chapter 1

WHAT, WHO, *and* HOW *of* YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM

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Scenario 1.1: Why Are Counselors in Schools?

Some parents were meeting, and one asked, "Why do we need counselors in schools?" Another followed with, "What is a counselor's primary purpose in providing services in the school?" These were not new questions. Educators, counselors, parents, policymakers, and others had asked similar questions countless times before. If you were listening to this conversation, how would you, as a school counselor, respond? Why are you working in a school, and what is your purpose?

One possible response to Scenario 1.1 is that you work in a school to help people become "more able" in their respective roles. As a school counselor, you help students become more able learners; assist parents in their nurturing roles; support teachers in providing beneficial instruction for all students; and, with administrators, help lead schools in becoming a more effective part of the community. In sum, everything you do as a school counselor—every program you plan and every service you deliver—aims at helping students, parents, teachers, and schools in the process of human development and learning.

If you agree with this conclusion—that you are in a school to help people become more able—you might also agree that to accomplish this goal, you too need to become more able in your professional knowledge and skills. To become more able as a professional counselor, you want to move beyond survival toward a confident stance that permits you to become identifiable, capable, available, and accountable—four characteristics of a successful school counselor. Being *identifiable* means knowing who you are and what you do in schools as a professional counselor. It also means letting others know about this identity. Being *capable* means practicing at a high level of skill while recognizing the limits of your competencies and professional role in schools. When you are *available,* you are accessible to the students, parents, and teachers you serve. *Accountability* brings together the first three abilities when you assess how you spend your time and measure the effectiveness of the programs you plan and the services you provide. Throughout this *Survival Guide* you will learn ways to accomplish these goals in becoming a successful school counselor. To begin, Chapter One explores the role and identity of counselors in schools.

Scenario 1.2: Role Identity

You are an elementary or middle school counselor. A new principal has arrived at the school to start the year, and you have asked to schedule a conference to talk about the counseling program. At the start of your meeting with the new principal, she begins, "I had a good guidance counselor at my previous school, but was never quite sure how he spent most of his time. He was good at helping out in the main office when we were short on staff, and he was quite sociable with the faculty. It was my first position as a principal, however, and I was uncertain how to direct his time and duties. My goal at this school is to take more of a leadership role in all special services, including guidance." How would you begin responding to the principal's statements? What key points would you make about the school counseling program, your leadership role, an advisory committee, program evaluation, and consultation with the principal?

Scenario 1.2 depicts a situation that many school counselors experience during their careers—explaining their roles in their schools and in their comprehensive counseling programs. This chapter will help you both answer the questions in the above scenario and establish your leadership role and identity as a school counselor.

Since its birth during the Industrial Revolution at the turn of the twentieth century, the school counseling profession has searched for an identity and role among the helping professions. Today such questions as Why are counselors in schools? and What are they supposed to do? are as prominent as they were over one hundred years ago. As a member of this profession, you now face the same questions: Why are you here? What are you supposed to do?

As an elementary or middle school counselor, you belong to an expanding profession that includes many areas of professional helping and service. The counseling profession of

the twenty-first century has become an important member of mental health services, and school counselors are essential partners in this effort (Falls & Muro, 2009; Schmidt, 2008). Today's professional counselors work in settings that include mental health centers, family agencies, prisons, hospitals, funeral homes, crisis centers, employment agencies, colleges, and schools, to name a few.

In preparing to become a school counselor, you studied many areas of knowledge, including human development, psychology, career information and development, tests and measurement, and social and cultural foundations. In addition, you acquired skills in specific helping processes, such as individual and group counseling, consulting, and facilitative teaching. These skills and knowledge provide a framework within which you are able to establish and clarify your professional role and deliver specific services to students, parents, teachers, and others.

Unlike counseling programs in prisons, hospitals, and mental health centers that narrowly focus specific services for particular populations, your services span a broad program of activities to assist several populations. Your program includes preventive services, developmental activities, and remedial interventions for students, parents, teachers, administrators, and others. The challenge of offering such a wide range of responsive services to different populations renders you unique in your practice of elementary or middle school counseling. This notion of a *program of services* is a key element in school counseling, and your ability to define and describe your school's counseling program to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community stakeholders is vital to your survival and ultimate success.

DESCRIBING THE PROGRAM

Although the range and diversity of the expectations placed on you illustrate the need for counselors in our schools, they can also threaten your effectiveness by pulling you in too many directions and spreading services across too broad an area. Among the most important steps you take each year, therefore, will be describing and defining the school's counseling program.

One element that influences how clearly you describe your program is the language you choose. Because school counseling is a relatively young profession, its practitioners sometimes struggle to articulate what it is and what it does. As a school counselor, you want to explain your program in language that is both consistent with your professional vision and understandable for students, parents, teachers, and others in the school community.

Choosing a Language

Over the profession's life span, such terms as *pupil personnel services, guidance program,* and *student services* have categorized and classified school counseling services. You, like many practitioners, probably identify yourself according to labels and language you learned in your graduate studies or encountered in your school system. What do you call yourself? How do you describe what you do? Why?

