session begins with a brief review of the pair's successes and failures during the previous meeting. The counselor reminds the children about past conflicts and the suggestions they identified in previous sessions to manage similar conflicts in the future. The goal of these reflections is to prepare the children to work more effectively and to choose games that will facilitate their intimacy.

Once the pair has concluded their initial reflections, and for the majority of the rest of the session, the children play while the counselor remains nondirective until he or she needs to help the children resolve conflicts. Typically the pair counselor does not play games with the children so that the relationship between the children can develop. When one child tires of a game or activity, the counselor helps the pair work together to select another activity they will both enjoy playing together. The counselor tries not to interrupt the children's play, but may gently encourage the children to articulate one another's point of view and to use more mature negotiation strategies. While the children play, the counselor acknowledges the children's demonstrations of caring, cooperation, and assertiveness. This tells the children that what they are doing is valued by the counselor and provides them an opportunity to internalize this value. Interventions that are designed to promote social and cognitive development are typically more effective when children are encouraged to use more mature social skills (Lockwood, 1978; Damon, 1988). Young children, in particular, seem to benefit from clear external guidelines for what is appropriate behavior. Younger children lack advanced perspective-taking abilities and need more direct feedback and role modeling about which social behaviors are acceptable. They need encouragement to practice certain skills, and praise when they are interpersonally successful. When working with preadolescents it may be more helpful for the counselor to make process comments about the positive impact of the youths' demonstrations of caring, cooperation, or assertiveness on their relationship. This helps the youths to see, from a third-person perspective, the impact of their actions on their relationship.

During the last 10 to 15 minutes of each session, the counselor assumes a more directive approach. The counselor facilitates the pair's

reflection on their conflicts during the hour, helps the pair to evaluate the effectiveness of their conflict resolutions that day, and suggests they anticipate how they might handle such conflicts differently in future sessions. At the end of the session the counselor helps the children do three things: first, recall their positive shared experiences of intimacy and caring; second, describe what behaviors, feelings, or thoughts contributed to their successes in cooperating or being assertive in moments of conflict; and third, identify activities they could engage in during subsequent sessions that would allow similar degrees of intimacy and agreement to be achieved between them. How this is accomplished depends on the age and maturity of the youths. Older children and early adolescents often can verbally respond to questions asked by the counselor. For younger children, the counselor can identify examples of caring, cooperation, and assertiveness that occurred during the session and ask the pair to discuss how these incidents happened. Conflicts then can be discussed in the pair.

Activities in Pair Counseling

Early attempts to use therapeutic games and specific social skills training in pair counseling (or "pairs," as the children often refer to it) led to limited success and suggested the need to use more common games and activities (Moody, 1997; Selman & Schultz, 1990). Therefore, a predetermined set of common games and developmental activities usually should be provided by the counselor. Recommended activities include expressive activities (drawing paper with water-based markers, puppets), physical games (Nerf basketball, Twister), rule-based games (playing cards, UNO, Sorry, Jenga, Connect 4), therapeutic games (Ungame, Lifestories), and social skills promoting games (Friendship Island, Mountaineering). Children also may plan ahead and negotiate other games they would like to bring to their next session.

Games, activities, and media chosen by the counselor should meet three practical considerations. First, the activity should not be so complex that it distracts the children from their developing relationship. For example, games such as checkers, that can be played while talking about other things, or activities that focus directly on their relationship development are better than games such as chess that focus all of the youths' attention on the game itself. Second, games should provide

children a variety of ways to interact, express themselves, and develop their relationship. Third, games should be fun for the children so that the children are motivated to play them, are interested in them, and can play with spontaneity and enjoyment.

Pair Counseling Versus Group or Individual Counseling

Pair counseling allows the two children to practice social skills within a two-person relationship before venturing into more complex social situations such as group counseling. Unlike in a group, in pair counseling the withdrawn child cannot vanish into the crowd of more talkative peers. Conversely, aggressive children often act out in groups in ways that inhibit the development of group processes (Ginott, 1961) and that model deviancy for the other group members (Dishion et al., 1999). In pair counseling, the acting-out youth cannot get his or her needs met (e.g., the need to play or have fun) unless he or she cooperates with his or her partner by working together.

