Implementing School-Based Family Counseling: Strategies, activities, and process considerations

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This article builds on an earlier description of a procedural model for assessment and treatment in School-Based Family Counseling (Carter and Evans, 2004). The model was first discussed in a paper by Evans and Carter (1997) and involves identification of critical issues within the school and family systems that affect the academic, personal and social development of children. These issues are then addressed through prevention and postvention activities with school staff, parents and children. Prevention activities focus on addressing critical issues through large group meetings with teachers, staff, parents and students. Postvention activities typically focus on addressing individual students' developmental and behavioral issues by first attempting to maximize collaboration between the school and family systems that most influence a child's life. A structured interview format is presented that provides a procedure for assessing the involvement and viewpoints of teachers, parents, and students. This then leads to concrete interventions to be implemented within both the school and family systems. A critical component of this model is a decision-making process that helps prioritize interventions for school counselors or school psychologists to implement depending on the assessment of the degree of parental and teacher involvement. A descriptive analysis of the counseling strategies is presented, with suggestions for implementation across varied settings. The specific activities and forms to conduct these interventions are appended.

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Children are most affected by two major systems in their lives: their family and their school. As children become adolescents, their peer group becomes more influential, but much of their daily life and many of their social interactions occur at the school site. Accordingly, school support

personnel (i.e., school counselors and school psychologists) are in a position to provide significant support and direction to families and schools in order to maximize the academic, personal, and social development of children. The vast majority of professionals currently in these positions are already overburdened with responsibilities other than the counseling and facilitation services described in this paper, and often lack the requisite skill sets needed for these activities.

Because of this, we have developed a school-based family counseling (SBFC) training model that has been described in detail previously (Carter & Evans, 1995; Evans & Carter, 1997). Briefly, this model involves implementation of prevention activities to address macro-level issues that impact most school children and postvention activities that address the unique difficulties experienced by high-risk students and their families. Prevention activities in this model are typically provided in a large group format whereas postvention activities are conducted through counseling sessions with specific students and their families. In the United States, school counselors, school psychologists, or marriage and family therapists are often in the best position to implement this SBFC model. In other countries, professionals with training and experience in counseling who work with schools or families to support the development of children also may implement the procedures described in this paper. We also recognize that educational and social service paradigms and structures are quite diverse across the world and can affect the specific manner in which the SBFC concepts advocated here are applied. While true, there is growing international acknowledgement of the need to integrate social and educational services to address barriers to student achievement (Huddart, 2007; Adelman & Taylor, 1999). In this paper, we will refer to such a professional as a "School-Based Family Counselor" (SBFC) or, at times, "counselor". This person might already serve as one of the professionals mentioned above, but should have the additional training and allocation of time necessary to fulfill the SBFC role.

To implement this model, the counselor needs to focus efforts on those areas that most enhance school success for children. In addition to data such as the number and type of referrals of individual students for intervention, information obtained from assessments of teachers, administrators, parents, and students can be critical to helping identify the most important issues facing schools and their surrounding communities. These issues then can be addressed through prevention and postvention activities with school staff, parents, students and other community members. Prevention activities focus on addressing critical issues through large group meetings with teachers, staff, parents and students. Postvention activities usually address individual students' problems in development and behavior by first attempting to maximize collaboration between the members of the school and family systems that are most likely to influence the child's development. Developing this sense of collaboration requires the SBFC to help both teachers and parents understand their shared goals and common strategies in helping children to learn.

The first critical process is to assist teachers and parents to overcome any negative feelings they may have about the child, themselves or the situation. This requires a process of turning a new page in the child's life that is blank and unwritten, and fostering a sense that a new, more successful page can be written by the parent, teacher, and child; an approach borrowed from narrative therapy perspectives (Payne, 2006; White & Epstein, 1990). Before writing this new page, however, it is critical to understand recent and past history, but without allowing this

information to bias the process of developing a fresh course to current issues. This is particularly challenging when students have long histories of social and educational problems and/or suffer from labeling processes that tend to become 'self-fulfilling prophecies' over time. Such "bad seed" conceptualizations can become common in many family systems (O'Reilley, 2007) and school settings (McCormick, 2003) and the resultant negativity and pessimism is difficult to contain. This is where the SBFC, however, can serve as an agent of change. An initial strategy can be to point out the importance of the self-fulfilling process that occurs with children. Here, the counselor can confirm that if parents and teachers feel pessimistic about a child's possibilities, the child is more likely to prove them right. The idea is to help parents and teachers to suspend their pessimism, not erase it. This suspension may then result in the other party feeling more optimistic about possible progress.

As parents and teachers experience the benefits of collaboration (mutual understanding, support, catharsis), openness to joint problem solving often occurs. This requires, however, that the counselor be optimistic and effective in helping parents and teachers to communicate more clearly about how the child is doing in each environment. This collaboration may reduce the sense of isolation that parents and teachers often feel. The primary task of the counselor is to create an environment where the parent and teacher can feel comfortable to risk trying to see the situation differently and to develop new ways of working with the child. Fostering this collaboration and sense of teamwork may be the most important aspect of the job.

