

# CHILD AND ADOLESCENT COUNSELING CASE STUDIES

*Developmental, Relational, Multicultural,  
and Systemic Perspectives*

Brenda L. Jones  
Thelma Duffey · Shane Haberstroh  
EDITORS

*Compliments of Springer Publishing Company, LLC*

## CHAPTER 17

---

### NATALIE'S NEW VISION

---

*Ernest Cox, Jr.*

Natalie was a 17-year-old Hispanic female. She was an 11th grade student who was on pace to graduate at the conclusion of her next school year. Natalie appeared to be a bright, confident, and articulate young woman. She had one sibling, a sister, who was 3 years younger. Natalie reported enjoying a good relationship with her sister. Natalie and her sister live with their biological mother and her mother's "boyfriend of the month." Natalie reported a good relationship with her biological father, though she rarely visited him.

In spite of challenges at home, Natalie has continued to perform well academically. She was an A to B student and active in school, and expressed interest in attending college. Natalie held a part-time job at a fast-food restaurant. She made the decision to work in order to contribute to the family finances and maintain financial autonomy. Although she enjoyed academic and early career successes, Natalie discussed some personal-social issues that hindered her home life. She shared about her history of moving very quickly in and out of sexual relationships. These behaviors led to conflicts with her mother. Natalie acknowledged that she liked the attention boys gave her and stated that if her mother gave her attention, she would not need to have boyfriends. She also communicated that she had "relationship issues" with everyone—her boyfriend, her mother, her mother's boyfriend, and her biological father. Additionally, Natalie shared that she had a history of physical altercations with her mother. She felt that both she and her mother dealt with "anger and communication issues." Therefore, our counseling sessions largely focused on anger, communication, and relationship themes.

## SYSTEMIC INFLUENCES

### The Family System

Natalie's mother contacted the professional school counselor and expressed concerns regarding her daughter's sexual promiscuity. Natalie's mother described the constant state of turmoil at home. She disclosed Natalie often spoke combatively and had a habit of embellishing stories. She also shared that Natalie threatened to run away from home on multiple occasions, but never followed through. Lastly, she wanted their life to change. She wanted a relationship with her children.

### The Peer System

Natalie surrounded herself with a small tight knit group of friends. She did not let many people get close because she feared that people would see the dysfunction in her family. Natalie was the oldest of her peer group and always had her eyes on the future. Thus, her goals centered on building relationships with her mother and addressing the painful drama from her life.

### The School System

A concerned teacher initially referred Natalie to counseling. The teacher did not know about Natalie's issues at home. She referred Natalie to the counselor because she saw "risky" physical behaviors in the hallways and noticed Natalie seemed troubled in class. Because of these observations, Natalie's teacher accessed the school counseling resources available to her. Professional school counselors address the needs of students, parents, and staff. Professional school counselors hold certification and/or a teaching license as well as a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling. Professional school counselors focus on addressing the developmental needs of all students in academic, career, personal, and social domains (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2014). Professional school counselors support the growth of students by helping to remove barriers that interfere with their success.

## DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Natalie was 17 years old. She was nearing the end of her adolescent years and in many respects entering her early adult years. Natalie maintained a part-time job, was on pace to graduate from high school and

enter college, and had narrowed her career interest. She was financially self-sufficient and the primary caregiver for her younger sister. Natalie seemed capable of examining her experiences, appeared optimistic, and followed through with her ideas. She worked to solidify her personal identity and cultivate relationships with others.

## RELATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Natalie entered counseling because she felt disconnected from her mother. In our first session, she identified her habit of building a wall around herself as a defensive mechanism. Despite this tendency, she still valued her relationships with her sister, her close friends, and her boyfriend.

## MULTICULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Natalie is a 17-year-old Hispanic female. Her family qualified for free and reduced lunch in schools. The family was a lower-upper class, matriarchal, single-parent household.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION

As a director of guidance and counseling, there are occasions when my support is required in the form of consultation, collaboration, or the provision of counseling services to students. In this case, I provided counseling services to a student at the request of the campus counselor and administrator. We provided counseling services through the comprehensive school counseling program model, which centered on individual planning and responsive services. The purpose of responsive services is to intervene on behalf of a student whose immediate personal concerns put his or her personal, social, and/or academic development at risk. The purpose of individual planning is to guide students as they plan, monitor, and manage their own educational, career, personal, and social development.

In my initial conversation with Natalie, she shared that her life was full of relationship drama. She described drama in her relationship with her mother, her mother's boyfriend, and her own relationships. Natalie acknowledged that her home issues caused social challenges at school. Her goal centered on finding a way to live a life free of drama, to reestablish a relationship with her mother, and to find independence.