The primary benefits of pair counseling over individual play therapy are the opportunities pair counseling presents for learning and practicing social skills within an ongoing relationship. To use a popular colloquialism, in pair counseling children not only learn how to “talk the talk” of being socially skilled, but they have opportunities to “walk the walk” within a close friendship.

The practice of pair counseling differs as a function of the time available and the level of pathology or disorder the child presents. In schools, pair counseling is usually conducted weekly. It usually lasts the length of one class period and is often the only intervention the student receives at school. In residential treatment, *pair therapy* usually is conducted twice weekly and accompanies other therapies (Selman & Schultz, 1990). When a child's disorder presents severe cognitive or emotional impairment, pair therapy may be indicated so that the benefits of the developing relationship can impact personality development as well as social skills development. Yet, in both contexts, when the sessions must be conducted on a short-term basis (e.g., three-month), using pair counseling may make the best use of this limited time.

Theoretical and Empirical Foundations: The Development of Pair Counseling

Pair counseling was developed out of pair therapy, which has a 25-year history. Pair therapy is a developmentally based psychosocial treatment modality for the long-term treatment of pairs of children and adolescents with severe emotional and behavioral disorders (Barr, Karcher, & Selman, 1998; Selman, Watts, & Schultz, 1997). Pair therapy focuses as much on the change of underlying personality structures as on social skills development (Selman & Schultz, 1990). The sessions are less structured than are pair counseling sessions and occur over a longer period of time. Pair therapy, like client-centered and psychodynamic play therapies, places most importance on the naturally developing relationship in the pair to provide opportunities for social development and personality transformation.

Research Findings

Research on both perspective-taking development and the effects of pair therapy support the argument that long-term pair therapy holds the promise of being an effective intervention for children who are socially less successful because of their immature interpersonal understanding and negotiation skills (Nakkula & Selman, 1991; Selman & Arboleda, 1985; Selman et al., 1997). There is evidence that long-term pair therapy can produce positive changes in social behavior among youth in residential treatment, and that it can effect changes that are not gained through individual or group therapy with youth diagnosed with severe emotional and behavioral disorders (Lyman & Selman, 1985; Watts, Nakkula, Jones, et al., 1997).

Initially pair counseling was used in schools to treat only subclinical populations of youth at risk for developing clinical disorders such as depression and conduct disorder (Selman & Cohn, 1990). However, the need for short-term and manualized interventions to promote social competencies among a variety of behaviorally and emotionally disturbed youth led to the use of pair counseling for youth with more serious problems. Pair counseling was manualized to include a set of intervention techniques and a systematic intervention structure (Karcher, 1999) that could facilitate developmental growth in a time-limited fashion (usually 20 sessions). Unlike pair therapy, which aims to

effect personality as well as developmental growth through long-term treatment, pair counseling targets social skills, cognitive-developmental growth, and better peer relations through a short-term, structured form of dyadic play therapy. However, pair counseling also has been found to be effective with children presenting severe pathology in clinical settings as well as those with only social skills deficits in schools. A recent study found that 18 sessions of pair counseling reduced both internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors for boys and girls between 8 and 12 years of age. Among children with externalizing disorders, reductions in delinquent behavior following pair counseling were explained by increases in perspective taking or interpersonal understanding (Karcher & Lewis, 2002).

Theoretical Orientation of Pair Counseling

Perspective taking. Selman (1980) describes a sequence of social perspective-taking abilities that represents the development of the child's ability to understand, articulate, and mentally coordinate social perspectives (see Table 1). Selman describes the young child's ability to articulate his or her own subjective perspective (the first-person perspective) as an advance from the undifferentiated egocentrism common among very young children. Still older children, usually by the end of elementary school, develop the ability to simultaneously reflect on and interrelate their own and another's perspective (the second-person perspective). For example, being able to consider two perspectives simultaneously, Chris might explain, "I wanted to play basketball, because I am good at it and I think it is fun, but Kareem wanted to read and share comics because he likes to do that more and has a big collection of them. So it was hard for us to decide what game to play." Later, as children approach adolescence, they typically become able to take a perspective on the relationship between the two individuals and their coordinated perspectives (third-person perspective). By early adolescence, most youth can understand what both parties want and can anticipate what will be best for their relationship over time. This third-person, or abstract, point of view can be called the "we" perspective because it represents the ability of individuals to understand what is best for the relationship.

