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## **Adventure Based Counseling and School-Based Family Counseling: Incorporating experiential education into the schools**

*J. Scott Glass and Kylie P. Dotson-Blake, East Carolina University*

**Each year school counselors face the enormous task of counseling students. While students deal with the stresses of learning material for classes, they often are simultaneously dealing with stressors at home. Due to time restrictions and the desire to include family members in the counseling process, school counselors are in need of programs that can effectively work with students and their families. Experiential counseling techniques such as adventure based counseling use structured group activities that emphasize cooperation and increase adolescents' self-esteem and interpersonal skills, which are typical goals of school counseling programs. This article examines the usefulness of adventure based counseling programs, and their applicability to school settings, focusing particularly on its uses with regards to school-based family counseling.**

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to J. Scott Glass, Department of Counselor and Adult Education, East Carolina University, 223-B Ragsdale Hall, Greenville, North Carolina 27858 (e-mail: [glassj@ecu.edu](mailto:glassj@ecu.edu)).

Students are greatly affected by the various environments and contexts within which they live and engage (Brofenbrenner, Moen, & Garbarino, 1984). While young people are primarily influenced by their families, the influence of peers and schools increases during their development (Bloom, 1990). Adolescence is an important and unique developmental stage, as the individual continues to be strongly influenced by his or her parents, while also feeling the influence of peers to a greater degree than ever before. During this stage, a more obvious need to identify with peer groups and social networks emerges (Ryan, 2001). This unique stage of development, therefore, compels schools to actively seek programs that harness the power of group participation and identification while also including families in an effort to address the psychological, emotional and social needs that have a direct impact on the education of children (Evans & Carter, 1997).

School-based interventions aimed at strengthening family involvement provide a powerful venue for addressing the developmental and mental health needs of children and adolescents (Epstein, 2001). Unfortunately, many schools have struggled to develop the consistent communication structures with families necessary for effective school-based collaborative efforts (Rosenblum, DiCecco, Taylor & Adelman, 1995). In order to better prepare school counselors and school psychologists to work collaboratively with families, more emphasis has been placed on providing pre-service school counselors and school psychologists with the tools and methods necessary to engage with families (Bryan, 2005; Dotson-Blake, 2006; Fine & Carlson, 1992). Adventure based counseling is one such innovative method that can be integrated into a school-based family counseling (SBFC) program to actively engage families and adolescents in developmentally appropriate ways in collaborative work. In an effort to encourage the use this innovative tool, this article introduces adventure based counseling to readers and explores shared goals of adventure based counseling and school-based family counseling. After a discussion of the shared goals, the focus turns to the application of adventure based activities in school-based family counseling process. Potential challenges are discussed and implications of utilizing adventure based strategies are offered.

### **Adventure Based Counseling (or ABC)**

Participation in ABC programs has become increasingly popular in working with adolescents on life-skills issues such as communication, problem-solving and group cooperation (Moote & Wodarski, 1997). The term “challenge course” has been used to encompass a wide array of programs implemented with diverse populations. Though highly diverse, all of these programs share key components: all are based on experiential education approaches in a setting unfamiliar to participants and all are aimed primarily at increasing participants’ self-esteem, trust in others, communication processes and risk-taking behaviors (Harris, Mealy, Matthews, Lucas, & Moczygemba, 1993; Rohnke, 1989; Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988). Generally, participants in these experiences are removed from their normal social contexts to engage in a number of physical activities that are not often related directly to the group’s primary purpose, with the aim of attaining new goals, both as individuals and as a group (Martin & Davids, 1995).

When families enter a school setting for school-sited SBFC, they may feel far removed from their typical social contexts (Rosenthal & Sawyers, 1996). The hierarchy of the family may experience some disequilibrium as the children are more comfortable in the physical setting than are their parents. These contextual differences create the environment conducive to moving family members out of their comfort zones and into a setting that highlights the importance of working together, valuing each other and examining systemic processes within the family for the successful completion of activities.