My preference is to call myself a *school counselor,* and the services I provide are part of a *school counseling program.* I belong to a *student services team,* which consists of other helping professionals, including the school nurse, school social worker, and school psychologist. For me, these terms accurately label the program of services I provide in schools. They are also consistent with the language of our profession, as used by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and its journal, *Professional School Counseling.* They are contemporary and more definitive than such older terms as *personnel services* and *guidance programs,* which are vague and often encompass conflicting roles and services for school counselors. For example, *personnel services* frequently imply and include record keeping, class scheduling, attendance monitoring, testing coordination, and other functions that detract from direct responsive services for students, parents, teachers, and others. Similarly, the term *guidance* is confusing and does not clearly indicate what counselors do in schools. Yet the word *guidance* has historical significance and remains prevalent in the school counseling profession.

Everything in schools relates in some way to the notion of "guiding students." Teachers guide students in daily instruction, as well as in their personal relationships with others—yet we do not call them "guidance teachers." Administrators guide students in regard to school policy, curriculum, discipline, and programs, but we do not refer to them as "guidance principals." Why then use the term "guidance counselor" instead of "school counselor"? Because guidance permeates every facet of the school, no single person or program has ownership of it.

In my view, a school counseling program encompasses a broad area of responsive services, including preventive services, developmental activities, and remedial assistance. The common ground for these three areas lies in counselors' prominent role in providing direct services to students, parents, teachers, and others. Some counselors believe that the term *school counseling program* is too restrictive because it limits services to remedial relationships. However, a more encompassing view is that counseling relationships are for everyone, not only for people who have problems, and they provide ways to help healthy, functioning people capitalize on their strengths and reach higher levels of achievement. In recent school counseling literature, this has been called "strengths-based counseling." For example, Galassi and Akos (2007) note that a strengths-based school counseling program allows counselors to design and deliver services that reach a larger percentage of students in their schools. It moves from a restricted emphasis on a few students' problems and deficits to a commitment to help all students identify their strengths and take positive steps to capitalize on those abilities. In this guide you will find suggestions for how to use counseling processes in preventive services, for developmental learning, and to remedy existing concerns.

Here are some helpful guidelines for selecting a language and vocabulary that describe accurately your role and function in the school:

1. *Understand the language.* The terms you choose—*counseling, guidance, personnel, strengths-based programs,* or whatever—should have meaning to you. You should be clear about the words you use to describe yourself professionally and be able to defend the language you choose.

2. *Educate the audience.* Once you choose the language of your program, teach it to the people you serve. Let students, parents, teachers, administrators, and others know what you mean by *counseling, group guidance, consulting,* and other terms. A language is useful only if the people with whom you communicate understand it, accept it, and use it.
3. *Use consistent language.* It is confusing to students and others when you use terms inconsistently. Consistency may be difficult at first, particularly if you have decided to change to new terms. Stick with it, and correct yourself when you confuse the language. Your audience will be as consistent as you are.

If you replaced another counselor who once served the school, the decision about language requires careful consideration. For example, if the previous counselor used terminology different from yours, you may need to adjust your thinking for a while. This is particularly true if your predecessor was at the school for many years and is well thought of by students and faculty. You may feel strongly about the terms you want to use to describe who you are and what you do, and these beliefs may be a healthy sign of your professionalism. Nevertheless, move slowly and explain your rationale as you introduce new terms. By being considerate and winning students, parents, teachers, and administrators' trust and confidence, you will be more likely to have your ideas and suggestions accepted.

Exhibit 1.1 presents a sample description for a school counseling program and the role of a counselor. You might use this description as part of a school brochure, student handbook, or faculty manual.

EXHIBIT 1.1

The School Counseling Program and the School Counselor

The counseling program in our school is available to help students, parents, and teachers develop positive learning experiences. The program consists of a variety of services and activities, including individual and group counseling, parent and teacher consultation, group guidance, information services, referral assistance to other agencies in the community, and student assessment.

The school counselor is responsible for developing, scheduling, and evaluating program services and is assisted by the counseling advisory committee and the school principal. Primary services of the school counselor provide direct assistance to students in the school. For this reason, a major portion of the counselor's day consists of responsive services that help students with their academic, personal, and social development. Parent and teacher consultations with the counselor usually occur in the early morning before classes or during after-school hours.

The counselor is a licensed professional with training in human development, learning theory, counseling and consulting, tests and measurement, career development, educational and related research, and other areas appropriate to the practice of counseling in a school. The counselor's office is located in the school, and appointments can be scheduled by calling (counselor's phone), e-mailing (counselor's e-mail address), or writing to (school address).

Leading the Charge

Regardless of the language you choose or how long it takes your school to adopt it, an important aspect of describing a program of services is the leadership role you take in the process. Remember that your leadership ability is paramount in helping the school build a successful program.

To survive and flourish as an elementary or middle school counselor, it is essential to identify and embrace the leadership role you have in the program and the larger school community. School counseling in the twenty-first century is not simply providing individual and group services to students. Rather, it is the orchestration of many services, some provided by you, the counselor, and some provided by other professionals. This orchestration, much like leading a major symphony, requires leadership characteristics and skills to develop working relationships, identify goals and objectives, and create appropriate action to demonstrate that everyone is playing the same tune and in the correct key (Baker & Gerler, 2008).