Interpersonal negotiation strategies. Each perspective-taking ability supports a specific type of interpersonal negotiation strategy. When a child can verbally identify her own subjective perspective and see it as vaguely different from the perspectives of others (level 1 perspective taking), typically his or her interpersonal negotiation strategies will be *unilateral* actions. The older child, when negotiating play from a self-reflective (level 2) perspective, typically uses *reciprocal* negotiation strategies like cooperation and deal making that take both individuals' perspectives into account. This reflects developmental growth away from the use of less complex, physicalistic, and unilateral strategies (e.g., fleeing or hitting). Lastly, a mutual (level 3) perspective is demonstrated in *collaborative* actions. Collaborative negotiation strategies strike a balance between meeting the needs of the self and another. By collaborating, each partner accommodates his or her needs in such a way that shared needs or interests emerge, and neither party sacrifices more than the other or develops resentment in their ongoing relationship.

Promoting perspective taking through psychosocial interventions helps children demonstrate greater interpersonal understanding and social maturity and thereby promotes psychological health (Schultz & Selman, 1989; Selman et al., 1986). The therapeutic assumption behind pair counseling is that efforts to help increase children's ability to accurately and effectively understand, name, and appropriately respond to the social perspective of their peers—that is, promoting interpersonal understanding—will lead youth to experience less alienation, rejection, isolation, and other social experiences that can contribute to children's depression, aggressiveness, and underachievement (Dodge, 1994; Kazdin, 1987). It also is hypothesized that the negotiation strategies practiced in pair counseling may be transferred to other peer relationships and to later romantic relationships in late adolescence and adulthood.

Developmental intervention techniques. Three main techniques used to promote perspective taking and interpersonal negotiation strategies are empowering, linking, and enabling (Selman & Schultz, 1990). These techniques allow pair counselors to help the pair work at a level of social and developmental maturity just above that which they tend to enlist on their own. The goal is not for all pairs to

engage collaboratively, but for pairs to perform more maturely and effectively than they otherwise would. Counselors promote perspective taking by *empowering* impulsive children to articulate their needs (e.g., articulating single perspectives—movement from level 0 to level 1). The goal is to help the children identify and articulate their separate beliefs, wants, goals, and feelings—that is, to share their own subjective perspective. Counselors *link* the perspectives of two children who cannot do this independently (e.g., helping youths coordinate their two social perspectives—movement from level 1 to level 2). This helps youth to intercoordinate their perspectives in order to cooperate when making decisions about the most appropriate actions to take or game to play. Finally, counselors help *enable* the children to see the long-term consequences of their individual actions on their collective relationship (i.e., helping them take a third-person perspective—movement from level 2 to level 3). By enabling, counselors foster mutuality and shared reflection, which helps the youth in the pair move beyond their separate, individual needs and toward attending to the needs of the relationship.

Which technique to emphasize depends on the level of social perspective taking and interpersonal negotiation the child relies on most. The counselor employs the technique needed to encourage a child to try out the next level of maturity. For example, the impulsive child should be empowered to speak up, whereas the demanding child needs help to listen. However, the maturity of children's interactions can vary widely during a session as a function of their excitement in play, their response to conflict, and their ability to reflect on the play sessions when asked to. Therefore, all three techniques will be used by the counselor during most sessions.

A Developmental Hierarchy of Games and Activities in Pair Counseling

Children grow through play. Both cognitive-developmental and dynamic play therapy theories suggest that children develop socially and emotionally when they are able to play games that allow them to develop physical impulse control; games that help them to express their feelings indirectly; games in which they can achieve mastery and confidence; games that elicit closeness and sharing in relationships; and games that promote the knowledge, practice, and application of more

mature social skills (Selman, 1980; O'Connor, 1991). Each of the games and activities used in pair counseling serves a function related to either cognitive-developmental or play therapy theories.

The first type of game used in pair counseling provides opportunities for dynamic processes (e.g., projection), fantasy play, and spontaneous symbolic play in pair counseling. These games include puppets, art, skits (e.g., the use of a police hat), and the Magic 8-Ball. Reflecting principles of dynamic and client-centered play therapy (O'Connor, 1991; Landreth, 1997), these games allow the children to choose activities that promote dynamic self-expression. Other games also must be available so that children are not forced to engage in disclosing activities that make them feel unsafe or vulnerable in the context of an unfamiliar peer.

