

# Chapter 7

## Solution-Focused Group Work for At-Promise Youth in School Counseling

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter focuses on addressing the needs of at-promise youth within the educational system through a school counseling perspective. The authors of this chapter provide an overview of solution-focus counseling and how it can be implemented in a group setting to meet the unique needs of students who encounter barriers during their educational pursuits. The following sections are discussed in this chapter: resiliency language; meeting the needs of at-promise youth; elements of solution-focused counseling; application of solution-focused group strategies; addressing career, social/emotional, and academics in solution-focused group counseling; and provide a case example. This case example outlines how a school counselor may implement a solution-focused group when counseling at-promise youth within the school setting.*

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Solution-Focused Group Work for At-Promise Youth in School Counseling**

The role of the school counselor has evolved since its first introduction into the school system as a vocational resource in the early 1900s (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). Today, school counselors' priorities are

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expanding beyond career exploration to include a hands-on collaborative initiative that helps to promote the social/emotional and academic development for all students (ASCA, 2012). School counselors are now central in demonstrating culturally responsive care while collaborating with stakeholders to create a school climate that embraces the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. These additional responsibilities are encompassed within the counseling program, where school counselors are measuring their impact through data collection (ASCA, 2012; Stone & Dahir, 2011). School counselors utilize this data to address the needs of diverse student populations, and more specifically, to identify students struggling academically to complete high school (Cook & Kaffenberger, 2003).

It is imperative that counseling programs address the needs of students who are facing barriers compromising their success in school (Shulz, 2011). In most educational settings, students are referred to as at-risk when they are performing below grade level, at risk of dropping out, or are not mastering skills needed to be successful after the completion of school (McWhirter et. al, 2013). Although the term at-risk is common in literature when discussing students who are encountering systemic barriers in the educational system (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998; McWhirter et. al, 2013), the authors of this chapter are choosing to utilize the label *at-promise* instead.

Deficit language promotes the misconception that individuals from marginalized and oppressed identities are solely responsible for their life circumstances (Whiting, 2006a). This mentality further strengthens the concept of meritocracy, a prominent idea in Western culture that places the focus on working towards your achievement and disregards the limited opportunities presented to individuals with marginalized social identities (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Haskin & Singh, 2015). The label at-promise reinforces a scholarly identity for these students associated with positivity, this positive identity can encourage students to obtain increased academic confidence (Whiting, 2006a; Whiting, 2006b). For at-promise youth, feeling capable in the academic setting is important, especially when reviewing educational statistics concerning high school dropout rates (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; McWhirter et. al., 2013; NCES, 2016; Schulz, 2011).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016), Latinx and Black students are dropping out of high school at higher rates than White students and students of lower economic status are dropping out at higher rates than their peers. Furthermore, students of low socioeconomic status and minority students are more susceptible to disciplinary actions within the school (Schulz, 2011). With concerns of not completing high school and increased disciplinary actions, minority students and students from poverty face barriers that are preventing them from being successful in the school system. Although there are many common factors that contribute to a student being labeled at-promise, circumstances creating these obstacles can greatly differ (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; McWhirter et. al, 2013). These dynamics are directly relevant to ethically competent school counselors who are tasked with meeting the needs of all students within a reasonable time frame.

## **Selecting a Counseling Theory for a Diverse Student Population**

As school counselors are facing ever-expanding roles and accountabilities, it is important for school counselors to meet the needs of students in a time-efficient manner. Solution-focused group counseling can be a powerful tool for addressing both student needs and time constraints. It has been proven effective in addressing not only concerns of limited time (Jones et. al, 2009), but also has been beneficial for students with a wide variety of concerns (LaFountain, Garner, & Eliason, 1996). By adhering to the

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