There are several significant aspects to tasks used in adventure based approaches. They occur in a group setting using novel, noncompetitive activities and are designed so that success cannot be reached individually (Wick, Wick, & Peterson, 1997). The sequence of activities uses readily available equipment and typically progresses from easy exercises through tasks that are more physically and mentally challenging

(Alexander & Carlson, 1999). This requires the families to explore and improve their communication processes and abilities to work together in order to successfully complete the activities. After each activity is completed, it is crucial that the counselor take an appropriate amount of time to process the experience with the family members, so that the participants are able to relate the activity to problems they are currently facing or to draw metaphors from their experience (Harris et al., 1993). Adventure based approaches can easily be incorporated into small-group activities in counseling or into psychoeducational activities for teaching (Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997). These small group activities are congruent with the structure of family counseling and the psychoeducational activities for teaching would be appropriate for providing parent education for families focused on school success.

Though activities appropriate for adventure based counseling in a school-based counseling venue will be discussed in greater detail later, we have provided a brief description of two activities to begin to orient readers to the purpose of using activities, or challenges as they are termed in ABC, in the counseling process. Activities used might include having a group of participants (anywhere from 8 – 15 people) attempt to stand together on a small board (18" X 18") for a specified amount of time in order to promote teamwork and illuminate the group's process of communication or decision-making. Another example of an activity is to have the group juggle 5 to 7 bean bags at one time to explore the importance of each individual member's contribution to the group's success.

When utilized in the SBFC setting, the effort to complete simple, noncompetitive activities such as the ones described draws the family together with a common goal and allows the counselor to observe a family's problem-solving process. Additionally, by working with the family to process the experience of completing the activity, the counselor can foster the family's insight into how family dynamics and communication patterns might be impeding the family's and individual family members' success at home and school. Finally, the success upon completing the task allows the family and counselor an opportunity to celebrate the family's strengths. When these activities are used with a specific focus on strengthening family patterns and dynamics to improve school success, adventure based counseling can serve as a powerful tool for working with adolescents and families in school-based family counseling.

### **Shared Goals of ABC and SBFC**

Evans and Carter (1997) state that the principal component of the SBFCounselor's role includes facilitating a combined approach involving parents, teachers and various other school personnel to aid students in becoming more successful in the classroom. While the focus remains on improving student achievement, individual, family and group counseling interventions are often employed. ABC has many characteristics helpful for promoting positive family processes, adolescent development and effective classroom engagement, rendering it an appropriate tool for school-based family counseling involving adolescents.

### *The use of an unfamiliar setting and a novel activity promotes participation*

A shared goal of ABC and SBFC is the promotion of involvement in counseling through novel, innovative approaches. One major component of successful family counseling is encouraging family members to be involved and engaged in counseling. Many families still avoid family counseling due to stigma related to receiving counseling services (Gerrard, 2008). Additionally families referred for family counseling may be multi-stressed or distrustful of the school environment and staff due to previous negative encounters within academic environments (Finders & Lewis, 1994). The novelty and physical activity of ABC activities can encourage families to participate in counseling. Simply put, it doesn't look like counseling to be involved in physically active group tasks and because the activities are designed to be fun and engaging, family members are more likely to participate. Through the processing of the experience of participating in the activity, counselors can foster insight among family members and address particular family dynamics that are impeding the academic process of children and the successful functioning of the family. By inviting, without penalty for non-participation, families to participate in non-competitive activities and supporting participants as they move out of their comfort zones, a SBFCounselor can encourage families to join in and take part in counseling.

### *The importance of total involvement*

ABC uses noncompetitive tasks and depends upon group interaction for completion (Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997). These noncompetitive tasks are designed so that the group must work together to successfully complete an assigned task, rather than having individuals attempt to tackle challenges on their own. Because of this design, either the entire group is successful, or they fall short of success together. This process provides a way to bring family members together to learn from and support each other in the SBFC process. SBFC relies on the involvement of family members for successful outcomes in counseling and of equal importance to the process, seeks to promote the family's involvement in the education and school experiences of the children.

The aim of total involvement raises the issue of how many family members may be involved in the session. It is obvious that some children are too young to participate in the activities described below. It is important, however, for the counselor involved to take a comprehensive view of family systems, and include members from the extended family who are meaningfully connected with the presenting problem, or who have the ability to make a positive contribution to the family's successful functioning.