The other three types of games recommended for pair counseling each reflect a level of perspective-taking ability. The first of these types of games or activities are physical, impulsive, and tactile, such as Nerf basketball and Twister (e.g., level 0 to 1). The second set of games reflects simple, rule-based games, which allow the children to feel competent in the coordination of their separate perspectives and behaviors. Some examples of these games include UNO, Sorry, and Jenga. These games provide simple, repetitious activities over which they can talk socially, deepen their friendship, and develop a more intimate shared experience. The games a pair chooses session-after-session are described as *home base activities* because they become routine and allow the children's attention to be paid to their developing relationship (Selman & Schultz, 1990). The third type of activity or game facilitates the development of a chumship or close friendship (e.g., level 2 to 3). Such friendship, reflection, and skills development games include Friendship Island, The Ungame, Mountaineering, and Lifestories. These games provide opportunities for self-disclosure, problem solving, and talking with each other but do not force emotional disclosure or make the children feel vulnerable in the context of a peer.

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF PAIR COUNSELING

The developmental theory behind pair counseling suggests that many children's problems reflect deficits in social skills and the inability

to successfully negotiate relationships. These problems often result from the absence of previous opportunities to develop adequate social skills. The pair counselor must educate the child and structure opportunities for developmental growth while at the same time provide opportunities for autonomy, spontaneous play, and engaging authentically with another child. Therefore, successful pair counseling requires both directive and nondirective techniques at different points in the sessions. As illustrated in Figure 1, sometimes the counselor structures the relationship and helps to scaffold the children's social skills, while at other times the counselor relies on interpretations and the children's own ability to co-create self-actualizing opportunities in their relationship. The choice of whether to be more or less directive and structured depends on which approach will provide the best opportunity for perspective taking, mature interpersonal negotiations, and greater self-awareness.

In this final section, five basic principles of pair counseling are described using illustrations from a case study of two nine-year-old boys, who participated in 18 sessions of pair counseling in a hospital setting as part of a larger study (Karcher & Lewis, 2002). Excerpts from this case were chosen because these boys demonstrated the greatest reductions in behavioral problems after pair counseling.

Principle 1. Make Clear that the Focus is on Developing Friendship Skills

Principle 1 is derived from the idea that being able to develop and maintain friendships is a core developmental task for children and early adolescents. Given the research linking perspective taking and negotiation skills to social skills development, the focus in pair counseling is on helping children develop the skills they need to manage and sustain peer relationships. Thus, the pair counselor's attention to the children's past difficulties is downplayed. More attention is paid to helping children to reflect on their present interactions and to better understand how their behaviors affect others. The child's current relationships, specifically the child's friendship with his or her pair partner, is the central focus of intervention.

Case example. Prior to the first session, both youth are interviewed and told about pair counseling. In the first session, the

counselor explains the rules of pair counseling and reminds the children that the main goal is to help them to develop friendship skills.

Counselor: We will meet on Tuesday and Thursday nights to play games.

Kareem: Yeah!!!

Counselor: It is my hope that by meeting, playing together, and working together you guys can learn how to be good friends.

Chris: No.... I'm never gonna be his friend. I don't like him.

Counselor: You don't have to be his best friend, but in here we're going to...

Kareem (*interrupting*): Friends...make friends.

Counselor: We bring kids together to try and learn how to be friends. You don't have to become friends with him outside of the pair, like on the unit, but our goal is for you both to learn how to act in ways that help friendships grow.

In the first session, the counselor emphasized that the children do not need to become friends, but only be willing to learn and practice ways of being a good friend in the pair.

Principle 2. Help Youth Reflect on the Qualities of Mature Friendships

Pair counseling shares with ecosystemic and child-centered models of play therapy the belief that limitations in social experiences constrain the child's ability to develop mature skills (O'Connor, 1991; Landreth, 1997). Like play therapists using O'Connor's (1991) ecosystemic approach, pair counselors attend to the here-and-now. Children's problems and issues that manifest outside the pair are typically not discussed directly in the session; rather, the counselor's verbal interventions remain focused on the quality of the pair's developing relationship.