A first step in developing your leadership role is to assess your strengths in taking on this responsibility. What skills and knowledge do you already possess that will enable you to persuade people to create a comprehensive program of services and commit their involvement in carrying out its objectives? Next is to determine what additional knowledge you need to be a successful leader in your school. How can you obtain this knowledge—through workshops, professional associations, or more graduate training? A third step to consider is how to begin developing support for your ideas as a school leader. What will you need to do to win the confidence of your administration? Which teachers, support staff, and other school personnel are likely to support a comprehensive program, and how will you secure their support?

Throughout this chapter and book, you will learn how you, as a leader, can create a viable and valuable program for your school. Here are some starter tips for putting your plan into action:

- *Know what you want to do.* Plan the school counseling program around accepted counseling and related services and understand the literature and research to support your ideas.
- *Enlist help.* Identify school members—administration, teachers, parents, staff, and others—who will support you from the start. Recruit optimistic colleagues and administrators and tell them your plans.
- *Respect school traditions and culture.* Even though you might want to work toward changing old ways of doing things, understand the emotional ties that some people may have to historical aspects of the school.
- *Be inclusive.* Although you might identify people who give early support to your ideas, be careful not to exclude other people in the process. People who might disagree with initial plans could have constructive ideas that, when incorporated into the plan, will help make it better.

- *Listen, listen, listen!* As a counselor, one of your greatest strengths is your ability to listen fully to others without being judgmental. Use that skill in building support for the counseling program and for your leadership. This is particularly valuable when hearing the disagreements that people have with some of your ideas.
- *Maintain a consistent stance.* In an earlier book, William Purkey and I presented a professional counseling stance that consists of optimism, trust, respect, and intentionality (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). Consider these characteristics and others that you believe will help you maintain a dependable leadership position in your school.

Focusing on a Comprehensive Program

By learning about yourself as a leader, gaining additional knowledge about the school counseling profession, and creating collaborative relationships in the school community, you place yourself in a stronger position to maintain a broad vision of what the program should be. This means focusing on the development of a comprehensive school counseling program.

All school counselors face the danger of feeling overwhelmed by the challenges that students, parents, teachers, and administrators bring. Sometimes, when you become overwhelmed, you might adopt a particular mode of operation because it is comfortable to do so. For example, a counselor who spends a major portion of her school day in a single activity, such as classroom guidance, individual counseling, or program administration, might do so because she feels comfortable and competent in this activity. Although such services are important, they do not, in and of themselves, establish a comprehensive school counseling program. As noted previously, a school counseling program ideally consists of a variety of activities and services, which aim at specific goals and objectives chosen as a result of careful examination and analysis of the needs of the school populations. You therefore want to move beyond routine reactions to situations and crises that emerge, and instead work according to a well-designed plan of counseling, consulting, and coordinating services.

All the suggestions and ideas in this guide relate to some aspect of a comprehensive counseling program. We can categorize these ideas under one or more of the four components of a comprehensive program—planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating.

1. *Planning* is the process of assessing school and student needs, formulating a philosophy of school counseling that is consistent with the mission of the school, evaluating the current program (if there is one), and establishing and prioritizing future program goals.
2. *Organizing* entails the selection of specific objectives and program strategies. This selection process includes deciding who will provide which services. The selected goals and objectives assign specific responsibilities to counselors, teachers, and administrators, defining their roles in the school counseling program.

3. *Implementing* is the action phase of a comprehensive program. It involves the delivery of responsive services, such as counseling, consulting, coordinating, referring, and testing. Implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program also involves all the personnel who have responsibility for educating students in the school: teachers, counselors, media specialists, administrators, and others.
4. *Evaluating* is the phase of a program that determines success, examines weaknesses, and allows you to recommend changes for the future. In this edition of the *Survival Guide,* you will see that program evaluation is deemed essential to a comprehensive school counseling program. Effective programs are not guided merely by the intuitions, preferences, and desires of counselors and teachers. Rather, they are based on data that illustrate the needs of students and measure the outcomes of the services provided.

These four phases of a comprehensive school counseling program illustrate that to be successful you must move beyond traditional approaches to guidance and counseling programs. Exhibit 1.2 shows a few of the differences between traditional and comprehensive approaches. As you can see, the traditional guidance approach is counselor centered, informational in nature, and remedial in focus, whereas the comprehensive model focuses on serving broad populations with a wide spectrum of responsive services. The scale for program assessment in Worksheet 1.1, moreover, will help you evaluate how comprehensive or traditional your current program is. The scale emphasizes teacher input, group services, program planning, parental involvement, and other aspects of a comprehensive counseling program.

EXHIBIT 1.2

Comparison of Traditional and Comprehensive Programs

Traditional Program	Comprehensive Program
· Predominantly one-on-one services	· Balanced program of responsive services
· Informational and administrative in nature	· Preventive, developmental, remedial in nature
· Reactive to critical situations	· Proactive planning and goal setting
· Clerically oriented	· Service oriented
· Counselor dominated	· High level of teacher involvement
· No data used for program planning	· Data used for planning and evaluation
· Minimum use of group work	· Extensive use of group services
· Counselor's activities directed primarily by the school principal	· Counselor-led program development in consultation with principal and others

Program Assessment Scale

Directions: Underline your response to each question, and fill in the respective point values in the blank spaces. Total the points for all twelve questions to determine how traditional or comprehensive your school counseling program is.