### *Promoting the ability of participants to receive support from others.*

ABC and SBFC share a focus on helping family members access networks of support to be successful. Working together to accomplish physically and mentally demanding tasks affords students and members of their families a chance to realize they are not alone in their struggles. When a family works together to achieve success, parents and children become more aware of their individual strengths and the importance of accepting help from others. By learning to seek help within the family, members are better prepared to seek help from networks of support external to the family (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000). Normalizing the difficult experiences facing families helps to

foster a sense of resiliency (Walsh, 2002) and can help families identify and connect with networks of support (Rotter & Boveja, 1999). Helping families connect with networks of support can increase a family's ability to identify and utilize systemic resources to aid in efforts to improve their children's academic outcomes, a key tenet of SBFC (Gerrard, 1996).

*The judicious use of activities to improve family processes*

Both SBFC and ABC focus on the promotion of certain processes which are essential for successful family dynamics, including cohesiveness and trust. One of the key factors in the development of a group is cohesiveness (Griffin & Pennscott, 1991). Evans and Jarvis (1980) suggest that group cohesion is an important variable for a variety of groups and different types of group processes. Methods for facilitating cohesiveness among adolescents and families in a school setting are critical for effective SBFC, and ABC can provide such activities. Cohesiveness and trust are key elements of strong family relationships (Walsh, 2003). Families that have a high, positive level of cohesiveness are more likely to promote and support the personal growth of individual family members, a process particularly important during adolescence (Laursen & Collins, 1994). Furthermore, a significant barrier to family-school collaboration may be the parents' distrust of the educational professional and setting due to previous negative personal experiences with education (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Gorman, 1998). By including activities focused on promoting trust and cohesiveness within the family and between the family and the counselor, relationships within the family and between the family and counselor will be strengthened. Challenges promote group cohesion and interpersonal skills, and consistently offer opportunities (after each activity) to process what has taken place, and relate this to issues currently being faced. This process of sharing will hopefully then make more meaningful self-disclosure possible as the family forms stronger bonds with each other and move into more challenging activities.

Finally, ABC is developmentally appropriate for SBFC involving adolescents. ABC, and in particular low-element challenge courses (LECC), involve group-oriented programs that help participants learn to share responsibility, develop cooperative problem-solving skills, and increase self-confidence and well-being. Experiential counseling techniques such as those included under the umbrella of ABC incorporate structured group activities that focus on cooperation and increase adolescents' interpersonal skills and self-esteem (Moote & Wodarski, 1997), which are common goals for family counseling with adolescents (Preto, 1999) and of school counseling programs (Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997). For family systems to be strong and effective, the individual growth of each member must be supported and fostered (Cowan & Cowan, 2003). Research has shown that the self-esteem of young people is improved when group interventions are activity oriented (Page & Chandler, 1994). In light of these assertions, ABC can serve as a modality to help families strengthen both their internal family relationships and their efforts to positively support individual members' relationships with social networks external to the family system through focused, intentional group-oriented programs.

### **The application of ABC within the SBFC process**

Many of the classroom and small-group skills taught as part of a developmental comprehensive counseling program are aspects of life-skill programs and are inherent to adventure based approaches (Moote & Wodarski, 1997). While research available regarding ABC is limited (Braverman, Brenner, Fretz, & Desmond, 1990; Johnson, 1992), the impact of structured activities on group development has received some attention in the research literature (Stockton, Rohde, & Haughey, 1992). Research has shown that structured group experiences, as used in ABC, result in greater self-disclosure (Crews & Melnick, 1976), more behaviors relevant to effective counseling (Lee & Bednar, 1977), and higher perceptions of cohesiveness (Bednar & Battersby, 1976; Glass & Benshoff, 2002). It is important that specific goals for each participant be established before beginning a program. In addition to individual goals, group goals should be established by the participants, and the parameters of acceptable behavior clearly defined (Herbert, 1996).