During the first session, after the ground rules are discussed and before the games are first presented, the counselor should encourage the children to begin to reflect on the kinds of friendship skills and problems they bring to the pair. Problems in other relationships are not usually discussed in pair counseling—at least they are not a central focus of the

counselor's interventions. However, during the first session, the children are asked to reflect on what has helped and hurt them in their previous efforts to get along with other youth. This discussion allows some goals to be set by the children and serves as an orientation activity that helps the children understand that pair counseling is about learning new friendship skills, not a therapy in which they must talk about other more personal problems.

Principle 3. Accentuate Strengths and Structure Cooperation

Child-centered (or pair-centered) play is the main intervention principle used to guide game play in pair counseling. For most of the hour the two children engage in unstructured play with each other. Like child-centered play therapists (Landreth, 1997), pair counselors assume that developmental growth can be thwarted when children experience constrictive environments that lack sufficient empathy and opportunities for autonomy and self-expression. Therefore, counselor directiveness is minimal when the children are playing. The counselor's main tasks are to point out the children's interpersonal successes, to facilitate cooperative interactions between the children during conflict, and to maintain a stance of positive regard for both children.

By pairing youth of different interpersonal styles, each child can learn the other child's skills. The shy child can learn assertiveness from the child who acts in other-transforming ways. The aggressive bully can learn self-restraint from the child whose style of dealing with conflict is typically to self-transform. By experimenting with one another's behaviors and roles the children begin to expand their own repertoires of social skills (Karcher, 1997). For the children to begin to emulate the positive aspects of each other's interpersonal style, the pair counselor must remain positive and noncritical when commenting on behaviors.

Principle 4. Link Past Conflicts to Current Opportunities for Success

At the start and conclusion of each session, pair counselors make structured, directive interventions that link relationship issues in the present to events in the children's relationship with each other in the past. The session is structured by setting time blocks that demarcate nondirected play and time to process and reflect on the session. Like dynamic play therapists, pair counselors share interpretations with

children of the ways in which the children's current functioning may reflect their longstanding patterns of behaving in relationships (Watts, Nakkula, & Barr, 1997); however, pair counselors focus their comments and discussion with children more on the children's relationships with their peers than with their parents.

Case example. Kareem and Chris demonstrated a consistent pattern of difficulty in deciding which games to play at the start of the hour. From the start Kareem consistently let Chris choose the games they would play. The counselor had encouraged Kareem to share his perspective—both his desire to have input into what the two played as well as his frustration with Chris. Kareem then began to assert himself. As early as the 6th session, Kareem had begun to insist that he have some say in deciding which games they would play.

Two sessions prior to the dialogue that follows, the pair hit an impasse, with neither child able to figure out how to resolve their shared need to determine what they would play. When it became clear that the children could not do it themselves, the counselor suggested turn taking and the use of a coin toss to decide the matter. This suggestion was the counselor's attempt to link the children's perspectives in a way that promoted cooperation (e.g., level 2). The boys agreed, and the counselor flipped a coin. When Chris lost the toss, he threw a fit, and the session had to end as he became verbally aggressive and threw a board game across the room. In the next session, Chris simply agreed to play anything as long as he did not have to discuss his tantrum from the prior week. In the 10th session, Chris once again wanted to have his say in what they did, but this time he suggested they try the coin toss again. The counselor was very careful to recall their past failure at using this technique and to walk the pair slowly through the process. The counselor flipped the coin, and this time Chris won. The counselor said, "Chris won, so we'll play 8-ball." Chris spontaneously offered to play the game Kareem would have chosen also. Chris said, "We can play Sorry for a little while too."

Their successful negotiation was followed by an open, honest, and intimate discussion between the two about lies that Chris had told about Kareem to the staff on the unit. In the remainder of the session, Kareem was able to confront Chris about being a pest and bullying him,

and stated that he would not play with Chris in the pair if Chris continued to do such things to him on the hospital unit.

