EASING TRANSITION ANXIETY: THE NEED FOR SPECIALIZED TRANSITION COUNSELING

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COUNSELING FOR LIFE’S TRANSITIONS

We all go through life transitions…

• Adoption                        Career changes                      Childbirth/postpartum
• Divorce/separation              Family changes                       Grief and Loss
• Interpersonal relationships     Marriage                               Relocation

from https://creativecounselingcenter.com/life-transitions-counseling/
HOW WE DEAL WITH TRANSITION ANXIETY IS #1
THE VALUE OF A THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

• Using the basics of the therapeutic relationship
  • provide the client with an open and safe setting that emphasizes self-exploration and change without the client feeling the need to censor or conform
  • Maintain the three important qualities a client should look for when seeking a therapist emphasized by Carl Rogers:
    • empathy
    • genuineness and
    • respect.

Posted by Maritza Rodriguez, April 1, 2011
TRANSITION COUNSELING TODAY…

• Barriers and limitations
  • (2019) Currently, teachers/facilitators/specialists without counseling training are filling the role of transition counselor
  • IDEA-based transition counseling is not a recognized specialty of counseling practice (closest may be a Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling) For some positions in vocational/rehabilitation counseling, the need to qualify for national certification as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC), Certified Vocational Evaluator (CVE), or Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) is warranted. ([www.crccertification.com](http://www.crccertification.com))

• **What credential is available through the National Career Development Association (division of ACA since 1985)?**
  • **Certified School Career Development Advisor (CSCDA)** - (coming soon) - for providers who work with other staff in the K-12 sector to coordinate the design, implementation, and monitoring of school and community based efforts to improve the chances of students entering the job market with skills, knowledge, and credentials to be competitive (but not specialized to students with disabilities).
HERE’S AN “AD” FOR TRANSITION COUNSELING

• Providing highly specialized field of personal counseling and life planning for those young people who have experienced life with mandated services and supports that disappear at graduation or age 22…
• Building appropriate supports for families and loved ones who do not know how to support an adult child with specialized needs…and
• Most of all, career counseling to the most underemployed segment of the population…
• Without these features, it is not TRANSITION COUNSELING.
INTRODUCTION TO TRANSITION COUNSELING

• What it is and What it is Not
  • Transition Counseling is/should be
    • 1 – relationship-based and evidence-based therapeutic practices to assist a young person with learning differences in proactively planning for their life choices (and support their family in “letting go” to an appropriate level)
    • 2 – front loading successful graduation from public school and moving more easily to self-directed choices for adult living
    • 3 – providing consideration of the specialized and mandated requirements of federal and state law
    • 4 – making the last day of public school and the first day of adult life look VERY MUCH THE SAME
  
  • Transition Counseling is not
    • 1 – cookie-cutter academic guidance in 4 year course planning (for high school or college)
    • 2 – appointments or meetings to review pre-selected graduation requirements and “checklists”
    • 3 – only for students who “don’t know what they want to do next”
ISSUES COMMON TO TRANSITION COUNSELING

• Common client misconceptions
  • “I don’t need help like those kids; I didn’t even need special education services.” (denial)
  • “The school has had someone help us with our child since he was 3 – who will do that after he graduates?” (learned helplessness)
  • “We don’t need a life plan – Grandma is going to stay home with our student after she turns 22 and you won’t let her come to school anymore.” (‘babysitting’ and ‘immortality’ myths)
  • “Texas Workforce said I didn’t qualify for their program so I guess I’ll just go get a Social Security check to live on.” (entitlement)
  • “I’m mad the school didn’t train me to do anything, so what am I supposed to do now that I’m 21?” (anger)
TRANSITION COUNSELING TO EASE ANXIETY

- Moral and ethical obligations –
  - in 2017, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 18.7 percent of persons with a disability were employed…all employment is approximately 65% of the population. (USbls, 6/21/18)
  - ‘school-to-prison pipeline’ - Students with disabilities, including intellectual limitations, ADHD, dyslexia, autism and impaired hearing or vision, are twice as likely to be expelled or suspended than their non-disabled peers. They also account for a quarter of public-school students who are suspended, arrested or turned over to law enforcement—more than twice their share of the total student population, according to the Government Accountability Office. (Anderson, 4/26/18)
  - Teenage suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Teenagers experiencing such thoughts believe there’s no future for them. A lack of a long-term future and no way of being able to imagine a positive future leads to apathy. Apathy eventually transitions to depression, which leads to suicidal thoughts. (Scholar Advisor, 2018)

- Purpose – to provide Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) to the highly specialized field of career counseling for students and graduates of special education programs, and assist in life planning (goal setting) for those young people who have only experienced their world with mandated services and supports that disappear at graduation or age 22.
EASING TRANSITION ANXIETY

• Why counseling and not just advising? Advising is short term solution for long term issues

• Basic Assumptions of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy:
  • 1. Change is constant and inevitable
  • 2. Small changes result in bigger changes
  • 3. Since you can’t change the past, concentrate on the future
  • 4. People have the resources necessary to help themselves: they are the experts
  • 5. Every human being, relationship and situation is unique
  • 6. Everything is interconnected
  • 7. Every problem has at least one exception
  • 8. Therapy is not the only way people change, there are many (Simon and Berg, 2013)
IS TRANSITION COUNSELING AGE OR DISABILITY RELATED?