#### *Setting up the activity*

ABC consists of a series of exercises, called elements. Some elements focus on leadership abilities and others focus on communication skills; however, all emphasize group cohesion. The elements used in this type of program are tailored for use with groups rather than individuals. The group exercises used in the program typically require participants to share responsibility and solve problems as a team (Harris et al., 1993). Successful solutions to these problems depend upon the extent to which group members cooperate, trust, and communicate with one another. In addition, these group exercises are designed to teach lessons to the participants that they can then directly relate back to their family processes and dynamics. A counselor facilitating an ABC activity within the wider process of SBFC initiates this by framing or staging the element for family members. An element is staged after the leader establishes a scenario and describes the task to the family.

#### *Processing the Experience*

After the task is completed, successfully or not, the leader takes time to process what has taken place. This processing provides an opportunity for family members to discuss in detail what they have experienced, to relate the activities to their everyday lives, and to apply meaning to what has occurred within the context of adventure based counseling. Since the goals of ABC activities are to improve self-esteem among participants and promote group cohesion and interpersonal skills, participants are taught ways to facilitate growth toward these goals regardless of the outcome of the challenges. Using the PARS (Processing: Activity, Relationships, and Self) model (Glass & Benshoff, 1999) after each activity, participants learn how to focus more on promoting the positive aspects of the family and on illuminating the strengths of members rather than focusing on task completion. Without qualified leadership in the processing component, an adventure-based experience provides fun for its group member but offers little or no therapeutic or educational value (Harris et al., 1993). Beginning group facilitators often make the mistake of emphasizing the activities themselves rather than the processing stage. Processing of activities becomes the "bridge" from exercise to insight. Effective processing with families involves helping members process the thoughts, feelings, and

reactions associated with a particular exercise in the context of the experience shared by all family members. The learning that is intended may be lost without proper leadership, and would, therefore, limit the impact of the exercises.

### **Facilitating ABC activities**

While ABC was originally took the form of programs in wilderness settings, adaptations can be made to make the activities and benefits applicable to a variety of settings and topics. For example, SBFCounselors could facilitate family groups that focus on a number of issues including peer relationships, leadership training, issues at home, fostering self-esteem, developing social skills, and improving communication patterns. Counselors who work with a family in a school setting can adapt ABC activities to be implemented inside as well as outdoors if outside space is available.

As an illustration of the use of ABC activities within a SBFC framework, several adventure based counseling activities along with a brief description of each are outlined below. In addition, processing questions are included to demonstrate how leaders may facilitate discussion among family members and foster insight into family dynamics and positive change. In each of the ABC activities described, problem-solving skills and exploration of family dynamics and processes are involved. These activities (Rohnke, 1984) are presented sequentially, with each activity and the processing of the activity comprising a single-group session.

#### *Moon Ball*

This is an appropriate activity for an initial SBFC session because it is fun, relaxing, enjoyable, and nonthreatening. These characteristics are designed to encourage family members to be actively engaged in family counseling. Additionally, the activity is focused on helping all family members understand that each individual member must be involved and focused for the family to be successful, and for both individual members and the family to achieve their goals. By setting the stage for total involvement and encouraging family members' support of each other as they complete this task, the counselor begins the process of building rapport and fostering cohesiveness within the family. To complete the activity, family members are asked to keep the moon ball (an inflated beach ball) in the air for as long as possible. The rules require that the same person may not hit the ball twice in a row, and the entire group must count out loud each time the ball is hit (e.g., "One! Two! Three! ..."). The family restarts the counting over at zero if someone hits the ball twice in a row, or if the ball makes contact with the ground. After practicing for a few minutes, the family chooses a goal that they can reach in three attempts (i.e., number of hits). They discuss strategies and when they are ready, they attempt to reach their goal.