### **Infusion of Creativity**

I practice from a narrative therapy approach with a solution-oriented focus to highlight potential solutions and clients' strengths. I incorporate interventions from a number of theoretical orientations including transactional analysis (TA), reality therapy, Adlerian theory, and cognitive behavioral therapy. I utilize TA, specifically egograms and the drama triangle, in order to visually depict roles and cross transactions. I use reality therapy to focus on decision making by following the WDEP model (want, doing, evaluate, and plan). I infuse these therapeutic interventions using impact therapy, an approach founded by Ed Jacobs. Impact therapy is a theory-driven, multisensory approach to counseling that recognizes that client change comes not only from verbal but visual and kinesthetic exchanges. Impact therapy is a multisensory approach to counseling that recognizes the client, and the brain, like novelty (Jacobs, 1992). Impact therapy is applicable in the school setting as it serves as a form of brief therapy and helps an individual be active and engaged in the change process.

### **Time-Efficient Methods**

Individual counseling in schools shares some similarities with mental health and other forms of counseling. Like mental health counselors, professional school counselors receive training to work with individuals, families, and groups to facilitate awareness and personal and social growth. However, limitations on time and a large caseload of students represent a major difference between school counseling and counseling within other settings. Professional school counselors find themselves seeking and using time-efficient methods. Many schools place a high demand and focus on the academic development of students. School administrators ask that individual counseling services fall within a 30- to 45-minute time frame. Therefore, counselors in school must work from a brief therapy model in order to quickly and efficiently respond to students' needs.

### **COUNSELING PROCESS FLOW**

Natalie and I elected to meet in the mornings, because this was the time when Natalie transitioned from home life to school life. She communicated that her home life impacted how she functioned during the remainder of the day. We did not preestablish a set number of counseling sessions. We agreed to meet once weekly until she felt the frequency needed to change.

## Session 1

In our first session, we reviewed the limits of confidentiality, completed an intake, began to build rapport, and gathered biopsychosocial information. During the first session, Natalie exhibited openness and receptivity to the counseling process. She voiced she felt ready for change in her life and her relational strife. Natalie shared her story and how she understood her family structure. She complained her mother seemed to always highlight the dysfunction in the family.

The root of Natalie's current conflict centered on her mother's relationship with her new boyfriend. In a recent argument with her mother, Natalie brought up issues she faced with her mother's boyfriend. Natalie's mother responded defensively, and the argument escalated. Natalie threatened to run away from home. She admitted that she used this threat often but never followed through. Natalie recalled that family conflicts occurred infrequently. She estimated they engaged in "big fights" once or twice a week. Occasionally, she threatened to run away from home, but shared that these were hollow threats. She would never actually run away because she was too close to graduating and going off to college.

As the session progressed, Natalie said, "My friends and sister are impressed at the tolerance level I have for my mom." She explained this by saying that it frustrated her to have a mother who wants to act like a child. Consequently, she felt the burden to act like an adult. She suspected her mother experienced low self-esteem and often made bad decisions. Natalie expressed her love for her mother but felt intolerant of her mother's behavior, reaching her current point of frustration. She often called her mom to task and expressed her concerns about their relationship. She acknowledged that conversations escalated to verbal and physical altercations. Natalie wanted her mom to understand her feelings. Instead, she said that her mother expressed that Natalie "was mouthing off" and acted disrespectfully toward her and her boyfriend. In the past, the conflicts between Natalie, her mother, and her mother's boyfriend became so intense that they resulted in professional filing reports to the department of family and protective services.

Currently, Natalie stated she felt safe and secure. Her family had a history of communication difficulties, which she hoped to change on her end. She was candid throughout the session; although she spoke of relationship conflicts, she also shared glimpses of when things were working well. In our first session, Natalie identified strengths as independence and caregiving, and described exceptions where her family functioned collaboratively. At the end of our first meeting, we planned

for Natalie to gather data and pay attention to times when her family got along.

## Session 2

During our second session, I infused multisensory counseling techniques. At the beginning of this session, I inquired to see how things had been better. Natalie said that things were okay; they had not been better or worse. Over the past few days, she spent time looking for times when everyone got along. She found that these times were few and far between. Natalie felt like she acted as the parent in the family all week long. She really wanted to threaten to run away this week but did not because it would have been counterproductive and would have led to a bigger fight. Natalie continued to feel frustrated by her mother. Her frustration centered on a comment that her mother made during a fight. She said her boyfriend meant more to her than her children.