1. Do you spend most of your time in individual counseling and consulting with students? Not most (3 points); Yes (1 point); No, I do not do any individual counseling or consulting (0 points) _____
2. Does your program emphasize a wide range of services, such as group counseling, teacher and parent consultation, parent education, individual counseling, student assessment, and classroom guidance? Yes (3 points); Somewhat (1 point); No (0 points) _____
3. Do you lead the development, implementation, and evaluation of a comprehensive program of services? Yes, I take a leadership role in the program (3 points); I have a program, but do not always lead its development (1 point); No, the principal directs my activities (0 points) _____
4. Are you involved with teachers in planning and presenting classroom guidance? Very much (3 points); Somewhat (2 points); Not at all (0 points) _____
5. Do you present all of the classroom guidance in your school? No, teachers also infuse guidance activities with their classes (3 points); Yes (1 point); We have no classroom guidance in the school (0 points) _____
6. Do you spend most of your time in crisis intervention and remedial services? Not most (3 points); No, but I but I still feel that I spend too much time on this (2 points); Yes, most of the time (1 point); No, I do not do any crisis intervention (0 points) _____
7. Do you have a written plan of goals and objectives that you revise annually? Yes, it guides program decisions (3 points); Yes, but the written goals and objectives are not actually implemented (1 point); No (0 points) _____
8. Do you have an advisory committee to help guide your school counseling program? Yes, an active committee (3 points); Yes, but not an active one (1 point); No (0 points) _____
9. Are you overburdened with paperwork? Not really (3 points); Somewhat (1 point); Yes, most of the time (0 points) _____
10. Do you use assessment procedures with students, parents, and teachers in addition to other school data to establish program goals and objectives? Yes (3 points); Occasionally (1 point); Never (0 points) _____
11. Are your teaching colleagues an important part of the school counseling program? Yes, their input is sought and they participate (3 points); Somewhat, a few teachers are involved (1 point); No, it is my program to develop and implement (0 points) _____
12. Does your principal understand and support the services of the program? Yes, always (3 points); Usually (2 points); Rarely (1 point); Never (0 points) _____

Scoring: The closer to 36 points you score, the more comprehensive your program. The closer to zero points you score, the less comprehensive your program of services.

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An example of the differences between these two approaches lies in the area of career information and development. In a traditional guidance program, the counselor assumes full responsibility for disseminating career information to students. At the elementary level, for example, a counselor could offer classroom guidance by presenting information about "the world of work." In a middle school, individuals or groups of students might receive occupational information from the counselor without any involvement of teachers.

In comprehensive programs, career information and development go hand in hand and are the shared responsibility of the entire school staff. Ideally, elementary and middle school teachers accept responsibility for integrating career information into their daily instruction. This infusion of career awareness helps students see how they can apply the subject matter in the outside world. It also enables students to learn which subjects relate to their interests and to particular careers. You can assist with this integration by planning career guidance lessons and activities with teachers, locating appropriate resources, and presenting special topics in the classroom. Throughout the school year, you design and lead individual and group activities to focus on specific career development needs of all students. In addition, you work with teachers to plan schoolwide activities that focus on career information and development.

Adapting the ASCA National Model and Other Approaches

In 2003, ASCA introduced a new model for designing and delivering comprehensive school counseling programs. You can find out about the ASCA National Model from the association's Web site at www.schoolcounselor.org and through other resources listed at the back of this guide.

The ASCA National Model for school counseling programs is intended to help practicing counselors create data-driven and results-based programs. The hope is that a national model will help counselors across the fifty states design, implement, coordinate, manage, and evaluate responsive services that enable students to achieve success in school. The ASCA National Model provides a framework around which counselors can design and develop their programs (American School Counselor Association, 2005). Just because the profession now has a national model, however, does not mean that all school counseling programs will look and function the same. Each elementary and middle school is different, and the comprehensive counseling program that you design and implement in your school will reflect those differences.

The ASCA National Model is relatively young, and research about its efficacy has not yet been fully explored. In the past, authors and researchers have presented other models or structures for designing and implementing comprehensive programs. For example, Gysbers and Henderson (2000) are two notable authors and researchers who developed an approach to comprehensive program planning and evaluation. Likewise, VanZandt and Hayslip (2000) offered a systemic planning model and provided examples of other programmatic approaches from the literature. More research is needed to verify if any particular model or approach is better than others in delivering effective services.

Your responsibility is to find or create a programmatic structure that works in your school to serve students, parents, teachers, and others. An important part of your leadership role as an elementary or middle school counselor is to select an appropriate model or structure with which to build a comprehensive program of services. Such a structure may

come from the ASCA National Model, another approach you find in the literature, or a program you have designed using your knowledge and experience as well as information about your particular school. The ultimate goal is to design a program that ensures appropriate services for all students.

Advocating for All Students

Elementary and middle schools reflect the populations and communities they serve. Typical schools consist of students who bring a range of hopes, challenges, and needs to class each day. Counselors and schools that design comprehensive programs of responsive services understand their role in advocating for all students, not only those who show promise but also those who struggle academically, personally, or socially.