The purpose of this activity is to allow family members to work together to establish and reach shared goals. If the counselor notices that the family is having trouble reaching its goals, or working together, it is appropriate then to stop the activity, have them sit down close to one another (if physical proximity is appropriate for the family at this point in the counseling relationship), and discuss possible reasons for the problems. Questions that may be used to help the family process problems and create effective

solutions include “How is this activity working for your family?” and “What can be done to improve your family’s success in completing this activity?” To help the family utilize the activity for reflection on family process concerns and issues, the counselor might ask the participants, “When you have to decide how to complete a challenging task, like we did with the Moon Ball activity, who usually takes the lead in your family? How do you usually decide when to make changes if it looks like your strategy isn’t working?” The counselor should also seek to ask questions that encourage the family to consider how the answers to the previous questions are relevant to the presenting issue that brought the family to counseling in the first place.

### *Group Juggling*

This activity requires more individual risk and has the potential for more personal disappointment. For this reason, it is an activity best used somewhat later in the counseling process after the counselor has had an opportunity to begin to build rapport with the family and the family has begun to understand the process of counseling. For this activity, the family stands in a circle and tosses beanbags to each other. The family sets a pattern for throwing the bean bags and follows that same pattern throughout the activity. The rules are (a) the person throwing the bean bag must call out the person's name he or she is throwing to, and (b) the toss must be made underhanded. The family then tries to juggle the bean bags for thirty seconds without dropping any of the bags. More bags can be added to increase the complexity of the activity.

This activity strengthens the notion of setting goals as well as emphasizes the importance of listening to each other. In addition, the importance of each family member’s individual contribution is discussed, because if one member chooses not to participate, the group juggling experience will not be successful. Here the SBFCounselor can emphasize the need to listen to one another, and the importance of each member to the family. In group discussions, whether during the activity or at the conclusion, it is important to stress how each member plays an important role in the process. Questions should be used during this session to help the group realize the impact that each individual can have on the group as a whole. Examples of such questions are “What would happen if you decided not to catch or throw your bean bags?”, and “What can you as individuals do to help the group succeed?” In order to move the processing from a focus on the activity into a focus on relationships and the self (following the PARS model), the SBFCounselor might ask the adolescent, “Does your success in school depend on you and your personal efforts alone?” Then to the entire group of family members and adolescent, the counselor might ask, “How do others in the family help the members who are students succeed academically? What happens if any one person in the student’s family network of support drops the beanbag?”

To transfer the learning from this activity to the family’s understanding of their family dynamics and process, the counselor might ask the family to articulate a goal for family counseling. Then the counselor asks, “Think about the moon ball activity you just did and how each member’s involvement was critical for your success in reaching your goal. How might that be similar to your work in family counseling?” The counselor



would then prompt the family to consider how each member will be important in reaching the goal the family set for counseling.

### *TP Shuffle*

This is an appropriate subsequent activity because it continues the process of challenging participants to deal with tougher situations and issues. This activity should be used cautiously with families that have struggled with issues of physical or sexual abuse, as it may involve family members touching each other. For the activity, the family members stand shoulder to shoulder in a random order on a 5-8 foot piece of tape stuck to the floor. The counselor then asks the family to line up in order of their birthdays or their height. To get in order, the group must follow these directions: (a) no one in the group is allowed to touch the ground unless touching the tape, doing so would cause the group to start over in their original order; (b) group members are allowed and encouraged to touch and hold onto one another; and (c) when in order, they must notify the group leader. The challenge is completed when the group is correctly in order. This activity introduces the concept of looking out for other people and illuminates the issue of personal space.

Although the tape is on the floor, it is possible for participants to lose their balance and fall to the ground. Therefore, group members are encouraged to hold on to one another and protect other members from possible injury and embarrassment. The need to touch one another to be successful in the challenge requires the participants to deal with sharing their personal space. Though this element does not direct family members to touch one another, successful completion usually requires it. In addition, this activity provides an appropriate forum to discuss the issue of encouragement versus criticism. Participants can be helped to offer encouragement to other group members rather than saying negative statements (e.g., "Why did you fall?"). This increases members' feelings of belonging and can cause group members to try to succeed in an effort to please the other group members. Questions should be used during this session to help members discuss the effectiveness of the family's process of problem solving and help the participants illuminate areas in need of improvement. Such questions would be: "How efficient are you as a family at solving problems?" and "How well is the family able to listen to one another and share ideas?" For the SBFCounselor, this activity provides an opportunity to explore the concepts of personal comfort in challenging situations and asking for help if one needs it. Where members of the extended family system are included in this activity, the group should be encouraged to reflect on how it feels to work with people they know less well to overcome challenges. This last process and exploration can begin with a focus on the activity and then move into a discussion of how it feels to parents for try to seek help when their children are struggling academically.