• How teenagers with disabilities are like all other teenagers
  • Time and time management
  • Sarcasm
  • Fashion sense
  • Family meal time
  • Clean house
  • As smart as a 10\textsuperscript{th} grader?
  • Saving money
  • Texting/sexting
  • Who’s parents are cool?
  • Emotional regulation
EXAMPLES OF TRANSITION COUNSELING IN ACTION

Isn’t there an app for that?

- Nozbe, GoalsOnTrack, LifeTick, Strides, Coach.me, Habit List, and irunurun
- But who teaches the underlying skills (and how do adolescents learn “adulting”?), for example:
  - Managing finances wisely
  - “Keeping house” – laundry, hygiene, cooking, cleaning
  - Conversing with a stranger
  - Traveling by yourself
  - Negotiating a raise
  - Sewing a button/mending a hem
  - Keeping the habit of unplugging daily
  - Rising above setbacks
  - Receiving and giving critical feedback with grace
  - Knowing your work-life balance limits
  - Ending a relationship kindly and clearly

from Christine Warner, 11/7/17
TRANSITION COUNSELING IN ACTION

• Short term goals for long term success
  • Talk about goal setting, its steps and its benefits
  • Highlight the learning that occurs from setbacks
  • Encourage supporters to “coach” not enable
THROWING THE GRENADE (WITH COMPASSION)

• Sometimes there’s bad news
  • Supporters have different expectations than students (higher or lower)
  • Some students are unaware of their skills, preferences, interests and needs (SPINs)
  • Example: most branches of the military will not accept recruits within 2 years of meds
  • Example: professional ethics prevent help in job exploration in high risk positions
    • For students with mental illness to police, military, intelligence departments, cybersecurity
    • For students with physical limitations to pro-athletics, welding and other high dexterity jobs
  • But no one has the right to tell a student they cannot do something – the lesson is to guide them to a related field or interest where their SPINs would be appreciated
THROWING THE GRENADE (WITH COMPASSION)

• Closing a window and opening a door
  • Example – student with cognitive disability wants to be a veterinarian and parent agrees they do well taking care of animals/pets with assistance (provide vet aide information and experience)
  • Example – student with cognitive disability wants to be a doctor, so …..
  • Example – student with physical disability wants to be a welder, so …..
  • Example – student with physical disability wants to be a fireman, so …..
  • Example – student with developmental disability wants to be a car salesman, so …..
  • Example – student with developmental disability wants to be a psychologist, so ….
THROWING THE GRENADE (WITH COMPASSION)

• Life Planning or Letter of Intent
  • Can be done with expert guidance
  • May be done by family or circle of support
  • For Life Planning,
    • A more technical document including how decisions will be funded and made legal
    • http://txlifeplanning.com/1.pdf
  • For Letter of Intent,
    • A more “emotional” document including client preferences and perceived needs long term
FOLLOW UP, THEN STEP BACK

• Check for client comfort and compliance
  • Meet with client and circle of support
  • Be prepared to help the client set short and long term goals
  • Follow record keeping and other ethics protocols including contract or outline of services
FOLLOW UP, THEN STEP BACK

• Follow up periodically
  • Time intervals will differ depending on individual
  • At least once a quarter or every 90 days would be the longest interval during a year
  • Develop checklists for clients struggling to make decisions or progress
FOLLOW UP, THEN STEP BACK

• Stay available for life changes and challenges
  • Changes will happen
  • Model and teach coping strategies to clients (and their circle of support when applicable)
MEASURING LONG TERM SUCCESS

- Six months
  - Chart successes at the six month mark
  - Have client evaluate their feelings about progress
  - Adjust goals as needed (directed by client)
MEASURING LONG TERM SUCCESS

• One year
  • Chart successes at the six month mark
  • Have client evaluate their feelings about progress
  • Adjust goals as needed (directed by client)
  • If no goals have been met in one year, have another “tough conversation”
MEASURING LONG TERM SUCCESS

- Five years
  - Keep records for up to 5 years for 22 year olds
  - Keep records for up to 9 years for 18 year olds
  - Keep records 5 years after last appointment or transfer to another counselor if closing practice
LESSONS LEARNED

- There is no efficient template that covers transition counseling
- All clients are entitled to self-determining decision making
- You may be the only person in the dynamic looking outside the box
- Start and end with the premise that people can follow their dreams
- Doctors aren’t the only ones in the medical field; Veterinarians aren’t the only animal caregivers
- Some “labels” aren’t the real barriers, other factors are
LESSONS LEARNED

• Listening is a more important skill than talking
• Watching is a more important skill than listening
• Being present is the most important skill of all
• Learning never stops (for you or any of your clients)
Categories and Facets to Consider when Exploring a Professional Credential

Your Professional Role:
- Counselor
- Trainer
- Resume Writer
- Coach
- Consultant

Your Education Level:
- High School
- Tech School
- Associates
- Bachelors
- Masters
- Ed Specialist

Your Professional Credential:
- Advisor
- Educator
- Doctorate

Your Career Progression:
- Early Career or Transition to Career Dev Field
- Practitioner
- Center/Agency Coordinator
- Supervisor or Manager

Your Work Setting:
- Research
- Bus & Industry
- Private Practice
- Workforce
- Agency
- Higher Ed
- K-12

From NCDA.org
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(and in June, 2020 - ACE Resources, ACEResources@mail.com for
Advocacy/Counseling/Empowerment services to youth with high functioning Autism)
Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, they send forth a tiny ripple of hope... These ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

Robert F. Kennedy