In response, I felt that it was beneficial to introduce multisensory techniques into the session to help Natalie see the story from a different perspective. I introduced TA, specifically Berne's three ego states (parent, adult, and child). I asked Natalie what she believed the roles were of the parent, adult, and child. Natalie had a general understanding of the role each ego state represented. We discussed that people can potentially act as either the parent, adult, or child. When two people interact, a transactional response occurs. I found a white board and asked Natalie to draw three different circles on the left side of the board mirrored by three circles on the right. She did this and then labeled each circle as parent, adult, or child. I asked Natalie to make a statement that was typical in her interaction with her mom. Natalie said, "Mom, do you know what your plans are for the evening and what time you might be home?" I asked Natalie to indicate the ego this communicated. She felt she made an adult statement. Next, I asked her to give me an example of how her mom would respond. Natalie stated that her mother would say, "You are always getting in my business." Natalie identified that this statement could be typical of how a child responds. Natalie immediately shared that this model made sense. She shared the idea of adult-to-adult conversations appealed to her as a relational goal. She noted that everyone in her family responded from the child ego state. Natalie believed that she and her mother found ways to take things out of context rather than listening to each other, attending to the delivery and manner of communication, and observing the body language that accompanied the words.

The session quickly progressed. Natalie said things made sense in her mind and she started to see what could be done differently. I

decided to stick with TA and introduce Karpman's drama triangle. We used the white boards again. Natalie followed along, drawing a triangle and placing the names indicating the roles of the victim, rescuer, and persecutor in each corner of the triangle. Natalie drew lines between each label, representing that a person could move between roles. I asked Natalie to choose the two other people with whom she experienced conflict. Natalie identified her mother and her mother's boyfriend. I asked her to assign each person a role of the victim, persecutor, or rescuer. Natalie said her mother played the victim, she was the rescuer, and mother's boyfriend was the persecutor. Next, we discussed the interaction and dialogue that occurred within the drama triangle. Natalie related the drama triangle to her life. She reflected and shared that she may have multiple roles in the triangle. Natalie stated, "I don't want to be in this triangle, I don't want the drama, I want out."

Natalie verbalized that the hands on explanations helped her better understand that it was her mother's interaction style. She learned they both chose to interact counterproductively. She wanted to create a plan to move away from the drama and rebuild her relationship with her mother.

To focus on goal setting, I conceptualized Natalie's situation using WDEP since we had the "W" and the "D." At the end of the session, I asked Natalie to make another attempt at doing some homework and reporting back next session. I asked Natalie if she felt comfortable writing notes to her mom. Natalie said she wrote notes to her mom in the past. I asked her to consider using a journal to write notes to her mother again. Natalie liked the idea and thought her mom would like it too. She planned to ask her mother to participate by responding to questions or asking what questions she had. The goal of writing focused on beginning a dialogue and limiting the potential for verbal altercations.

### Session 3

Natalie missed our third session. She cancelled, but left a note. The note simply stated, "Can't make session today, things are going surprisingly well. See you next week."

### Session 4

Our fourth session, which ended up being our last session, seemed different. Natalie came in to the session more energetic than normal. I checked in to see how things had been different. She shared that things were going well. Her relationship with her mom improved. Natalie

said she got along with her mother's boyfriend and began focusing on her senior year.

I shared with Natalie that I noticed a tremendous change over the past 2 weeks. Natalie mentioned she worked really hard with her mother to build their relationship. She said journaling was exactly what she and her mother needed. Journal communication provided an opportunity for them to express thoughts and feelings. Natalie said her mother hesitated to participate at first. However, as she engaged in the activity, she opened up and expressed how much she cared for her children. Natalie used the journal and wrote about things she learned, including the drama triangle. She drew diagrams for her mom and explained what she had learned. Natalie told me that journaling allowed her to communicate her feelings. She told her mother that she was done with drama and wanted her mother to be done with it also. They used the journal to open up communication with each other, to build trust, and to start piecing their relationship back together. She felt that she had a new outlook and the confidence to do things differently in life.

## OUTCOME

From time to time, I see Natalie in the hallways on her campus. She regularly approaches me, says hello, and gives me a quick update on how things are going. Natalie will soon graduate from high school with good grades. Her teachers report that she engages in school and works diligently in class. Natalie maintains positive peer relationships at school. She also reports that her home life is going well. She continues to have a great relationship with her sister and her mother's boyfriend. She is proud of the fact that they learned to interact with each other. Natalie is most proud of her relationship with her mother. To this day, they continue to journal with each other and speak respectfully to one another regardless of the topic.

## REFERENCES

- American School Counselor Association (ASCA). (2014). *The ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Jacobs, E. (1992). *Creative counseling techniques: An illustrated guide*. Lutz, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.