Prevention Activities
Prevention activities often focus on addressing emerging critical issues that impact the entire school and surrounding community, as well as individual students and their families. Among K-12 students, these issues are frequently ecological in nature in that they concern factors that affect the general atmosphere of the schools and homes in which children and youth learn (Bloom, 1990; Bronfenbrenner, Moen & Garbarino, 1984, Elias, Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007). Problems may include high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, or early pregnancy, or developmental issues such as transitions from middle school to high school or from home to elementary school (Elias et al., 2007). These situations frequently involve a convergence of factors within both school and family systems. To address these ecological factors efficiently, we have found that it is best to implement prevention activities in a large group format that might include school staff, parents, students and other community members. These group activities are typically conducted at the school site or a nearby community center where as many interested persons as possible have the opportunity to become involved. These are more effective when they are conducted in an interactive format that maximizes audience participation rather than an educational lecture. In addition, these group meetings are more efficient if they include a "self-diagnostic" component that helps the audience to assess the extent to which they might benefit from more individualized assistance. This component often results in better use of available services because the prospective client (e.g., teacher, parent, or student) understands how the service fits into the larger picture of helping children to succeed.

An initial step in this group process is the prioritization of the most important issues that need to be addressed. In our experience, it has been most effective for the SBFC to conduct a brief survey that accesses the views of the school staff, students and parent groups regarding critical needs, assets, and issues. While there may be several standardized formats and

instruments available, this survey should be brief and easy to complete with an emphasis on learning about strengths, challenges, and priority issues that are specific to the school's mission of maximizing the development of children. We have found a quick way to obtain this information is to use a simple, three question assessment about the respondent's view of the greatest strengths of the school, the most important challenges, and any barriers to change. These questions should be framed in terms of enhancing student achievement, classroom behavior or social functioning. This data can help determine the most critical issues to be addressed and lead to decisions on who needs to be involved in prevention activities. Following is an example of a multidimensional strategy that incorporates the school and family systems in SBFC prevention activities.

Prevention Activities Involving the School and Family Systems

One of the issues that currently impact many schools in California and other parts of the United States is the increased number of inexperienced teachers working within the schools. Due to current shortages of qualified teachers, many school districts must resort to the hiring of emergency credential teachers with little or no experience in teaching (Murnane & Steele, 2007). In some urban public schools, these emergency credential teachers constitute over half of the faculty (Hollister, 2001; Murnane & Steele, 2007). At the same time, differing cultural, parenting, and discipline norms that may include physical discipline to get children to pay attention and follow directions at home, often result in parents and students feeling confused about the expectations urban schools place on them. When such children enter school, some of them have great difficulty behaving appropriately in class or resolving peer conflicts (Eamon & Altshuler, 2004; Michaels, Pianta & Reeve, 1993). Many schools have thus experienced a considerable increase in referrals of young students for discipline problems related to classroom behaviors such as not paying attention and not following directions. When this occurs, teachers and parents have a tendency to blame each other for these problems. In order to address these problems efficiently, activities need to be focused on assisting both teachers and parents to learn effective ways of improving children's attending and compliant behaviors in both home and school environments. Such activities are most effective when they also include a process that promotes a consistent partnership between teachers and parents to enhance student development.

Teacher Training

To improve the skills of emergency credential teachers in addressing disruptive student behaviors, it was necessary at several pilot schools to provide specific training in both behavior management and in how to effectively partner with parents. The idea was to provide teachers with an understanding of effective processes and strategies that school staff might use to address these issues. If a counselor or psychologist (or other SBFC personnel) provided this training, we found that the teacher often better understood what was occurring and would feel more involved in the process. If these school support personnel were unavailable, then the teacher might be able to implement the strategies individually with additional assistance. Initially, training was provided only to the emergency credential teachers. It was readily apparent, however, that there were veteran teachers who could also benefit from training in these areas. In our experience, most training of teachers within schools focuses on curricular and administrative issues, with less emphasis on managing challenging student behaviors and even less attention spent on how to

work effectively with parents. These latter issues were very important to the teachers that we worked with, but they reported receiving very little specific training in these areas. Consequently, it is usually best to include as many teachers as possible in these training experiences. In addition to meeting the needs of emergency credential teachers, the inclusion of all teachers allowed us to use the considerable expertise of the best teachers in the school. This resulted in a more collaborative experience for both teachers and school support staff. Following is a description of these interventions (see Appendix A for specific handouts associated with these activities).

A major component of this training was to first solicit input from teachers as to which specific challenges they were experiencing regarding these issues. These challenges were written down on large poster boards for the entire group to see. Participants then were given three colored dot stickers that they could attach to the three top challenges among the list. In this way, the three most common challenges were identified and then explored through a group problem-solving process. Part of this process was to access and validate the group's existing expertise in addressing the challenges. Facilitating this group problem-solving process was critical to expanding the school's awareness of their own "hidden" resources. Another important component of these trainings was helping the teachers to self-diagnose the extent to which they might benefit from more individualized assistance in addressing these challenges.

The first interactive session focused on providing teachers with positive strategies for managing challenging behaviors in the classroom. Teachers were asked to think of a child with whom they had experienced challenges and then to describe the problematic behavior. The top two behaviors typically identified were not paying attention to the teacher and disruptive behaviors such as calling out answers or talking while the teacher was talking. The teachers were first assisted in reframing their relationship with the student more positively, then to explore the possible reasons and emotional context underlying the student's behaviors. The teachers then were assisted to identify positive strategies (see Appendix A for examples) that would address these factors more constructively. They then determined whether these strategies should be taught to all students or only to the identified student. Finally, the teachers were provided with specific strategies to increase appropriate behavior while not disrupting their teaching.