### *Shipwreck*

This activity was chosen last due to the level of risk involved. A small platform or mat is placed on the ground. The task is to get as many family members as possible on a platform at one time and for them to remain for at least 5 seconds. The participants must: (a) have all of their feet off the ground, with each person having at least one foot on the platform; and (b) not stand on each other's shoulders or lift people off the ground. When the family begins to fall off the board, participants should let go of each other so

they do not pull the group down on top of them. Issues of safety and protecting one another become important with this exercise. Again, personal space is invaded and the exercise requires members to be close to one another in order to be successful. If the counselor believes that the family is not ready for touching and close personal contact, this activity should not be used. As with the previous activities, it is important for the counselor to help facilitate the process. For example, if family members begin to argue with each other, the counselor monitors the situation and after an appropriate amount of time leads the family in discussing what has taken place. It is important not to rescue family members too quickly in order to give them ample time to try to solve problems on their own. The goal would be for the family to learn strategies to assist their problem solving efforts outside of counseling. The following are questions used to help members process the experience afterwards and apply what they have learned to their daily lives: "What skills did you use with each other that will help with other people in your daily environments?" Another related question is "What skills did you use to complete this activity that would be helpful to use when your family faces a tough issue in the home?" The counselor can encourage families to extend the learning from this activity into changes in family routines that need improvement by asking, "What will you do differently as individuals in your daily routines that will be a result of what you have learned here?" and "As parents and leaders of the family, what might you change in your daily routines because of what you learned here?"

In terms of applying family learning to academic processes, the SBFCounselor has a particularly powerful opportunity when utilizing this activity to explore self-discipline, leadership, motivation, and collaboration. Each of these characteristics can be processed within the bounds of the activity and applied to the family processes and academic outcomes of the adolescents involved. For example, the counselor can introduce specific ways the participants encouraged each other and explore how this encouragement can be transferred to the academic setting and to the family's effort to tackle problems in their home and interactions. Also, the counselor can discuss the presentation of leadership that emerges from the activity and explore how this leadership process may mirror or complement the leadership processes necessary for positive academic achievement.

### *Wrap-up*

It is critical in ABC for group leaders to help participants process what they have experienced. Corey (2000) suggests that one of the most important group leadership skills is "assisting group members in transferring what they have learned in the group to their outside environments" (p. 128). As with any counseling situation, members need to be given adequate time to discuss what has taken place. In a wrap-up session, it is important that members are allowed to examine their experience. Family members are challenged and helped to apply to their relationships and activities outside the group what they have learned through the experience in the group. Family counseling requires extended time and focus on systemic patterns that are often firmly entrenched and supported by dysfunctional processes. These processes and observed family structures can be addressed throughout the adventure-based sessions presented here. Using adventure-based sessions and activities allows the counselor to enhance the process of rapport

building and joining with families and most importantly encourages family members to become invested and involved in counseling since the adventure-based activities are non-threatening and fun!

In the wrap-up session, group leaders use the PARS Model (Glass & Benshoff, 1999) to facilitate discussion amongst the participants in order to help them draw personal meaning from the ABC experience. The goal is for family members to recognize how the ABC program can directly relate to their family life outside of the counseling sessions. Questions are asked such as, “What have we learned about working with each other in these ABC activities that will help us in other situations?,” “What have we learned about ourselves that may affect how we handle other situations with our family in the future?,” and, “What will you do differently as individuals back in your daily routines that will be a result of what you have learned here?” These questions are designed to have participants discuss what they gained from the ABC experience. For many family members, difficulty experienced on a particular challenge translates directly into their daily lives.

