

The Professional School Counselor and the Identification, Prevention and Intervention of Behaviors That Are Harmful and Place Students At-Risk

(Adopted 1989-90; revised 1993, 1999, 2004, 2011, 2017)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors work collaboratively with students, families, school administration and community members to implement a preventive, school counseling program, which includes early warning systems for identifying students who may be engaging in harmful or risky behaviors, as well as developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive interventions and supports addressing those behaviors and promoting student resilience and success.

The Rationale

All schools and communities have students who could potentially drop out of school and/or engage in destructive behaviors such as absenteeism, performing below their potential academically, substance abuse, bullying, cyberbullying, suicidal ideation, physical violence or engaging in self-harm and other destructive or dangerous behaviors. Additionally, schools and communities may have environmental, resource or policy issues inadvertently contributing to student failure and harmful behaviors (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). These behaviors can have devastating lifelong implications and often stem from social/emotional concerns including: low self-esteem, family and relationship problems, grief, trauma, neglect, abuse and/or substance use. Implementing trauma-informed practices may help staff with interventions while maintaining sensitivity to students (Haviland, 2017).

The School Counselor's Role

The school counselor advocates for school-based interventions and mental health referrals before moving toward expulsion or other disciplinary measures and provides proactive leadership in identifying, preventing and intervening with student at-risk behaviors. Using data to develop and assess preventive and responsive services to address these risks is an integral part of a school counseling program. The school counselor collaborates with staff, schoolwide teams, parents/guardians and the community to identify students who are participating in harmful behaviors and intervenes with these students to limit or eliminate the risk of harm or negative consequences. White and Kelly (2010) delineated many evidence-based practices school counselors can use to address protective and risk factors. School counselors take a leadership role in enhancing students' strengths and reducing their risk factors by:

- enhancing social support through a peer mentoring or buddy system
- assigning adults as monitors or mentors for students, clearly delineating roles that specify how to address any mental health issues or concerns
- providing school counseling classroom and group lessons to increase student knowledge and awareness of the dangers of harmful behaviors as well as cultivating attitudes and skills that promote success such as resiliency, grit and a growth mindset
- providing responsive services, including short-term individual and group counseling
- referring students and families to appropriate support services and community agencies
- collaborating with school staff to identify and assist students in crisis
- conducting staff development for school and district staff
- providing information, consultation and support to parents/guardians to increase familial involvement
- advocating for changes in the school and community to promote resilience, success and equitable access to needed resources

Summary

By implementing a school counseling program, school counselors collaborate with other educators and stakeholders to provide prevention, early identification and trauma-informed interventions for all students to minimize or eliminate harmful behaviors placing students at risk.

References

American School Counselor Association. (2016). *ASCA ethical standards for school counselors*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Haviland, S. (2017). A districtwide effort. *ASCA School Counselor*, 54(3), 14-18.

Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2007). *School counseling to close the achievement gap: A social justice framework for success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

White, S., & Kelly, F. (2010). The school counselor's role in school dropout prevention. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 88(2), 227-235.

Resources

O'Grady, K. (2017). Transforming schools with trauma-informed care. *ASCA School Counselor*, 54(3), 8-13.

Internet Resource Links

http://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/PositionStatements/PS_MultitieredSupportSystem.pdf

<https://www.pbis.org/school/mtss>

<http://dropoutprevention.org/effective-strategies/>

<https://acestoohigh.com/2015/05/31/resilience-practices-overcome-students-aces-in-trauma-informed-high-school-say-the-data/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>

http://www.nhstudentwellness.org/uploads/5/3/9/0/53900547/fact-sheet-adverse-childhood-experiences_final.pdf