The second interactive session assisted teachers in learning how to develop more effective partnerships with parents in order to improve student learning. Studies clearly show that the attitude and actions of the family greatly impact a child's success in school (Cassidy & LaDuca, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Mullis & Edwards, 2001; Teachman, Day & Carver, 1995). Many parents, however, are not aware of the importance of this connection and don't know what to do or how to be a positive partner in their child's education. In order to build this partnership, teachers were assisted in focusing on exploring what might be going on at home and understanding the situation versus engaging in the "parent-bashing" that frequently occurs when teachers are frustrated in their attempts to involve parents. Within the group process described above, teachers were taught specific strategies to create a more collaborative relationship with parents. These included gaining a better understanding of parental strengths and challenges, and working with the parent to identify the strengths and challenges of the student. The goal of this discussion is to mutually develop specific strategies to address challenging student behaviors across both home and school environments.

Prevention Activities Involving the Family System

In addition to the above activities that are primarily focused on the school system, other prevention activities were used to improve the family's skills to address the above problems and to help their children in school. Our own experience and relevant research indicate that most parents want their children to be successful in school, but they may not be aware of what specifically they can do to adequately prepare them (Drummond & Stipek, 2004). Reaching out to parents of young children can provide an opportunity to help them teach their children the behavioral skills necessary for a smooth transition to the more structured environment of school. Following is a description of prevention activities we have used with parents to help their young children to be successful in elementary school (Evans & Carter, 1997).

In cooperation with school administrators and community organizations, families with preschool and/or early school-aged children were asked to attend an evening meeting at the school to discuss ways to help their child to be more successful in school. A variety of strategies were used to increase parent attendance at these meetings, particularly for those parents of "at-risk" children who were typically less involved in their children's education. We collaborated with social service agencies to refer parents from at-risk families, and enlisted the aid of teachers and administrators to identify, contact, and encourage those parents whose children were already experiencing difficulties in school. Importantly, we worked with existing parent groups within the school who were helpful in promoting this training and improving parental attendance (e.g., Parent-Teacher Associations).

At the outset of the meeting, we emphasized to the parents that this was an interactive group process where we all hoped to learn from each other. The initial focus was on accessing the parents' viewpoints of what skills their children needed to be successful in the structured school environment. It was critical to help parents to share their views first before sharing our perspective. This avoided the possibility of "lecturing" to the parents and communicated the school's respect and real interest in family involvement. One of the counseling skills critical to this process was the ability to reflect these views in such a way that they could be incorporated into the student skills that we hoped to impart to the parents. These skills could best be summarized as relating to the "Three Rules of Kindergarten", which are considered to be: follow directions, keep hands and feet to yourself, and respect others.

This information was then written down on large poster paper for the group to see. We then discussed specific strategies for how parents could teach these skills at home, with an emphasis on developmentally appropriate expectations. Next, we discussed the most common challenges to implementing these practices and what to do to overcome these challenges. Again, an important part of this process was to access and validate the group's existing expertise. Facilitating this group problem-solving process was critical to expanding the parents' awareness of their own "hidden" resources. Another important component of this meeting was to summarize what was learned and to provide handouts that could be referred to when parents wanted to implement these strategies in the home environment.

This meeting was used as an opportunity to present basic parenting concepts such as building child self-esteem, nonphysical discipline, and parental teaming and conflict resolution. In this interactive setting, some parents were exposed to new concepts and methods of parenting and had the opportunity to listen to other parents share their own successes and challenges. This also enabled them to begin to develop networks with other parents for support. Parents also were

helped to assess their own family situation to determine when more intensive intervention is needed, and community and school resources were identified that could help meet these needs. We found that when individual family sessions were required, they were more efficient because basic parenting principles had already been introduced in the large group meeting. This sometimes allowed the school support staff to focus on addressing the unique needs of each family in a more cost-effective manner. In addition to helping families become more involved in their children's education, the procedures described above provided an important opportunity for community members to be involved in meetings that identify and address educational issues.

Prevention Activities Involving Students

Whereas the example described above focuses on elementary school children, this interactive group model also can be used with adolescents. As children get older, peers and the community become more influential in educational success, although the family continues to have considerable influence on the development of the adolescent (Henry, 2000). Therefore, peers and the community need to be included in strategies that address adolescent school-based difficulties. For example, although parents were not directly involved, we have use the following process in middle and high schools to facilitate group meetings with teens on topics such as school climate, diversity issues, and conflict resolution. The following is a description of a prevention activity used to address transition issues with large groups of middle school children.

At an urban public middle school, we were asked by the school psychologist to provide an intervention for those eighth graders that had been identified as being at high-risk for dropping out when they reached high school. Historical data from the high school where most of these children would attend revealed that students dropped out during ninth grade. The school psychologist wanted us to meet with these "at-risk" eighth graders to address their needs. She also advised us that these students were very disruptive when she had previously attempted to meet with them.

Clearly, the transition to high school is difficult for most children and there are many students who drop out that were not considered to be at-risk by their middle school staff (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). In order to meet the needs of these children and those already identified as "high-risk", we decided to provide an intervention for all of the eighth grade students. We met with all students in their respective Social Studies classes and provided the same experience for each class. We again utilized an interactive approach rather than lecturing to the students and this appeared to minimize disruptions and inattention. We began by asking the students to tell us what they thought the differences would be between eighth and ninth grade. The students were quite realistic in many of their comments and we were able to compliment them on their understanding of these realities. We then organized their discussion into advantages and challenges. Next, we presented the data about the number of students who dropped out of school during ninth grade and asked them what they thought were the biggest reasons why this occurred. We then identified protective factors and discussed related skills that might compensate for these difficulties. This led to a deeper conversation about other high-risk behaviors associated with high school (e.g., substance abuse, negative peer influence) and ways of decreasing their vulnerability to these behaviors. During this interactive discussion, we were able to address most of the material that would have been presented to a "high-risk" group, but

the experience seemed to be much more productive and enjoyable for both students and school support staff.

