

concerns of children in K–12 school settings. Group work with children and adolescents was effective in decreasing bullying behaviors, increasing self-esteem for children of alcoholics, decreasing trauma-related anxiety in young survivors of natural disasters, and decreasing levels of anxiety and increasing academic performance for children from divorced parents. Villalba believes that wellness, like prevention, is an ideal conceptual approach for small and large group work in school settings.

DeLucia-Waack, Segrist, and Horne's (2007) DVD illustrates the value of a structured psychoeducational group for high school students. The leaders show flexibility and encourage members to interact with each other, and the structured exercises facilitate interaction. The value of preparation in forming a group, ways of developing group ground rules, icebreaker activities, how to encourage members to make connections, and how to assist members in identifying what they learned are also illustrated. The purpose of a psychoeducational group is different from the purpose of a therapy group, yet a similar process unfolds in both types of groups.

Groups in the schools are generally brief, structured, problem focused, homogeneous in membership, and may have a cognitive behavioral orientation. Both counseling and psychoeducational groups that focus on wellness and prevention are well suited for school settings. Teaching basic skills to all students in classroom guidance lessons and providing further services in small groups to children and adolescents who are at risk helps young people develop coping and communication skills. Treatment of more severe problems is generally not within the scope of counseling services offered in a school setting, although developmental groups with remedial aims may be offered. Because not all children or adolescents are ready for group participation, it is important to know how to suggest alternative helping approaches. School counselors need to make it a practice to know about referral resources and be willing to make use of these resources when it is in the child's or adolescent's best interest.

Typically, school counselors have an unrealistically large caseload. Regardless of how talented the counselor might be, there are limitations on what can be done to bring about significant behavior change. The counselor's time is often spent reacting to the immediate needs of children rather than on developing prevention programs. Given adequate resources and increased numbers of competent counselors, we would like to see school guidance programs include group counseling on the elementary, middle, and secondary levels. Group counseling aimed at cultivating caring and compassionate individuals can be an ideal forum for creating what Adlerians term "social interest." In the context of a group, priority could be given to helping children and adolescents deal with feelings of rejection, anger, alienation, and isolation. The group is also a place where young people can learn the meaning of belonging and contributing to society.

For a more detailed discussion of group counseling in the school setting, see Falco and Bauman (2014), Sink, Edwards, and Eppler (2012), Sklare (2005), Steen (2009), Steen, Bauman, and Smith (2007, 2008), Steen and Bemak (2008), Steen, Griffin, and Shi (2011), Steen, Henfield, and Booker (2014), Murphy (2015), and Winslade and Monk (2007).



Guidelines for Group Work With Children and Adolescents

This section contains practical guidelines for school counselors who are considering setting up groups for both children and adolescents.

Developing a Sound Proposal

Designing group proposals is discussed in detail in Chapter 5, and the same principles apply here to planning groups for children and adolescents in school settings. As you develop your group proposal, keep these steps in mind:

- Describe your goals and purposes clearly.
- Develop a clearly stated rationale for your proposed group, including the reason a group approach has merit.
- Provide evidence to school administrators demonstrating that group counseling is an integral part of the school counseling program and that it is effective in changing student behavior and enhancing the educational experience (Sink et al., 2012).
- Clearly articulate to administrators, teachers, and parents the benefits children or adolescents derive from participating in a therapeutic group experience and identify how this group complements the mission of the school and will help students achieve not only academically but personally and socially as well (DeLucia-Waack, 2006c; Steen, Bauman, & Smith, 2007).
- State your aims, the procedures to be used, the questions for processing, the evaluation/assessment process, and the form of documentation you will use.
- Develop an attendance policy.
- Provide an orientation to the group for the parents of the children.

Legal Considerations

Be aware of your state's laws regarding group work with minors. Know the policies and procedures of the school district or agency where you work as they apply to your school, as well as the ethical principles specific to counseling children and adolescents. Do not tell children that you can keep everything they discuss confidential because you may be required to disclose information about them to your agency or school administrator. Be clear about what you can and cannot promise in the way of privacy. Be aware of your legal responsibility to report abuse or suspected abuse of minors. When a minor discloses information that creates even a suspicion of abuse or neglect, a school counselor has a duty to report this matter to Child Protective Services. In this situation confidentiality *must* be broken; the law requires you to take action by notifying the appropriate authorities. Bertram (2011) provides a concise overview of ethical and legal issues in group counseling, including the standard of care, member screening, informed consent, confidentiality and privilege, situations requiring breach of confidentiality, and danger to self or others. For other ethical considerations in setting up groups for minors, review the discussion of such standards in Chapters 3 and 5.