The American Counseling Association (ACA) endorses advocacy competencies that include three levels of focus for school counselors: (1) the client/student, (2) the school/community, and (3) the public arena (Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). A few examples of student-level competencies include

- Identifying students' strengths and resources
- Helping students develop self-advocacy plans
- Helping students identify barriers to their development
- Developing an initial plan of action to address identified barriers

Examples of school- and community-level competencies include

- Identifying environmental factors that influence student development
- Developing alliances with groups working for change
- Developing a plan for dealing with probable responses to change

Examples of public-arena-level competencies include

- Recognizing the impact of oppression and other barriers to healthy development
- Communicating information in ways that are ethical and appropriate for school populations
- Supporting existing alliances for change

The examples here are only a few of the extensive list of ACA advocacy competencies (see also Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). It is important for you to gather and implement strategies that will support student development by eliminating barriers to learning and addressing social justice for all students. By doing so, you not only advocate for individual students but also encourage all students to empower themselves. For many students, their school failure relates to historic oppression and other barriers, which have to some degree contributed to the "achievement gap" in public education. Your advocacy on behalf of students, the school and community, and the public at large is important in addressing this issue.

One way that you can advocate for all students is by observing and listening to the culture of the school. At times, schools pass policies or develop programs that, though well intended, might discriminate against certain groups or individual students. When you see this happening in your school, it is imperative that you take action. Point out to the

principal and teachers what you have observed or what you have heard, and help them understand the implications for all students in the school. For example, one elementary school started a program for students to bring their fathers for a turkey lunch before Thanksgiving. The counselor pointed out that some students did not have fathers, and others had fathers away in military service. After listening to the counselor, the principal and faculty decided to change the program to "Bring a Family Member to Lunch."

By advocating for all students, you demonstrate the democratic principles on which our educational and political systems were founded. Taking this professional stance is another way to win support from the principal, teachers, and parents. With their support, you are better able to describe and define the scope and limits of your role as a school counselor within a comprehensive program. For this reason, seeking input from administrators, teachers, and parents about the program and your role as counselor is essential.

SEEKING INPUT

A comprehensive school counseling program does not belong to one person and is not your sole responsibility as an elementary or middle school counselor. For this reason, the first step in establishing your program is to seek input and win cooperation from your teaching colleagues. When you make program decisions in isolation, out of reach of your teaching colleagues, services may tend to get out of touch with the needs of the school. As a result, the program may lose support from the faculty.

You may not win the total support of the faculty in the school, but you do want the majority of teachers to believe that the services you provide and the parts of the program for which they are responsible are important to meet the educational goals for all students. This is also true for your principal and the larger school community. If you succeed in convincing the school community of the counseling program's indispensability in meeting students' needs, you will win the support of a broad audience for the leadership you provide in designing an overall program of services. Winning the support of your colleagues and parents is the next step in the process of building a program.

Winning Support

The first person to include in the decision-making process for developing a comprehensive program is the school principal. If you have replaced a counselor, you want to assess how the principal viewed the program in the past. When starting a new counseling program, you should determine what expectations the principal has for this addition to the school. If you are a veteran counselor, you want to maintain a strong working relationship with the principal. In all cases, you should schedule a time at the beginning of the year to meet with your principal and gather insights and expectations about your role.

Before scheduling this meeting with the principal, it may be helpful to do some preparation. Whether you are replacing a counselor, beginning a new program, or revising an existing program, make a list of questions for your interview. You may want to memorize these questions so your interview is relaxed and spontaneous rather than stiff and structured (as it can be when reading from a prepared list). Although the following questions and explanations are designed to help you prepare to replace a counselor, you can adapt them to fit your own situation. If you are a veteran counselor, for example,

an adaptation of these questions might help you and your principal examine where the program is and where it could be heading.

Questions to Ask the Principal

1. *What was the most beneficial service offered in the school counseling program last year?* The principal's answer to this question will help you assess his or her priorities for the program. This information enables you to compare your philosophy with the principal's expectations. By comparing your views with the principal's, you will know how much work you have to do to convince the principal of why a comprehensive school counseling program can benefit an elementary or middle school.

2. *Was there an annual plan for the school counseling program?* If there was a plan, you may have seen it during your interview for this counseling position. If you did not see one, ask about it. An annual plan will give you a clear idea of what the past program looked like. If the principal indicates that there was no written plan, this is an excellent opportunity to mention that you would like to create one to give the program a specific mission, goals, and direction during the year and an adequate evaluation at the end of the year.

3. *Do classroom teachers integrate or infuse guidance lessons in their daily instruction?* The principal's answer to this question will indicate how the school views guidance and who has responsibility for it. You might ask whether there is a guidance curriculum—learning goals and objectives that are part of the overall school curriculum. Some states and school systems have developed guidance curriculums for every grade level. If this is true in your school, do you know who has responsibility for implementing the curriculum? If you find that teachers are integrating guidance activities into their daily instruction, you will know that you have a strong foundation for a comprehensive school counseling program. However, if you find that the previous counselor had sole responsibility for classroom guidance, much work will need to be done to include the types of responsive services found in a comprehensive program.