This experience led to the development of further meetings with parents to assist them in reducing their adolescent's vulnerability to high-risk behaviors. The goal of this important prevention activity was to help parents to better understand developmental aspects of adolescence and to learn how to build a strong positive connection with their child before adolescence. This connection enables parents to have a positive influence on their child's decision-making, which serves as a primary protective factor in reducing vulnerability to high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse and early pregnancy during adolescence. Further information about this prevention activity can be found in Appendix B.

Additional Prevention Activities to Improve the Organizational Climate of the School

As a result of the school wide assessments previously discussed, we found that many schools had a negative organizational climate that inhibited optimal functioning. This negative atmosphere often is caused by poor communication between school staff, which leads to a lack of cooperation in addressing student issues, unfamiliarity with each other, and the development of gossip that adversely affects working relationships. The following intervention was conducted during a school-wide in-service training to improve the organizational climate at a local urban public elementary and middle school in Los Angeles. A major component is providing an opportunity for experiential learning that also could be used by teachers to build a "community of learners" in their own classrooms. The direct application of this learning to the teachers' classroom appeared to be an important factor in their willingness to fully participate in these in-service activities.

The following interventions were conducted within 30-minute time-slots during a full day in-service training where all teachers and school staff were present (about 100 persons). This was implemented in an urban kindergarten through eighth grade public school in an impoverished area of East Los Angeles. The SBFC was asked by school administrators to begin the day of in-service with an "ice-breaking" activity that might improve the ability of the group to work together throughout the day. The counselor used an activity from the TRIBES curriculum known to most of the staff, although few were familiar with the specific activity (Gibbs, 2001).

One-minute autobiographies. In order to separate any pre-existing cliques, all of the staff (including administrators and office and plant personnel) was organized into ten random groups that were different from their typical seating patterns. They were told that upon hearing the prompt from the counselor, one person would have one minute to say anything that they wanted about themselves and their lives without being interrupted. When prompted again by the SBFC, they would stop immediately and then the person on their right would begin to do the same. This would continue until everyone in the group had had a chance to talk. After completion of the exercise, they returned to their seats and the SBFC facilitated a discussion about what they had learned. The most common comment was about how much they had learned about each person in the group, regardless of how long they had worked together. This exercise increased their understanding and empathy for each other, regardless of their position within the school. Further discussion centered on the interconnection between faculty and staff, and how the interactions between the two groups can serve as positive or negative models for students.

In light of the success of the above exercise, the counselor was invited to begin the next in-service with another activity. At the time, there had been several incidents where children were left unsupervised because of missed messages between teachers, administrators and office staff. Consequently, the goal of the next exercise was to improve the effectiveness of staff communications to ensure student safety and provide appropriate role modeling for students. The counselor chose another activity from the TRIBES curriculum: the Tennis Ball Game, which provided a fun and meaningful experience to address this issue (Gibbs, 2001).

Gossip reduction. Another exercise provided the staff with a chance to experience the positive and negative consequences of constructive or destructive discussions about people in the school. This time, they were allowed to form groups of three with their friends. They were then asked to each tell a brief story about the best thing that ever happened to them on a school campus. At the end of the stories, they were asked to stop and assess whether they felt good or bad. They repeated this exercise, but this time telling about the worst thing that ever happened to them on a school campus. At the end of the stories, they again assessed their feelings. Subsequent discussion centered on the emotional effects of positive and negative stories and how these might affect their feelings about their work with students, parents, and each other. A direct connection was made between their experiences during the exercise and the common problems of school gossip and "burnout." While this intervention did not eradicate school gossip, it did appear to increase the staff's awareness of the possible negative consequences of gossiping, especially in their feelings about their job. Over the next week, several staff members talked to the counselor about the benefits of the exercise and their use of it in their own classrooms to help students become more mindful of the consequences of how they talked about each other.

Postvention Activities

In addition to the prevention activities described above, it is necessary to provide postvention for individual students who are experiencing difficulties. Postvention activities typically focus on addressing individual students' problems in achievement and behavior by enhancing collaboration between the school and family systems. A process model used to address classroom difficulties is described in detail elsewhere (Carter & Evans, 1995). Briefly, this model actively involves the student, parent, teacher, and other school personnel in developing specific strategies to improve classroom behavior while simultaneously addressing the family or school dynamics underlying the problem.

In implementing this model, we have found that a critical component is the use of a structured interview format that provides a procedure for assessing the involvement and viewpoints of teachers, parents, and students and leads to structured interventions to be implemented by members of the school and family systems. Rather than asking the person to fill out a survey or questionnaire, we have found that a brief individual meeting using the SBFC Interview Form (Appendix C) is more effective in gaining participation from teachers and parents. This may be because they can provide more information verbally in a shorter period of time without having to write anything down. It also provides a direct interaction of a more personal nature where they have control over the specificity and confidentiality of information that they provide.

The interview format is used for two main purposes: to gather information about the respondent's view of the student and the problem, and as an initial step in the process of

activating a collaborative team approach to addressing the problem. This leads to a decision tree of which interventions are most efficient for the SBFC to implement, depending on the degree of parental and teacher involvement for that particular case.

