

Counseling

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Column Editors

This section is devoted to presenting Adlerian counseling cases, situations, or transcripts that will be evaluated/analyzed by the editors or guest reviewers. Counselors and therapists are invited to submit cases and transcripts of counseling that include the following information: (a) sex and age of counselee, (b) background information, (c) reasons for initiating counseling, and (d) actual incidents (preferably verbatim or descriptions of a situation). This material should be typed and double-spaced and not be longer than four pages. Send contributions or questions to: Dr. Dorothy Bickling, 26 Minot Avenue, Acton, Massachusetts 01720.

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The Children's Life Style Guide

The student with whom I utilized the Children's Life-Style Guide (Dinkmeyer, Pew and Dinkmeyer, 1979) is an 11-year-old boy. Steve is in 5th grade, having been retained a year in first grade. Steve has "severe" learning disabilities and works with both the Resource Room Teacher and Learning Disabilities Specialist. His classroom work is modified. Steve was referred for counseling due to his poor self-image. In addition to learning difficulties, he is also overweight and experiences peer ridicule on both counts. Steve will become a member of a counseling group consisting of 6 boys (5th and 6th grades) who are also learning disabled. However, before initiating the group process, I see each member for 2 to 3 individual sessions as a means of establishing rapport and to better define common concerns. The following is the life-style information from my initial interview with Steve.

I. Parents

Dad	46 years old
Mom	43 years old

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I. A Family Constellation

Tom 14 years old
Steve 11 years old
Patty 4 years old

- Q. Who is the most different from you? How? "Dad. He's rough—likes fights and punches and stuff."
- Q. Who is most like you? How? "Mom. She looks like me—her handwriting is like mine. We do a lot of stuff together. I like to help her and my brother likes to help my Dad."
- Q. What was life like before you went to school? "Boring—all you do is sit around and watch the tube when your brother's at school."

II. Functioning at Life Tasks

Socially: How do you get along with adults? Other kids? "Nice with adults. I'm not a wise kid—not fresh. Not so well with other kids because they will call me names like fatty and stuff—you know, about my weight. It's a good thing—my strength—because they back off."

Work: How do things go for you in school? "O.K. I get out of the room a lot. It's fine with me. I don't have to read with the teacher so I don't get as much homework. My friends help me—they cheer me up."

- Q. What subject do you like the best? Like least? Why? "I like art, gym, and math—they're easiest. All my teachers have known I like art. I don't like reading and spelling. I have arguments with the reading teacher. It's hard."
- Q. What do you fear the most? (wanted assurance of confidentiality) "My father. He forces me to read clocks. I know how but he forces me to do a lot of stuff—like do a paper route."
- Q. What would you like to be when you grow up? Why? "First, an artist of my own kind—not work for somebody—just draw and sell them myself. Or a basketball or football player. I do know I'm not going to get married. I don't like girls—except for my sister and mother. I danced with a girl once at an anniversary party, but she was my cousin."

III. Family Atmosphere

- Q. What kind of person is your father? "Good guy—not mean. He brought back Canadian money for me and my brother to split. When he's nice, he's really nice. There are some bad times too—when he's angry. Once when I was 7 he pushed me against the beds."
- Q. What kind of person is your mother? "She's nice to me—not a mean lady."
- Q. Which of the children is most like your father? In what ways? "My brother. They look alike, and working—my father takes him on jobs. I don't want to. The way he talks, the anger, and the habits."
- Q. Which of the children is most like your mother? In what ways? "I am. The way we talk, write, our faces."
- Q. What was life like before you went to school? "Boring—all you do is sit around and watch the tube when your brother's at school."

IV. Sibling Characteristics

A. Who is the most?

Intelligent—Tom

Hardest Worker—me

Best grades in school—Tom

Conforming—me

Rebellious—Tom

Helps around the house—me

Critical—Tom

Considerate—me

Selfish—Tom

Tries to please—me

Sensitive, feelings easily hurt—me

Temper—Tom

Materialistic, likes to get things—Patty

Most friends—Tom

Most spoiled—Patty

High standards of achievement—me

Athletic—me

Strongest—me

Attractive—Patty "she's a real looker!"

Most punished—"My brother. He wises off—it's his age. He lies too."

V. Early Recollections

1. A birthday party for me when I was 5 years old. There were tons of people there—lots of relatives and some of my friends. I have a lot of cousins and we had a lot of fun having a record fight—you know spinning records at each other across the floor. I felt good—happy and joyful. (if I would do “bad” things I’d have friends)
 2. We had a cottage. I don’t remember how old I was. There were 6 of us there. The first day when my dog saw the water, he ran off the dock and dove in. After that he hated the water. It was funny. I felt happy. (reassuring to see others fail)
 3. I was driving my father’s boat, full throttle. We saw some ladies swimming out too far so we picked them up. Then my father said “let me drive.” But, there was no gas. So, I jumped out and pulled the boat all the way. I felt good because I helped. (I am valuable when I am helpful to women)
- *I asked for more ER’s but he said, “I don’t remember that much stuff.”

VI. Three Wishes and Fantasy Animal

- Q. If you could have three wishes, what would they be?
1. all the gold in the world
 2. brand new house
 3. fastest and best looking Corvette in the world
- Q. If you were going to pretend to be an animal, which would you choose? Why? “Which one is the fastest in the world? A jaguar I think. I’d want to be that because it’s the fastest and strong — and he’s powerful.”

VII and VIII. Summary and Assets

Steve is the second born male of three siblings. He was referred to the counselor as a result of a 766 (PL94-142) team meeting whose members expressed concern regarding his self image and peer relationships.

Steve is resentful and critical of his father’s relationship with his brother. He does not see himself as possessing the male attributes they value. He needs to be liked and perceived as “good.” He sees himself as sensitive, conforming,

and as a “people pleaser” in contrast to his rebellious but achieving older brother. The brothers attempt to defuse their rivalry for parental attention and approval by devoting themselves to a specific parent. Patty, as a subfamily, does not appear threatening. Steve may still feel protected and secure as mother’s “baby.” Through emulating her, he gains significance in the family, and can view his brother on more equal ground while being less vulnerable to his father’s criticism.

Steve sees life as a cocktail party wherein he must behave within social limits (adult) while protecting himself from criticism and rejection. He defensively focuses on the positive aspects of his school program and resents work which highlights his disabilities. Steve values independence as a means of avoiding ego threatening situations with others. His early recollections about life suggest Steve believes life is a demanding risk; others will always be critical of his performance and their pressure needs to be avoided because I am incapable of meeting these unfair demands. Steve secretly values speed, power, and strength as necessary for male acceptance. His learning difficulties influence his ability to incorporate these traits in daily academic tasks and some life skills (e.g. difficulty reading the clock.)

Steve’s assets are his artistic ability, sensitivity to his own feelings, and strong desire for self acceptance.

Discussion

This counselor has gathered a lot of information about Steve and his perceptions of how to belong. Within the family unit it appears that Steve most closely identifies with his mother while his older brother identifies with the father. In essence, the family appears to consist of dad’s son and mom’s son in the first grouping and a much younger daughter who psychologically is an only child. Dad and Tom appear to be much more active and powerful while Mom and Steve are more passive.

No specific information is presented by the counselor to help identify mistaken assumptions held by Steve in his interactions with parents and teachers. Steve is very discouraged about finding a sense of belonging both within the school and his family.

The counselor is proposing establishing a counseling group of 6 boys all of whom are described as learning disabled. It is admirable that the counselor is initiating group methods. It is hoped that Steve will also have an opportunity

to be in groups other than the identified LD group. While the six may have many things to learn from each other through the group process, they also need to share these experiences with other students. To spend so much time and energy on a disability or an area where one does not feel competent, can be very discouraging. Mainstreaming gets more and more difficult as the students identify with the special group rather than with their other age mates. These six boys probably have more areas in common with other students. This should be accentuated so that they feel a part of the entire school rather than just a part of their special grouping.

With Steve emphasis needs to be placed on his strengths, his “can do” side. He feels competent in art, gym and math, the latter indicating that he is a problem solver and can apply these skills in his day-to-day world. His difficulty in reading and spelling cause him trouble with other subject areas. Although the counselor doesn’t describe the type of reading difficulty, often trouble in reading and spelling can indicate lack of acceptance of order.

Because there are so many other adults involved with Steve — resource room teacher, learning disabilities specialist, regular classroom teachers and parents — the counselor can perhaps be most effective by assuming the role of consultant to these others. This will not negate individual and group counseling sessions, but serve to give a more comprehensive, consistent approach to dealing with Steve.

References

Dinkmeyer, D., Pew, W., and Dinkmeyer, D. *Adlerian counseling and psychotherapy*. Monterey, California: Brooks Cole, 1979.