4. *Are teachers involved in an advisement program?* This question is most relevant for middle schools, but can also pertain to elementary programs. By an advisement program, I mean procedures through which all students receive information about their academic progress, school programs that may assist them, and community services that could help in their development. If teachers are active in an advisement program, it is necessary to determine the school counselor's role. A comprehensive school counseling program often includes a type of advisement program that involves teachers, and for which the counselor might have coordinating responsibility. The counselor also provides staff development services for teachers to learn effective advising skills. A strong advisement program can be the heart of a school counselor's referral system.

5. *Is there an advisory committee for the school counseling program?* Building a successful comprehensive program that reflects the needs of the school and community requires the input of others. If in the past the counseling program had an advisory committee, encourage the principal to continue with one. If there is currently no committee, ask the principal to suggest names of teachers and parents who might serve. In middle schools, you also could recommend that students have representation. If your school has numerous committees, you may want to recommend that an existing committee serve as the advisory group for the counseling program—you will win favor with the teachers by combining your initiative with another committee's objectives.

Once established, the advisory committee will help you: (a) assess student needs, (b) design a comprehensive program, (c) inform the faculty and staff about program goals and their respective roles in reaching these objectives, and (d) evaluate services for the year. An advisory committee enables you to win support from the faculty for program decisions and changes. It also encourages the staff to accept responsibility for various aspects of the program.

6. *What about parental involvement in the school?* A comprehensive counseling program benefits from volunteers and parents who are involved in their children's education. A school that prides itself in strong parental involvement and volunteer programs is in good shape to establish a comprehensive counseling program.

How your principal answers this question may give you an indication of how welcomed parents are in the school. School climate, which has a bearing on student achievement and overall school effectiveness, is affected by parent attitudes. As the counselor, you can assist the principal in strengthening parents' relationships with the school, which would improve school climate and thereby improve student performance.

7. *Is the counseling center located in an ideal place, and is it adequately furnished?* If you have begun working as a school counselor, you have already assessed the facilities and made preliminary judgments. If your assessment is positive, you will not need to ask this question. If, however, there are some aspects of the counseling center that bother you, you may want the principal's perceptions.

The principal will be able to educate you about funding limitations, space restrictions, and other realities that have an impact on the placement and furnishings of a counseling center. If the principal is open to suggestions for changing the center, you may want to have a few ideas in mind. For example, suppose you are in an elementary building with three stories, and the counseling center is in the basement at the far end of a dark hall. You may want to emphasize that student access to the counselor is paramount to a successful program, and that kindergarten and first grade children would probably not be comfortable visiting the counselor under these conditions. You might ask whether any alternatives might be possible.

When focusing on facilities of the counseling center, it is wise to emphasize their impact on the program and on students, parents, and teachers. Avoid mentioning your own welfare, preferences, and tastes. The most important factor is how appropriate facilities contribute to a positive difference for clients the program intends to serve.

Is the furniture adequate? Are there adult-size chairs as well as student chairs? Is there a telephone for making confidential referrals and following up on cases? Is the center sufficiently private for confidential sessions with students, parents, teachers, and others? If some of the facilities are less than adequate, ask your principal how you can help improve the situation. Worksheet 1.2 provides a simple checklist to evaluate your facilities.

Because elementary and middle school counselors frequently work in old buildings designed and constructed before counseling programs existed, adequate facilities are sometimes unavailable. Take heart. Remember, just because the broom closet or boiler room is the only available space does not mean it has to look and function like a broom closet or basement. Use your imagination, ask teachers for ideas, and renovate!

Facility Checklist for a School Counseling Center

Directions: Check *Yes* or *No* for each of the items on the list.

Yes	No	
☐	☐	The center has adequate space for small group sessions.
☐	☐	The counselor's office has audio and visual privacy.
☐	☐	A reception area exists for waiting and reviewing materials.
☐	☐	The center has a display area for educational and career materials.
☐	☐	The counselor has a telephone and desktop computer.
☐	☐	There is storage area for equipment, toys, games, and materials.
☐	☐	The center has appropriately sized furniture for students and adults.
☐	☐	There is at least one table for group activities.
☐	☐	The counselor has access to a conference room.
☐	☐	There is a sink for washing hands and cleaning up paint, clay, and so forth.
☐	☐	The center has a computer for student self-instruction and guidance programs.
☐	☐	The counselor has access to a TV monitor for video, Internet, and closed circuit use.
☐	☐	The school has a secure room elsewhere in the building in which records are stored and teachers can have access without disrupting services of the counseling program.

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8. *What has been the most successful service offered in the counseling program?* If the principal has an answer, you may want to follow up by asking how he or she evaluated the service. In other words, on what basis does this principal believe this service was successful? The principal's response will give you insight into the kinds of accountability processes that have existed in the program. You will want to stress the importance of evaluating services so that the program can be altered each year to meet the needs of students, parents, and teachers.

9. *What service or activity, if any, would the principal prefer to discontinue?* Sometimes principals and counselors do not communicate sufficiently about the program. If your principal has allowed some services to continue, despite his or her feelings about them, you should know this up front. If the principal dislikes a service that you believe is important, you can examine what aspects of the service have been discomforting and negotiate changes to make it more palatable.