As soon as a child is referred because of academic or behavioral difficulties, the counselor schedules a 5-10 minute meeting with the parent, teacher or administrator who made the initial referral. In order to maximize participation, it is important to make the appointment at a time that is convenient for the respondent. The counselor explains to the respondent that the purpose of the interview is to learn about their view of the student and the problem. The respondent is also informed that the same questions will be asked of others (e.g., parents, teachers, the student) and that this information will be used to set up a collaborative intervention between home and school to address the problem as comprehensively as possible. Again, the fostering of a sense of collaboration and of being a part of a team is critical to the success of this approach. The respondent is told that at the end of the interview, the information to be shared with others will be read back to them and if there is anything that they do not want to be included, it will be kept confidential. As mentioned above, Appendix C contains a copy of the "SBFC Interview Form" that can be used to record responses. The form includes space to record information about the student, respondent, scheduling process (number of telephone or direct contacts necessary to make the appointment, appointment attendance, etc.), date, and the responses to questions.

Interview Content

Exploration of student strengths. The respondent is first asked to comment on the student's strengths. This question is a critical initial step because it frames subsequent discussions within a balanced perspective of positive and challenging traits and behaviors. Helping participants to acknowledge positive aspects of the student is an important part of the process of addressing challenging behaviors. As described later, this balanced perspective also is important in reducing defensiveness on the part of parents and students. At times, it may be difficult for parents and teachers to come up with strengths, and the counselor may need to help them define and explore these aspects. In addition, it is often necessary to reframe negative comments into positive ones. For example, a mother responded to a question about her child's strengths by saying, "Well, he's not a total slob". The counselor then reframed this in terms of the student's ability to sometimes clean up after himself.

Exploration of student challenges. The respondent is then asked to describe the student's challenges. These challenges are separated into challenges to the student, to those around him or her, and to the teacher or parent. Part of this discussion is to ascertain the respondent's view of how well the student is able to satisfy the "Three Rules of Kindergarten" discussed earlier. While these may seem to be more applicable to the school setting, they are in fact important parts of the student's functioning in home and social environments as well.

Exploration of previously attempted interventions. In order to prevent redundancy and to communicate respect, the respondent is then asked to describe what attempts, if any, they have made to address the above challenges. These responses are separated into what has seemed to work and what has not seemed to work. The respondent also is asked if they know of any specific obstacles that may have hindered these interventions.

Exploration of underlying causes. The respondent is then asked to comment on what they think might be underlying factors of the problem behavior. This information typically involves discussion of feelings, situational variables, current stressors and other aspects that may be critical to developing strategies that address the most important issues involved in the behavior.

Interview Process

One of the most important aspects of the SBFC Interview is the interview process. While the information obtained through the questions is vital, the process of developing a collaborative relationship between parents and teachers may be more important to the overall success of the intervention. In order to begin this process, the interviewer actively searches for any similarities in the views of the current respondent (e.g., the parent) and previous respondents (e.g., teachers), particularly in the area of student strengths. If any exist and confidentiality is not violated, the interviewer then shares this information with the respondent about the specific similarities between their responses and those of others. For example, after a parent commented on his child's strength of keeping his room clean, the SBFC shared the teacher's comment of how well the student kept his desk organized. When the parent described his child's challenge of sitting still in church, the counselor shared that the teacher also had mentioned that the student had some difficulty remaining in his seat during story time. This feedback showed the parent that he and the teacher shared some similar views of the child's strengths and challenges. When these interactions occur, they can have a profound affect on reducing parents' defensiveness while increasing their willingness to work together with the school to improve student success. This process is more complex than it appears and requires the interviewer to be sufficiently competent in the active listening and reflection skills necessary to be an effective SBFC.

The interview process is conducted with as many of the important players in the child's school and family systems as possible. It is preferable for the counselor to meet directly with these individuals, but if not, then telephone interviews can be conducted. If the counselor is unable to obtain participation from the parents or teachers, it is critical to document all of the attempts made to contact them, any appointments made and missed, or other information about the process. While the counselor may then be forced to work only with the teacher (or parent) and student (if old enough), the interview format can still be very useful in promoting their mutual understanding of the problem and development of effective strategies. In this scenario, the counselor serves as both a facilitator and a motivator of the student (in place of the teacher or parent). If both the teacher and parent are resistant to participating, then the counselor must work with the student either individually or within a group setting. The information obtained in the interview, however, will still be an important part of an efficient individual or group intervention process because it establishes a collaborative working relationship between student and counselor. This collaboration is critical to the success of most individual and group counseling interventions. The above process and resultant data enhances the decisions regarding the types of interventions that will be used to address the student's difficulties. While it is most effective and therefore most efficient for the counselor to work with participants from both family and school systems, if this is not possible, the data from the SBFC Interview Form can be used to document attempts and obstacles to obtaining maximum participation.

Classroom-Focused Interventions with School and Family System Participants

The counselor's first task is to obtain a commitment from the above parties to attend as many meetings as necessary to complete three main phases of intervention: initial, midcourse, and closure, scheduled at intervals dependent on the nature of the problem. The initial phase/meeting promotes a shared problem-solving process that incorporates the various viewpoints of the student's challenges and possible solutions. Solutions typically involve environmental modifications, for example, effective classroom management, parenting skills and positive discipline techniques that motivate the child and incorporate individualized behavioral or cognitive coping mechanisms that can be used to change problematic behaviors. Examples of these include having the child sit on his hands to keep from touching other children; have him tell himself silently that if he stays in his seat, he'll earn a high status reward such as being chosen to hand out papers or collecting milk money; or have him remind himself that if he raises his hand and waits to be called on, people then will really pay attention to him.