Principle 5. Promote Connectedness and Help Children Recognize Change

The success of pair counseling depends on the development of a pair-directed, authentic relationship. Like child-centered play therapists (Landreth, 1997), pair counselors allow the children to select their own games, to decide what to do together, and to specify how long they will do it (see Figure 1). While the children play, the counselor comments on the children's use of mature relationship skills and illustrates how those skills help them maintain their friendship. The counselor helps them deepen their interpersonal connectedness so that they will become more willing to take each other's perspectives and use more mature social skills in the pair.

Pair counselors also serve as historians. They help the youth see how their friendship has grown over the course of the pair sessions (Watts, Nakkula, & Barr, 1997). The pair counselor helps the children step out of the moment and view themselves as children who are changing, developing new skills, and growing in their abilities to make and maintain friendships. The children are helped to see how conflict in relationships can present learning opportunities.

Case example. Chris' and Kareem's final session concluded with a reflection on their friendship and discussion of their more differentiated perspectives on the nature of friendship.

Counselor: Okay, initially, when we started, some of us had a hard time getting along. Do you remember? What are you both doing differently now?

Kareem: He decided to, um, be my friend. Remember? You brang the Buzz Lightyear guy in for me to play with. That's how we got to be friends. That's how it started.

Chris: Kareem really loves to play with that Buzz Lightyear doll.

Counselor: Is Kareem right? At some point, did you decide you wanted to be his friend?

Chris: Yeah.

Counselor: What led you to want to be friends?

Chris: To be my friend? I don't know really. I just wanted to, and so I did.

Counselor: I remember a couple times you guys got really upset in here. Both of you did. You (*to Kareem*) got upset one time when we were playing puppets, and you (*to Chris*) got upset one time when we were going to flip coins. Remember that?

Chris: Yeah. Oh, man. I forgot...I said the f-word and busted out of here and went to the Quiet Room. Then I wanted to do better and have more fun with Kareem.

Counselor: That's great. Chris, do you think pairs is good for kids?

Chris: Yup.

Counselor: How come?

Kareem: It makes them be friends.

Counselor: How does it do that?

Chris: By helping them...you tell them, they gotta get along with the other kid to play—they can't just play by theirselves! But at first, he might just get a little mad. Did you see how Kareem did not want to play with me at first?

Counselor: Kareem, what did you learn about Chris from pairs?

Kareem: Um, that I do some things he doesn't like.

Counselor: You learned some things about yourself? Like what?

Kareem: Uh, me acting silly. Sometimes I act silly, and he doesn't understand me and then he wants to do something else that he likes.

Counselor: Did you learn anything new about yourself in this pair, Chris?

Chris: I learned that if I am good to Kareem I have more fun, because we get along and get to play. Hey, Kareem, how about we play Sorry when we go to the game room?

In the final session these two children described pair counseling as helpful because it set up a structure in which cooperation was rewarded and in which they were provided support for interacting more maturely. There were inevitable struggles and conflicts, and these conflicts provided benchmarks for measuring change. The role of pair counselors as historians is probably just as important as their role as captain of a sometimes rocky voyage.

Whereas cognitive-developmental theory provides a road map toward social skills development, dyadic play therapy can provide the medium for growth. Reflecting in many ways an integration of both individual and group play therapies, pair counseling provides a unique, developmentally based, dyadic play therapy for children whose primary problems lie in their inability to successfully develop and sustain satisfying peer relations.

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Table 1

A Model of Perspective-taking, Negotiation Strategies (INS), & Interpersonal Orientations

Examples of INS for the two interpersonal orientations	
Perspective taking: INS	Other-transforming
3rd-person: Collaborative	Both act out of shared needs and concern for us in the relationship. Here actions are considered for their effects on the relationship. The we perspective is given primacy over individual perspectives.
2nd-person: Reciprocal	Ask why, barter, go second ↔ Argue, persuade, go first
1st-person: Unilateral	Obey, give in, acquiesce ↔ Dictate, bully, order, tell
Egocentric: Impulsive	Flight, whine, hide ↔ Fight, grab, hit

Adapted from Yeates, Schultz, and Selman (1991).