As a follow-up to this question, you might ask about activities that the principal wants you to handle, but that have no relationship to school counseling. As a member of the school staff, you will want to participate and accept your fair share of responsibilities to help the school run smoothly. Although you want to be involved, however, too many extra duties or administrative functions can detract from your primary counseling role, and might even defeat your purpose in the school.

The sample questions for principals in the previous paragraphs provide a starter list that you can tailor to suit your situation. Having an open, honest discussion with your principal sets the stage to win support for a comprehensive school counseling program. The questions for principals may also be adapted to help you survey your teaching colleagues to assess what teachers think will make a good program. Without knowing what they think you are less able to gain their support, which, along with that of the principal, is essential for the success of a school counseling program. Teachers' support is also important in helping you convince them of their role in assisting with student development.

Sharing Ownership

Winning support from your principal is the first step toward including your colleagues in planning and implementing a comprehensive program. As noted earlier, an advisory committee is an excellent vehicle through which to gain their cooperation. After discussing the idea of a committee with your principal, you will want to select members. This selection might come from the principal's recommendations or from parents and teachers who volunteer. The people selected for this committee should advocate a strong counseling program, believe that the program is the responsibility of all staff members, and be willing to attend committee meetings during the year.

If you and your principal decide to seek volunteers, you could make an announcement to the staff about the committee at a faculty meeting or through a memo to the teachers. You might consider following up your announcement with discussion at a faculty meeting. Exhibit 1.3 is one example of an announcement. The last part of Exhibit 1.3 includes a sample form that you could adapt for potential committee volunteers.

EXHIBIT 1.3

Advisory Committee Volunteers

Dear Teachers:

The principal, Mrs. Jones, has asked that we form an advisory committee for the school counseling program. This committee will consist of teachers, students, and parents, and will guide the counseling program during the year. The committee will

- Design a needs assessment procedure and make program decisions based on the results of this assessment
- Determine how classroom teachers will use the guidance curriculum during the year
- Assist the counselor with the design of a schedule of services
- Help the counselor determine topics for group counseling and group guidance
- Focus on school climate and recommend activities to improve the learning atmosphere
- Help the counselor design procedures to evaluate the program during the school year

The committee is to meet before the end of September, and will meet three more times during the year. The school counselor will chair the committee.

Mrs. Jones will select committee members next week. If you are interested or can recommend students and parents for the committee, please complete the form below and return it to the counselor's mailbox. Mrs. Jones will announce the committee members at our next faculty meeting.

Thank you for your assistance!

Advisory Committee Form

Name: _____

Please check the statements that reflect your wishes.

_____ I would like to serve on the School Counseling Advisory Committee.

_____ I nominate the following student for the committee: _____

_____

_____ I nominate the following parent for the committee: _____

_____

Home Phone: _____

Please return this form to the counselor's mailbox.

During the year, your advisory committee will help you and the teachers plan events and activities to focus on schoolwide guidance, parent involvement, student development, and school climate. As these activities are implemented, the involvement of students, parents, and teachers will be essential. This is another illustration of how the school counseling program belongs to everyone.

Letting everyone share ownership in the counseling program gives you support that is vital for functioning as a school counselor across a comprehensive program of services. Such support enables you to delineate clearly the expanded services of the program.

DEFINING WHAT YOU DO: A GLOSSARY OF RESPONSIVE SERVICES

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, school counseling is a broad professional practice that includes preventive services, developmental activities, and remedial interventions. As such, counseling in schools encompasses a wide variety of activities and services. The ASCA National Model adopted the term *responsive services* to describe many of the activities that school counselors perform to meet the needs of students. The term is appropriate because almost all of the services implemented by counselors in schools—such as counseling, consultation, group work, assessment, and coordination—are usually chosen in response to an identified need or situation.

An important characteristic of a successful school counseling program is the awareness people have about your role as a counselor. To be successful, you want to educate students, parents, and teachers about all the responsive services that you implement and how these services help students achieve academically, develop appropriate personal characteristics and self-worth, and learn valuable social and life skills.

One way to help others learn about your role as a school counselor is to list your functions, with a brief description of each, in a faculty manual, student handbook, PTA or PTO newsletter, or other resource. The first step is to identify what services and functions you believe are important to the program.

Identifying Responsive Services

The following sections will help identify and describe the services of a comprehensive school counseling program. Depending on your audience—students, parents, or teachers—you may need to adjust the language accordingly. You could use this description in a handout or on your school counselor's Web page.

Individual Counseling

Professional school counselors provide individual sessions for students to assist with a variety of educational, career, and personal concerns. The primary purpose of these sessions is to help students explore their concerns, make appropriate plans of action, and be successful in following through with their plans. Typically, the counseling provided is preventive and developmental in nature. Occasionally, school counselors provide counseling to help students remedy a problem, and these are usually short-term helping relationships. When more time is necessary for such counseling relationships, a school counselor will often

encourage the family to use treatment opportunities in the community, such as private counselors, mental health centers, or other agencies. In instances in which other treatment opportunities are not available to families, an elementary or middle school counselor may decide to continue counseling a student as long as progress is apparent.