For example, one participant who was consistently in trouble at school for fighting responded that he better understood how to deal with conflict. On the challenges when this particular family was having difficulty completing a task, family members discussed how to best approach the problem, developed a goal and then implemented a new plan of action. This student suggested that when faced with conflict he would be best served by stepping back from the situation and evaluating more beneficial ways of dealing with the problem. Family members are asked to identify strengths of the family as well as strengths of individuals. When used within a SBFC process, families should be encouraged to reflect on the particular strengths of their family as demonstrated in ABC sessions, and the counselor should strive to highlight the importance of each family’s resiliency for the promotion of academic success of their children. The emphasis is placed on what has been learned, not on the completion of the activities, and the goal is for each participant and family to leave the experience, given systematic time and attention, being able to relate the activities and discussions to their own lives and family processes as addressed within the wider SBFC process.

### **Discussion**

ABC is a useful method for SBFCounselors to incorporate in their work with families. Participation in ABC activities is an effective way for families and family members to build self-esteem, learn group cohesion, develop trust within the family system, learn problem-solving techniques, strengthen appropriate and effective leadership, and develop effective communication skills. Furthermore, the development and implementation of adventure based counseling can be done inexpensively and within the framework of school-based family counseling.

When facilitating ABC activities with families, the SBFCounselor can emphasize or introduce concepts that are deemed important for that particular family, including exploring patterns of communication, supporting the family hierarchy and examining family dynamics, just to name a few. After determining the specific needs of a family,

the counselor could initiate dialogue that would focus on specific topics that pertain to the ABC activity. For example, the counselor might ask a question that focuses the family on issues of self-esteem (e.g., "What strengths do you feel you brought to the family during this challenge?"). Or the counselor might ask individual family members to discuss issues regarding problem-solving skills within their family (e.g., "What have you learned from this session about other ways you could deal with this particular challenge when it arises at home?" or "Can you think of different ways we could have approached the challenge that would have brought us to the same successful conclusion?" or "Are there times at home when you have tried to find a different way of approaching challenges?").

Another appealing aspect of ABC is that a number of the activities can be adapted to the family counseling setting at a low cost. Although ABC is typically located in outdoor settings, a large number of these activities can be modified to fit the confines of a school or other indoor setting. For instance, instead of using wood to build a platform that would take up a large amount of room (for the Shipwreck activity described earlier), counselors can use supplies such as tape on the floor, that will serve the same purpose but require less money and less space. Instead of using the block of wood, the tape can be placed on the floor with the same dimensions. Another example could be using tape again, or smaller pieces of wood, when implementing the TP Shuffle challenge (also discussed earlier). This makes the challenge appropriate for indoors and keeps the school from having to purchase building materials or have storage areas to keep the challenges when not in use. Imagination and creativity can go a long way in making additional challenges available to students and their families.

Finally, and probably most importantly, ABC activities are designed to be fun, engaging and non-threatening for the participants. Consequently, using such activities in a SBFC process can help encourage family members to actively participate in the counseling process. Using the processing of activities as a jump-off point for starting more intense discussions of structure, dynamics and family functioning provides a way to promote the investment and involvement of family members in more intense family counseling sessions. SBFCounselors can benefit from using activities that introduce themselves to children and parents as someone who encourages them to have fun while also helping them deal with some difficult issues.

Although ABC can be adapted to a variety of situations, and has been demonstrated to be useful for SBFCounselors, care should be taken not to misinterpret its apparent ease of use to mean that no training is required. It is important that SBFCounselors spend adequate time becoming familiar with ABC concepts and exercises used, so that participants can maximize their opportunities to learn. At the same time, ABC practitioners require systematic training in understanding and working with family systems. It is through processing that family members are able to attribute meaning to the exercises and understand how the lessons learned apply to their family dynamics and processes. Without effective processing the individual family member's ability to transfer meaning from sessions to his or her personal life may be lost. Clearly, ABC activities can be viewed as contributing to the promotion of effective family experiences. However, this article also demonstrates that the relationship between ABC and SBFC is a tentative

one at present, and it is therefore crucial that the issues raised above serve as a springboard for a more systematic exploration of how this relationship is most appropriately applied, and for a critical evaluation of its effectiveness.

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