As the group collaborates in developing these coping tactics, strong emphasis is placed on strategies that can be used and practiced in both home and school settings. For example, a child can be required to raise his hand during class discussion and at the dinner table at home. This bilateral applicability is important because it serves to remind parents and teachers of the need to work together across both environments to improve the child's functioning. It also is critical that the implementation of these strategies actively involve the child with the adult who is with them in the home or school, because this helps the child to feel as if they have an active partner in the process of improving their behavior. The "Lips in Sync" strategy described in Appendix A is an example of this mutual participation process.

At the end of this initial phase, parents and teachers are asked what, if any, possible obstacles might occur that prevent them from being able to implement these strategies. The counselor also needs to identify possible obstacles and raise these if this has not already been done. Strategies for overcoming identified obstacles are then discussed.

The second phase is the implementation phase where the strategies decided upon are attempted in both environments. In this phase, parents and teachers are encouraged to look upon problems or challenges as a natural and constructive part of the problem-solving process. They are asked to record details of the implementation process including their own feelings, for discussion with the counselor at a later time. A mid-course meeting is held to assess progress and make any necessary modifications.

As the above phases ensue, the SBFC has the opportunity to assess the functioning of the home and school systems. This assessment measures the ability of the each system's participants to:

1. Listen to each other and communicate effectively.
2. Be open and flexible in collaborating on possible solutions.
3. Demonstrate their level of motivation to improve the situation of the child.
4. Follow through with the interventions necessary to improve the situation.
5. Evaluate and record implementation data.

The assessment highlights potential obstacles to improvement in the child's functioning, and indicates the necessity and direction of more intensive interventions.

If family issues are most critical to the solution of the problem, then the SBFC provides one to six family counseling sessions aimed at improving the student's functioning in school. If the problem primarily involves school system factors such as classroom behavior management or curricular considerations, the counselor works with school personnel to address these issues. In many situations, it is combinations of family and school issues that need to be addressed. If more extensive needs are identified (e.g., marital counseling, psychiatric consultation, retraining or reassignment of teacher, etc.), the counselor makes referrals to resources within the school district or community.

The third phase involves a closure meeting that is held to acknowledge progress, address any additional needs, and ensure a system for continued communication between all parties is in place. At this meeting, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of maintaining the collaborative relationships that have been responsible for progress and to develop specific mechanisms for following up with parents, teachers, and students after the specific intervention is completed. This can be accomplished through a variety of means, but it is important to schedule at least one or two specific times where this follow-up contact can occur. This can be done in a reasonably efficient manner by having the teacher call the home or having the student or parent drop in during recess or after school for periodic updates on progress or regressions. These may not be as lengthy as counseling sessions, but can include monitoring and coaching that maintains contact and collaboration among all parties. Parents and students also can communicate details of their progress to the SBFC through phone calls, email, or notes.

If the student gets in trouble or has difficulties again, the collaborative team can be mobilized immediately with a problem-solving process already in place rather than starting all over again. In addition, it is important to include a self-diagnostic process that may help parents and teachers decide whether they need additional learning experiences to improve children's success (e.g., teacher professional development on classroom management, or parent training/family counseling). This can be accomplished by highlighting the circumstances that indicate the need for additional assistance (e.g. multiple students experiencing problems in the classroom, increase in marital or family conflicts, and reduction in grades or increases in absenteeism). The participants are then given specific referral information or encouraged to contact the SBFC.

Evaluation Considerations

Over the past 10 years, the concepts and strategies discussed in this paper have been implemented in several urban settings in the United States, most notably in California where partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education have placed SBFC graduate student interns within schools. At the University of San Francisco, the "Mission Possible" program has used their Marriage and Family Counselor graduate students to provide SBFC services to local public and private schools in the inner city. In Los Angeles, the "School-Based Family Counseling" graduate program at California State University, Los Angeles, an integrated degree in Marriage and Family Counseling and School Counseling, has trained graduate students in the SBFC model for the past 15 years. Many of these graduates have been implementing various aspects of the model in local public schools in their roles as School Counselors. These efforts have yielded positive anecdotal information about partial implementation of the SBFC Prevention and Postvention model.

A process and impact evaluation plan for piloting of the full SBFC model at three school sites has started to yield data indicating the general efficacy of this model in addressing the needs of under-performing students. School administrators familiar with the SBFC concept through publications and supervision contacts initiated the plan with SBFC interns and graduates and who were concerned about high-risk students and their families Data was gathered from interviews with counselors, administrators, teachers and parents, and from school and student information regarding attendance, number of referrals for behavior problems, and classroom functioning. Evaluation forms also were developed to gather pre/post information from teachers and parents regarding SBFC interventions. These attempts at conducting formal impact evaluations of the model have been challenging, primarily because of the high turnover rate of administrators who govern the three school sites originally chosen for this SBFC implementation. Currently, a five-year commitment has been obtained with a large, urban charter school to implement the full SBFC model. A funded, five-year impact evaluation has been developed for the program, with data collection underway. Future evaluations of the implementation of the model need to gather data related to a wider range of children's behavioral and mental health issues; examine the model from a developmental perspective to understand its impact on various age groups; assess variables related to service delivery issues and family perspectives; and examine the impact of the services at the school and community levels.

Conclusion

Although there are some significant obstacles to their implementation, it is hoped that the procedures described in this paper will help support professionals working in schools address many of the issues they face. As discussed previously, those implementing the SBFC model may need additional training and experience to successfully provide these services. The large group meetings require a high degree of facilitation skills to provide a meaningful experience for all participants. The postvention activities require considerable skill in developing a collaborative relationship between individuals who may be used to interacting as adversaries. Gaining consistent participation and motivating involved parties to improve their efforts to help the child is critical to success.