Individual Planning

Many contacts with individual students will not involve counseling relationships. Elementary and middle school students benefit from assistance in making decisions about school, academic subjects, extracurricular activities, career interests, and other matters related to their educational development. In such individual sessions a counselor's role is to provide information and other assistance in helping students make appropriate choices. These sessions may occur a single time, or may include ongoing sessions with particular students.

Group Counseling

In some instances, students help one another by working in groups with leadership from a counselor. Group counseling allows students to share ideas about specific issues, such as problem solving, career choices, educational planning, and peer relationships, as well as helping them use these ideas to resolve their concerns. Group sessions usually involve small groups of students led by a counselor and meet once or twice a week for a specific number of sessions. An advantage of group over individual counseling is that it can often be a more efficient use of the counselor's time. In addition, students gain personal confidence and social skills by learning to empathize with and help one another.

Group Guidance

School counselors often meet with groups of students to help them learn specific information about themselves (for example, testing results) and their development. Commonly referred to as group guidance, these instructional groups can be large, such as classroom size, or relatively small, such as three to five students. Ideally, teachers also lead these types of activities in their classrooms. Guidance groups usually focus on topics related to one or more goals and objectives in a guidance curriculum. As an example, a teacher might integrate activities about healthy peer relationships into a social studies unit.

Group guidance also can be part of a student-teacher advisement program. Whether led by a counselor or a teacher, guidance groups are instructional in nature and focus on such topics as self-concept development, study skills, friendship, health habits, career information, and good citizenship.

Guidance Curriculum

Some schools design learning goals and instructional strategies to assist students with personal, social, career, and educational development, and integrate these goals and strategies into the school curriculum. The intent is to have classroom teachers incorporate these goals and objectives into daily instruction. School counselors assist with this curriculum by planning its integration with teachers, providing resources and materials,

and presenting some activities with teachers in the classroom. You will learn more about this service in Chapter Five.

Student Appraisal

Counselors help students, parents, and teachers by gathering information about student abilities, behaviors, and achievement in order to help make appropriate decisions about educational placement and instruction. In helping with these decisions, counselors use tests, inventories, observations, interviews, and other procedures to gather information.

Referrals

An important role for school counselors is to serve as referral agents when students and their families require assistance from other programs and services in the school system or from agencies outside the school. Counselors work closely with teachers and administrators in these referral processes. Key to being a successful referral agent is the counselor's knowledge and working relationship with other helping professionals in the school system and community.

Consultation

Schools help students develop to their fullest potential when everyone works together. For this reason, counselors consult with teachers and parents to plan appropriate services for every child. These consultations typically focus on the needs of the individual child, but sometimes counselors lead group consultations for teachers and parents to focus on specific issues and topics. For example, a counselor might present a workshop for teachers to learn about indicators of child depression, or might lead an education group for parents to discuss child-rearing techniques.

Coordination

A school counseling program includes a wide range of services and activities that require coordination for smooth administration, and for which the counselor assumes primary responsibility. The preceding paragraphs offer a sample of typical counselor functions and responsive services. Use them as a guide to develop a list that suits you and your school's counseling program. As you can see, responsibility for many activities is shared. Part of your role is to coordinate these many functions. Your next step in program development is to determine areas of shared responsibility: Who does what?

Communicating Your Role

As noted earlier, having a lexicon or description of your services is just the first step in defining what you do in your elementary or middle school. More important are the processes you use and actions you take to communicate your role to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community.

This *Survival Guide* devotes considerable attention to ideas and strategies that you can use to help people understand their roles in the school, so I will not devote much space to

the topic here. However, there are three essential points that might help you create and communicate a role that is professionally satisfying and rewarding:

1. *Use existing avenues of communication.* For example, if you have regular faculty meetings, PTA or PTO meetings, assemblies, or other gatherings in the school, place yourself on the agenda each time and say something about what the counseling program is accomplishing. If your school puts out a newsletter periodically, write a "Counselor's Column" and share useful information for students, parents, and teachers.
2. *Commandeer a bulletin board.* Sometimes counselors shy away from being responsible for bulletin boards in the school, and this reluctance is understandable. Sometimes managing bulletin boards becomes a full-time job and takes counselors away from their primary responsibilities. Nevertheless, having control of at least one bulletin board can be an excellent way to communicate what you and the counseling program are doing in school. Be sure to include samples of students' drawings and other work if appropriate, because they will attract attention to your announcements.
3. *Launch your program into cyberspace.* In this rapidly changing world of advanced technology, it is essential that the counseling program be visible on all school communications, such as school newsletters, student handbooks, and the Internet. Ask for space or links on your school's Web site to feature the school counseling program.

These three ideas only scratch the surface of ways to communicate your role in a comprehensive school counseling program. What is most important, and stressed throughout this book, is the effort you make to communicate the role as you understand it in order to take professional command of who you are and what you do in the school.

In this chapter, you have learned about ways to describe and define a comprehensive school counseling program. This guide takes the position that planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating a program of responsive services are key to your survival as a school counselor. To be successful in this endeavor, seek input from others and share ownership of the program. The next step is to determine the responsibilities that various players—administrators, teachers, and counselors—have in making a comprehensive program of services a reality. Chapter Two offers suggestions for determining these responsibilities, identifying your role, and learning to balance your time across the many services of a comprehensive eschool counseling program.

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