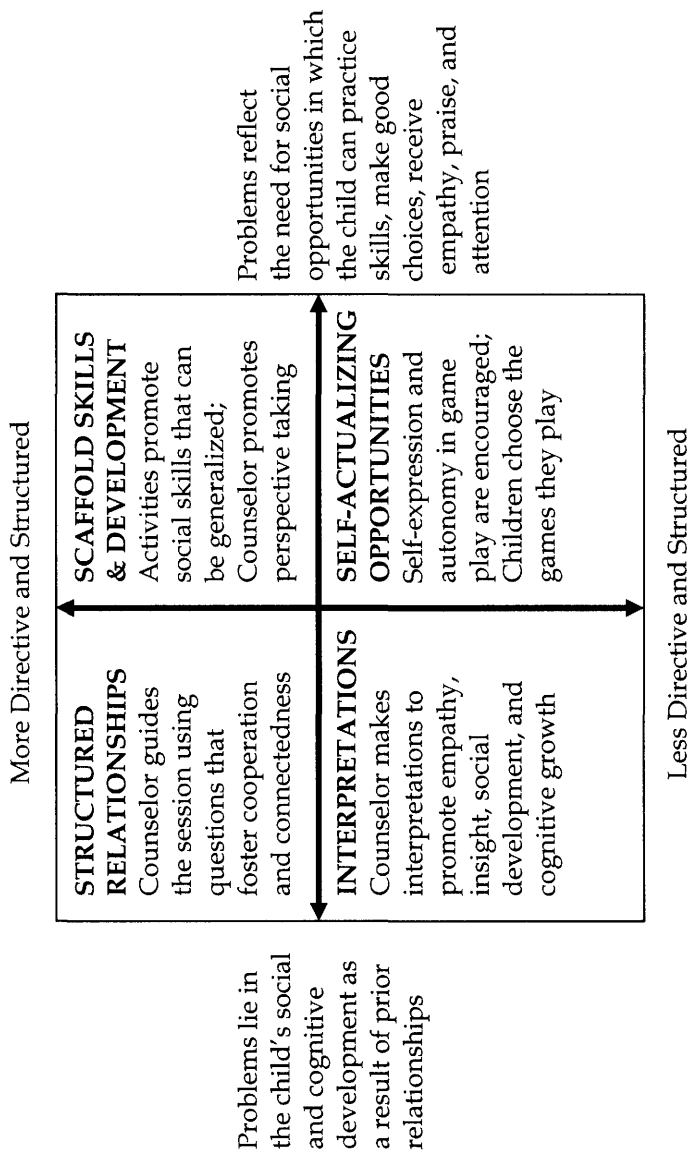


Figure 1. Four counselor tasks reflecting play therapy techniques in pair counseling.

Appendix

The Structure, Tasks, and Processes of Pair Counseling

Structure of Pair Counseling

Two Children: Same sex, similar levels of cognitive-developmental maturity, opposite behavioral style (i.e., interpersonal orientation strategies); similar in age, usually age 8 to 14.

Game Play: Dynamic, physical, rule-based, and social skills games are played.

Developmental Interventions: Counselors help the children solve problems, resolve conflicts, identify dynamics in the pair, express feelings, and talk about interpersonal problems, experiences, and needs while playing games together.

Child's Work: Successful Play

Children Have Seven Tasks

1. Reflect on last session's successes and conflicts.
2. Negotiate first game.
3. Play the game.
4. Negotiate second game (e.g., who selects, who starts).
5. Reflect on the hour.
6. Anticipate how to avoid similar problems in the future.
7. Plan and negotiate an activity for the next session.

Counselor's Work: Structuring the Sessions

Beginning: Counselor Helps the Children...

1. Reflect on the past session (explore what worked and what didn't).
2. State how they felt in both situations (success/intimacy and conflict/autonomy).
3. Identify what they will try to do differently during the present session.
4. Plan what they will do in the present session (first game negotiation).

Appendix (continued)

Middle: Counselors Should...

1. Praise pair's successes, name individual's competencies, ensure safety.
2. Help pair identify and name affective experience of intimacy/autonomy.
3. Help pair successfully negotiate conflicts and problems:
 - a. Use problem-solving steps;
 - b. Prompt perspective taking (by empowering, linking, enabling).

End of Session: Counselor Helps the Children to...

1. Reflect on how the hour went: which negotiations worked and which didn't.
 2. Identify what helped their friendship and what was problematic.
 3. Anticipate what they will do differently next week.
 4. Plan their next session's activities (which they can renegotiate the next session)
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