For many who work in schools with high student to counselor ratios, these strategies may seem idealistic and untenable solely because of the time required for planning, organizing and implementing these procedures. This is particularly true for those who have experienced an increase rather than a decrease in tasks such as paperwork and administrative responsibilities that are not related to prevention or postvention activities. We do believe, however, that there continues to be a strong desire in most communities for improving the lives of children. While the above activities may serve as a vehicle for realizing these goals, it is likely that school professionals will need to be very proactive and explicit in advocating for the time and resources necessary to transform the way they operate as agents of change. We have found that even a small degree of implementation paired with careful evaluation of results can start to change the mind of skeptics within schools and communities. This requires, however, that the school professional be willing to be optimistic in looking at the possibilities for positive change in both

school and family systems. Such professionals can facilitate the collaborative process between schools and families that can make a critical difference in the academic and social development of our children.

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I. POSITIVE STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS
Reframing Your Relationship with the Student:
- <u>Force</u> yourself to have unconditional positive regard for the student-This is WORK!!
- Believe that there is a purpose for the student's behavior
- Believe that the student can learn more appropriate ways of reaching this purpose

What to think about **before** reacting to the behavior:
       -Try to see student's point of view:
             --What is the student's **goal** in the behavior?
                  --attention
                      -from the teacher
                      -from peers
                  --self-esteem—how do they get it?
                  --emotional outlet
                  --other
             --What **feelings** are involved in the behavior?
                  --Fear/anxiety
                  --Anger (look for the **hurt** that causes the anger)
                  --Sadness
                  --Excitement/Happiness
       -Is there an **appropriate behavior** that you can **teach** the child that can reach the goal or address their feelings?

Teaching appropriate behaviors:
       -First rule is that children must **look** and **listen** before
            responding
       Kids need to know **exactly what to do**
            --don't assume that they know what is appropriate
       Be explicit and specific about the desired behaviors
            --give short, concrete directions to shape positive behaviors
       Use extensive modeling and role-plays to provide concrete
            experiences of how to behave appropriately
       Catch them being good and give emotive, verbal praise --
            Remember to **personalize** the **praise**

How to teach the appropriate behavior:
       As a **group** (if this is a common problem in the classroom):
            Help all the children to understand the <u>appropriate</u>
                <u>behavior</u> and **why** it's important
       Individually (if this is a problem unique to the child or if
            discussion of it might in any way cause embarrassment):
            --teach a strategy that leads to an appropriate behavior and includes a "secret sign"
            that can silently cue the child to use the strategy

EXAMPLE: "EYES ON ME"
When a student is easily distracted, let him know that you know that he is smart and can learn, but won't be able to until he looks at you and listens. Then create a secret sign (wink at him) that you will give him during each lesson. Challenge him to see if he can see the "secret sign" and that you'll ask him after the lesson how many times you winked at him. Tell him that the only way he can win is if he's looking at you throughout the lesson.

EXAMPLE: "LIPS IN SYNC"
If the child wants **attention** from the teacher, then find a time to talk to her privately. During this brief conversation, talk about "good attention", when someone likes what you're doing, and "yucky attention" when people don't like what you're doing.
To get the "good attention", she will need to raise her hand and wait to be called on whenever she wants to say something to you. To help her do this, she should practice touching her lips with her finger before she says something to you. This will remind her to raise her hand to get the good attention. She should also watch you for the "secret sign" (e.g. touching your lips with your finger) that will remind her of what she needs to do to get the "good attention." Let her know that if she isn't called on, it's only because you can't call on everyone, not because you don't care. Then ask her to tell herself silently that she knew the answer, and later, she can whisper to you that she knew the answer.
Worksheet: What have you learned today?
Resources: Point out readings, handouts in notebook.

II. DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS TO IMPROVE STUDENT LEARNING

Studies clearly show that the attitude and actions of the family greatly impact a child's success in school. However, many parents are not aware of the importance of this connection and don't know what to do or how to be a positive partner in their child's education. In order to build this partnership, we have to focus on exploring what is going on at home and understanding the situation versus "parent-bashing".
What are the biggest challenges you have in working with families to improve academic achievement?
Chart responses
What to think about before you work with parents:
Building the Parent-Teacher TEAM:
Establishing a collaborative relationship is **first priority**
(-it's more important than problem-solving because if they don't feel like a partner, they won't engage in problem-solving processes)
Unconditional positive regard for families--this is WORK!!
Respect the family's situation; see **their** point of view
- Learn more about the family's situation, siblings, past experience with school
- Assume parents want the best for their kids
Acknowledge parental strengths & challenges
-Strengths--The fact that they are meeting with you is
the most important indicator that they care about their children's education

-They know much about what their child knows and how they learn
-Challenges--It's not easy to be a parent--
-takes a lot of time and energy to help children succeed
-emotionally taxing--usually the most intense worrying that a person has
done in their life
-the right thing to do is not usually obvious
-there may be other children or adults who are dependent on the parent
-stress from work, marriage, and environment
-there may be a lack of resources to meet needs
Commonizing problems--other parents experience these
challenges and so do teachers, but kids need consistency across
environments to succeed in school
Ask parents about their child's strengths:
(Some parents may be surprised by this and have trouble coming up with things)
--Strengths-- at home
-- with siblings or peers
Give feedback child's strengths that you see in the classroom
(Reframe talking as being able to be verbal)
-Point out similarities between what parent and teacher sees
Explore challenges at home and give feedback about challenges in school environment
-Point out similarities between what parent and teacher see
Then prioritize challenges, especially in terms of student learning
-focus on **3 Rules of Kindergarten**
-Follow directions
-Keep your hands and feet to yourself
-Be respectful of others in how you talk & act
Then engage in a mutual problem-solving process
Problem Solving Process: POCS
P -identify the **P**roblem
O -list the **O**ptions for intervention (home& school)
C -consider the **C**onsequences of each option;
determine the feasibility of each option
S -select a **S**olution
Use parent strengths to address challenges
Explore resources for further assistance--at school
--in community
Set up follow-up mechanism--communication
--another meeting
Summarize for the parent what was discussed
Then we'll talk about the referral process
--the SBFC process
Teacher consultation
Teacher and parent interview
1-5 session procedural model
SBFC checklist procedure

