

Students Counselling in Higher Education

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Abstract: *Abstract: College/ university is the period of transition into adulthood and the world of work as students begin separating from parents and exploring and defining their independence. During these years, students are evaluating their strengths, skills and abilities and this is the period when counselling is need most for students. A trained counsellor provides the needed support and guidance to the growing and striving individual to facilitate overall development of his/her personality. Through collaborative efforts with other faculty members, parents & school administration, counsellors help all students in the areas of academic achievement, socio-personal development and career development and other vocational avenues. Counselling helps students tackle various problems and introduce them to their personal traits, interests, skills and aptitude. It helps them choose their careers according to their personality and lifestyle. It trains them to be successful in their educational and professional careers, provides them with training in personality development. Counselling enhances their interview and life/ communication skills, makes them learn time management skills and provides them with necessary help to make a realistic educational plan. Counselling also benefits teachers to a great extent. It helps them in improving & managing classroom environment and helps them in communication with parents.*

Keywords: *Counselling, benefits, students, teachers, college, university.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

People have always sought help and counsel from others in times of difficulty. Looking at the people around, interacting with them, listen actively to them, it is observed that most of them are undergoing stress, trauma, family disputes, physical and psychological abuse, and violence. There are either minor or major family problems with children or spouse or in-laws; problems at school, or job related problems with the boss, colleagues or subordinates, depression or general stress of life. In times like this, they need someone who can give solace, comfort, peace of mind, or make them relaxed and feel happy, help them to realize their goals and achieve maximum in life. These circumstances have given rise to the need for counseling. It is not just that people who face problems require counseling but it is also assistance for maximizing human growth and potential. A trained counselor provides the needed support and guidance to the growing and striving individual to facilitate overall development of his/her personality. Through collaborative efforts with other faculty members, parents & school administration, counsellors help all students in the areas of academic achievement, socio-personal development and career development and other vocational avenues.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The present paper is based on secondary data collected from books, journals, websites, seminars, workshops and personal sources etc.

3. DESCRIPTION AND DISCUSSION:

Counseling involves helping others to understand themselves better and to be more effective in solving their problems. Various writers have tried to explain the term 'counselling' in various ways. A consensus type of definition was put forward by Gustard (1953). He defined counseling as 'learning oriented, carried on in a one-to-one social environment. The counselor who is competent and knowledgeable assists the client to learn, understand himself/herself and perceive realistically defined goals. At the end, the client becomes happier, healthy and a productive person in the society.

The committee on Definition of Division 17 of American Psychological Association (APA) has given three features of Guidance and Counselling.

- Client's realistic acceptance of his/her own capacities, motivations and self-attitudes.
- Client's achievement of a reasonable harmony with his/her social, economic and vocational environment.

- Society's acceptance of individual differences and their implications for community, employment and marriage relations.
All these definitions imply that counseling is a serious business, and only well-trained and equipped people can perform it.
- It is an assistance and hence not 'advice giving' given to persons who are basically psychologically healthy. It is not dictating to others or telling them what to do. It is a scientific process of helping a person to understand himself/herself better in order to cope with the day-to-day problems faced in the normal course of life.
- It is not solving another's problems, but helping her/him to solve their own problems. Making him/her understand his/her assets and liabilities can do this.
- It is essential to create an environment in which a person can see things objectively and face life.

Counseling is not carrying another person's burden, but assisting him/her to carry and face their own problems. The counselor assists a person to cope with his/her own stresses. It is not making 'decisions' for others. It is helping them to arrive at their own decisions. It is also helping the client to implement the decisions s/he arrives at. Until and unless the decisions are translated into actions, they are of no consequence (Mohan, 1999). Counseling requires special training and therefore a counselor must undergo formal training in order to give 'assistance'.

The goals of counseling therefore are-

- Facilitating behavior changes
- Helping client to resolve his/her problems
- Enhancing the clients effectiveness and ability to cope with life's problems
- Promoting the decision making process
- Facilitating the empowering the client to develop his/her own potential to cope with life.

3.1. Need for Counselling

Although need for assistance or guidance has always existed in the form of advice sought from parents, elders in the family, Gurus (religious heads), community heads or leader etc., professional counseling is of recent origin. With the increasing complexities of life came the realization that school and home were not in a position to provide timely assistance to growing youth to meet the demands of living. There is a growing recognition and concern that –

- Looking at the present context, where stress, tensions and worries are on the rise and where help is needed to overcome them.
- Advancement of science and technology has made things more complicated. Globalization has triggered much competition in trying to outshine others in money matters, productivity and knowledge, which creates stress.
- Families as support systems are gradually breaking down. For instance, families have come down from joint family to nuclear families and now to single parent families – where the single parent is working to make ends meet and has hardly any time for the child.
- Values and spiritual self are at very low ebb. Things that could give a lot of solace and peace have gradually disappeared.
- Education and the subsequent hunt for jobs are becoming more complicated, causing stress.
- Cut throat competition, economic insecurity and job mobilization give rise to stress. In view of the above, one feels there is a great need for professional help to reduce stress and make life peaceful and more meaningful for people.
- Students face unique and diverse challenges that impact academic achievement.

College/ university is the final transition into adulthood and the world of work as students begin separating from parents and exploring and defining their independence. During these years, students are evaluating their strengths, skills and abilities.

- i) Common areas where Students need counseling
- ii) Changes associated with life styles.
- iii) Peer Pressure & Bullying (victim & perpetrators).
- iv) Risky behaviors (smoking, alcohol, drugs)
- v) Sex education
- vi) Adjustment issues
- vii) Low self-esteem (withdrawn, lonely)
- viii) Attention & Concentration problems (social media/ networks, cell phones)
- ix) Job related problems/ un- employment
- x) Terrorism

- xi) Low academic achievement (poor grades)
- xii) Conflicts with peers/ parents and teachers
- xiii) Aggressive, argumentative or defiant behavior.
- xiv) Personal problems (parental conflicts, divorce/ broken family, dominating parenting styles, financial problems, relationship issues, loss etc.)
- xv) Exam anxiety/ phobia
- xvi) Most importantly, academic pressures as they face high-stakes testing, the challenges of college/ university admissions, the scholarship and financial aid application process and entrance into a competitive job market.

3.2. Counsellor's Basic Skills:

In counselling confidentiality has to be maintained as the student's story is very personal and trust is built on the ability to keep confidences. Moreover, attending skills visual/ eye contact such as vocal qualities, verbal tracking and attentive body language is required. Here the goal is to give the students 'air- time' and reduce the 'talk-time'. Observational skills like body language (gestures, posture, eye contact and facial expressions) too need to be taken care. A basic listening skill which is listening to students; enables them to continue to talk and explore is equally important. Likewise questioning may open up new areas for discussion; clarify issues and aids in student's self-exploration. Open questions can be asked to encourage them to talk and to get maximum information. Typically, they begin with *what, how, why, or could*. Closed questions that can be answered in a few words to obtain specific information which begin with *is, are, or do* can be used. However, encouraging is one of the important components during counselling. Here encouragers have been defined as head nods, open gestures, and positive facial expressions that encourage the student to keep talking. It is also important to help the person reflect on what they said, redefine their statement if they feel it's not entirely true, help elicit more information, show you listened, interested, understood, makes the person feels heard, reflection of feeling, identifying the key emotions of a student, feeding back, clarifying the emotional experience and responding to student as a worthy human being. Empathy too is important in understanding the student world as she/ he sees and experiences it. Accurate use of listening skills is a way to demonstrate empathy. The counselor can also add something congruent beyond what the student has said to help them see a new perspective (similar situation/example). Confrontation is a form of advanced empathy which helps the student look at thoughts and behaviors that might be self-defeating or harmful. It is a form of challenge and not a verbal assault. It needs to be done with a high level of empathy and usually it is in reference to an incongruence or discrepancy on the student's part. Therefore, respect and warmth can be shown by his/her open gesture, smile and tone of voice. The ability to keep one's comments congruent with body language is also an indicator of respect and warmth. Non-judgmental and acceptance requires a counselor to suspend her/ his own opinions and beliefs and assume a neutral value with their student. Hence, it is expressed through vocal qualities and body language and also verbally. Likewise, communication from the counselor like feedback skill, interpretation and reflecting needs to be highly specific. Immediacy which means being in the moment with the student, being in the here- and- now with them needs to be incorporated while doing counselling.

3.3. Stages of Counselling: Basically there are five(5) Stages of a Counselling Session

I. Initiating the session

- Building rapport, making the student comfortable
- Structuring helps the client understand the purpose of the session and keep them informed
- Attending skills, discuss ethical issues.

II. Gathering Data

- Drawing out stories, concerns, problems, or issues
- Open and closed questioning
- Encouragers and paraphrases will provide additional clarity
- Positive asset search

III. Mutual Goal Setting

- Focuses on client's goals
- Enables you to know what the client want
- How would things be if the problem were solved?
- The desired direction of the client and counselor should be reasonably harmonious
- Attending skills, basic listening skills.

IV. Working

- Exploring alternatives, confronting client's incongruities and conflict, re-storying
- Exploration of personal dynamics
- Summarization could help start the working stage
- Positive asset search

- Identify irrational beliefs or unhealthy thought patterns

V. Terminating

- To facilitate change in thoughts, feelings and behaviours in the student's daily life

3.4. Counsellor's task:

Counsellors provide individual/ group/ educational/ career/ peer/ parental counselling e.g. resolve conflicts, identity development, specific student concerns (adjustment, social class, substance use, poor grades, peer pressure, suicide and loss etc.). Other types of counselling are crisis counselling (counselling for prevention of child abuse, substance abuse prevention counselling, counselling for HIV/ AIDS awareness, counselling for suicide prevention), short term counselling and long term counselling. They work with administrators, teachers, and staff to meet student needs. Supporting students and their families in case of personal problems where the issues start affecting their academics, interpersonal relationships with peers, family and others. They carried out classroom observations on behaviors, relationships and providing feedback to teacher, students, parents, other faculty/ staff. Work with other faculty/ staff and administration to implement safety and improvement programs. Provide information and guidance on post college/ university options for training and careers as well as for financial assistance for further education. For this they collaborate with teachers and community partners to ensure that student transitions to post college/ university education and the workplace with essential knowledge, attitudes and skills (life skills) for success. Therefore, counselling plays an important role in supporting the personal, social and intellectual development of each student. According to studies conducted in Georgia in 1997, counselors- impact students' academic performance, increase productive behavior of students and reduce disruptive behaviors and many others.

4. CONCLUSION:

Counselling gives time and space to work through problems. Counselling and therapy helps gain a different perspective on problems and issues. It provides a safe, non-judgemental and respectful environment. Counselling can help regain wellbeing and balance in life. Counselling helps students to introduce them to their personal traits, interests, skills and aptitude. It helps them choose their careers according to their personality and lifestyle. It trains them to be successful in their educational and professional careers, provides them with training in personality development. Counselling enhances their interview and life/ communication skills, makes them learn time management skills and provides them with necessary help to make a realistic educational plan. Counselling also benefits teachers to a great extent. It helps them in improving & managing classroom environment and helps them in communication with parents. Counselling also brings enormous benefits to college/ university. For instance, turnaround in the internal and university results, improvement in the public image of the college/ university, helps the college/ university make a realistic educational plan and increases the strength of students.

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