APPENDIX B - <u>PREVENTION ACTIVITIES FOR THE FAMILY SYSTEM</u>

HOW PARENTS CAN UNDERSTAND AND ADDRESS AT-RISK BEAVIORS IN YOUTH
1) OVERVIEW OF AT-RISK BEHAVIORS AND VULNERABLE YOUTH:
- Behavioral indicators that may reflect At-Risk behaviors
1. Withdrawal from previous relationships with family or peers
2. Problems in school achievement or attendance
3. Non-communication or unwillingness to talk with others
4. Prolonged irritability or extreme mood swings
- Internal Factors--Aspects within Individual
(e.g.; personality traits, temperament, strengths & challenges)
- External Factors--Ecological Model (Aspects in the Environment)
(e.g.; family & parents, peers, school, additional values)
<u>NOTE</u>: When kids have difficulties in one or more of the above areas, they are considered vulnerable to engaging in at-risk behaviors (e.g., substance abuse, early pregnancy, negative peer involvement). However, a deficit in one area can be compensated for by a strength in another area, resulting in reduced risk. Parents play a critical role because a strong relationship with a child can enable you to mediate the risk associated with internal or external factors.

2) COMMON PROTECTIVE FACTORS
    A. Parental monitoring--Know **where** children are and **what** they are **doing.**
    B. Proactive communication by parents--really **listen** to your children, try to understand what their life is like, initiate conversations and help them to communicate effectively with you.
    C. Provide structure--although they may resist, children do crave structure because it reduces anxiety and confusion.
        1. The most important structure that you provide is consistently **modeling** appropriate behavior. Practice what you preach!
        2. **Co-construct** with your children clear expectations and consequences for both positive and negative behaviors. Be sure to respect their developmental level by asking for and including some of their input into decision-making. But remember, **parents** have to make the ultimate decisions about what is best for the family.

3) HOW TO CREATE THE CONNECTION WITH YOUR CHILD
    A. Parental mind-set before talking with your child
        1. Brace yourself so that you **don't freak out** when your child shares their life with you. If you don't control your reactions, then your child will shut down and be wary of sharing with you in the future. If you do freak out, explain to the child what you're feeling and why. Then reiterate that you still want them to keep telling you what's going on with them so that you can be of help to them as they negotiate the challenges of establishing their own identity and independence.
        2. Try to think back and remember what it was like when you were the same age as your child. Sometimes this is difficult because we may not want to

remember the emotional pain that often accompanies adolescence. However, it's critical to get out of your "adult" way of thinking so that you have a common point of reference when talking with your child.
- B. Talking with your child
  1. **Express** your **desire** to strengthen the connection between you and your child and ask them for help in making it happen.
  2. Discuss and apologize for past factors or mistakes that may have hindered your connection with each other. Don't blame the child, but talk about your regret that you haven't been closer. Also, remember that apologies are meaningless without a sincere commitment to making the changes to prevent recurrence of mistakes.
  3. Talk about what it was like when you were their age, but remind them that you don't know what it's like now. Let them know that you hope that they'll educate you as to what they're experiencing so that you can be a partner and resource in helping them develop into a happy adult.

4) CO-CONSTRUCTING FAMILY EXPECTATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES
- A. Remember that you are trying to teach your children what to expect from society when they are adults so that they will already have the skills necessary to be happy and successful when they reach 18.
- B. Remember the **three outcomes** of good parenting and the skills necessary to achieve these. The young adult should be able to:
  1. Be self-maintaining (self-discipline, make and manage money, clean up after self, operate independently, etc.)
  2. Have at least one GOOD friend (express thoughts and feelings in ways that can be heard by another; ability to listen and understand others-- put yourself in another's shoes; be assertive versus aggressive or passive; etc.)
  3. Stay out of jail (understand rules and consequences; maintain self-control; think before you act; etc.)

The family expectations and consequences should help parents to teach children to develop the above skills.

5) WEBSITES FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:
CYFERnet (Children, Youth, and Families Educational Resources) **www.cyfernet.org** --look at this **with** your children to stimulate discussion.

APPENDIX C--<u>THE SBFC INTERVIEW FORM</u>

Student: _____

Date: _____Time:_____

**Parent:_____Teacher(s):_____Gr
ade/Track/Room ____/_____/_____ Referral Source:**

School Support Personnel:_____ Administrator:_____

❏ **Wrote to** ❏ **Called** ❏ **Scheduled appt.-When:_____**❏ **attended appointment** ❏**If
not, reason _____**

Attempts to contact: _____/_____

	Strengths	Challenges	Ability to use 3 rules of Kinder	Interventions tried/Comments/ Underlying Causes
Teacher				
Parent/ Student				

Further Comments: _____

_____

_____

❖ *Classroom:*

Behavior:	Strategy:

OUTCOMES:

❖ *Family:*

Behavior:	Strategy:

OUTCOMES: