

Boosting Self-Care Strategies and Resiliency Manual for Promoting Counselors' Wellness

Rosemarie A. Tayoto, De La Salle University, Philippines

The Asian Conference on Education 2020
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Counselors' wellbeing is very essential in the fulfillment of their day to day task of providing counseling services to their clients. It is expected that a counselor with a positive physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional states will be able to develop a therapeutic alliance, demonstrate empathy, and design an appropriate intervention plans to address the client's presenting concern. On the other hand, prolonged exposure to individuals experiencing a high level of stress may place counselors at risk of vicarious stress, secondary stress disorder, compassion fatigue, and burnout. Thus, it is at utmost importance that school counselors should prioritize their own mental health. This current manual aims to provide a set of group intervention activities that will offer a proactive approach to self-care practices and enhance resiliency to promote counselors' wellness. Counselors' level of professional vitality, personal vitality, professional stress, and personal stress will be measured using the Skovholt Practitioner Professional Resiliency and Self-Care Inventory (Skovholt, 2014). This will serve as a sounding board for counselors to reflect on their current state of wellbeing and self-care practices. The proposed manual is composed of 6 sessions which will run for one and a half hours every session and will be scheduled on a weekly basis. Strategies will include group sharing, individual journaling, creative works, reflections, and processing. At the end of the group intervention, counselors are expected to have their own self-care plan that will aid them to maintain positive mental health amidst the challenges brought by both personal and professional life.

Keywords: School Counselors, Resiliency and Self-Care, Wellness, Group Manual

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Often school counselors are handling clients who are suffering from a high level of distress and psychological crisis. Because of this, counseling professionals are vulnerable and predisposed to a lot of work-related risks such as compassion fatigue, burnout, vicarious trauma, and secondary stress disorder (Tyre, Griffin, and Simmons, 2016).

In this regard, the proposed intervention aims to provide a venue for the counseling professionals to contemplate on their current state of well-being as school counselors using the Skovholt Practitioner Professional Resiliency and Self-Care Inventory (Skovholt, 2014). The different group sessions target to promote counselors' wellness through different activities such as group sharing, individual journaling, creative works, reflections, and processing. The main objective of this manual is for the participants to come up with their own self-care plan that will help them improve their resiliency and sustain positive mental health while fulfilling professional and personal tasks.

This concept has been studied by numerous numbers of researchers and proved that having proactive self-care activities can avert the harmful effect of stress and boost wellness to mental health practitioners such as psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and school counselors. In a specific study conducted to psychologists, results revealed that the main impact of self-care practices on an individual is reducing stress level, preventing possible burnout, and attaining life satisfaction (Rupert and Dorociak, 2019). Likewise, it is also found among mental health professionals that self-care plays an important role and is significantly associated with wellbeing (Richards, Campenni, Muse-Burke, 2010) and taking a proactive approach to self-care particularly in integrating this to the professional development program of the institutions and professional organizations (Posluns and Gall, 2019). Furthermore, in the study conducted to a group of therapists, it has been found that an increase in their self-care activities will decrease the level of burnout and effect of secondary traumatic stress to them, in addition to the positive effect of self-care to compassion satisfaction towards their clients (Catlin-Rakoski, 2012).



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework on Boosting Self-care Strategies and Resiliency for Promoting Counselors' Wellness

School counselors are susceptible to experience a high level of stress (Lambie, 2006) and burnout (Lawson, 2007) due to the nature of their work. They are expected to build therapeutic rapport with clients dealing with negative emotions and design appropriate treatment plans to address the client's concern. Often, counselors are focus on attending to client's needs and find it difficult to prioritize their own wellness and self-care (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001).

Aside from these, there are also varying environmental reasons such as too much workload, unsupportive and unhealthy relationships with peers, lack of formal supervision from the supervisor, and poor program support from the teachers, administrators, and other school personnel (Maslach, 2003).

With this kind of work environment and demands it is important that school counselors have a high level of resiliency in order to execute daily tasks and work effectively despite the challenges, they confront everyday both in their personal and professional life through adequate problem-solving skills, effective coping strategies as well as self-care activities (Pooley & Cohen, 2010). Self-care practices are different activities that counselors do in a conscious effort to maintain her physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy which will give support to carry on positive energy, determination, and commitment in performing expected responsibilities with happiness and satisfaction.

The Code of Technical Standard for Registered Guidance Counselors (2015) in the Philippines stated the importance of giving attention to the counselors' well-being and its direct effect on the professional practice of counseling. Professional counselors are accountable to maintain a healthy mind and body that will enable them to serve their clients effectively. They are also expected to seek out professional help and support once they experience mental health concerns or counselor impairment. Likewise, the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics also emphasized that counselors should monitor themselves for possible signs and symptoms of dysfunction in their physical, emotional, and mental health. Counselors are advised to stop providing services during impairment and submit themselves to appropriate intervention and treatment when seen necessary to avoid malpractice (ACA, 2014).

School counselors who have lesser coping strategies and low levels of self-awareness are at a higher risk to experience compassion fatigue, vicarious traumatization, and burnout due to prolonged exposure to clients experiencing emotional suffering and mental crisis (Robino, 2019).

To prevent impairment to school counselors, it is very important that they have conscious efforts to engage regularly in self-care practices. It is an ethical obligation and should be the top priority for counselors and other mental health practitioners. Richards, Campenni, and Muse-Burke (2010) explained the definition of self-care and its four components. First is physical self-care wherein it involves physical activities that encourage the person to use his/her energy such as exercises, sports, household chores, and daily functioning that facilitates body movement for which a person may feel positive and energize. Second is the psychological definition of self-care that refers to submitting himself/herself to personal counseling. This will allow the counselor to recognize his/her own personal and professional struggles and it gives an opportunity to get support from another person. The third is the spiritual component

of self-care which refers to finding meaning and sense of purpose in everything a person does and its connection to one another. This may include activities such as meditations and participation in religious activities and the likes. Lastly is the support component of self-care. Establishing a positive relationship with colleagues and family can be a very helpful support system for those who are in the human service profession. Likewise, regular supervision, case consultation and continues education in the field of work can also benefit the professional and personal well-being and development of the counselor.

Practicing self-care strategies on a regular basis will help counselors enhance their resilience. The concept of resilience has been well studied and defined from different perspectives. According to Leipold and Greve (2019), through resiliency skills, a person will be able to overcome and cope effectively with a very challenging situation. Another common definition was “resilience is the ability to bounce back and overcome adversity” (McCubbin, 2001; p.2). A similar definition to this was stated by Connor and Davidson who identified resilience as “personal qualities that enable one to thrive in the face of adversity” (2003, p.76). Furthermore, Sadler-Gerhardt and Stevenson (2012) pointed out that there is a way in order for a counselor to avoid depletion and burnout due to the occupational hazard caused by a day to day encounter with people who are in distress, victims of trauma, or suffering from mental health conditions. For them, it is highly important that those in the helping profession should prioritize building their resilience as they go through the process of helping others. Once the counselor learns to build his resilience, there will be a lesser chance of malpractice, enhance the drive to help clients, and increase job satisfaction.

In this regard, with continuous self-care practices among school counselors, it is expected that their ability to cope with adverse life events both personal and professional will increase hence their resiliency level was enhanced and counselors’ wellness has been promoted. As defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2000), wellness is the optimum condition of the health of a person. There are two focus areas when it comes to wellness. First is the realization of the fullest potential of the individual in terms of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects of an individual. Second is the performance in whatever role they are in with their life successfully. In line with this definition, a counselor’s wellness refers to personal advancement and professional proficiency that encompass mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and vocational well-being (Roach and Young, 2007).

Conclusion

The following are the specific guidelines and procedures in facilitating the intervention manual for school counselors. The main objective of this proposed intervention manual is to lead school counselors towards achieving wellness through proactive self-care strategies that will aid them in enhancing resiliency skills and prevent mental health concerns. Specifically, the following goals are expected to be met at the end of the process:

- a.) To become aware of their current state of wellbeing and self-care practices.
- b.) To recognize the importance of self-care strategies and their vital role in resiliency building.
- c.) To explore different types of self-care strategies that would help them to become more resilient with stress and burnout.

- d.) To increase the capability to design their own self-care plan that promotes personal and professional wellness.
- e.) To practice self-care purposefully to enhance psychological resources in handling daily demands and achieves life satisfaction.

The group intervention is suitable for 10 – 15 members. This will run for 6 meetings with one and a half hours per session once a week. Participants will be asked voluntarily for their participation in the intervention therefore once consent was given, they will be requested to actively take part and complete the entire program. The schedule of the sessions will be plotted strategically on a common preference and availability of the members of the group since all are expected to have their work residency as school counselors.



Figure 2. Boosting Self-Care Strategies and Resiliency Manual for Promoting Counselors' Wellness (Intervention Process)

The figure above shows the process of the proposed intervention for school counselors. Volunteered participants will be asked to accomplish the Skovholt Practitioner Professional Resiliency and Self-Care Inventory (Skovholt, 2014) to gauge their level of resiliency and self-care practices. This will serve as a sounding board for school counselors to reflect on their current state of well-being. The sessions will be composed of different structured learning experiences such as group sharing, creative works, self-reflections, and processing. At the end of each session, they will be asked to create an individual journal based on what they have experienced and realized in the intervention. Lastly, after the completion of the six sessions, counselors are expected to design their own self-care plan that will help them to maintain positive mental health amidst the challenges brought by personal and professional life.

Outline of the Sessions

Session 1: Purpose, Activities, and Process

The purpose of the first session is to discuss to the participants the purpose of this intervention program and its possible benefits to school counselors. Everyone will be encouraged to take an active role in all the activities and their commitment to the sessions. Openness and confidentiality will be emphasized as an essential part of the intervention. More so, the first session will also be intended to take full advantage of getting to know one another, develop rapport, and to be comfortable with the presence of everyone in the group as well as the facilitator.

The first activity will be an introduction from the facilitator. The participants will be asked to introduce themselves to the group and will be encouraged to share their reasons for joining the intervention. The facilitator will then synthesize the answers of the group and highlight the common reasons stated by the participants. Afterward, the participants will be asked to read and accomplish the Skovholt Practitioner Professional Resiliency and Self-Care Inventory (Skovholt, 2014). This activity will lead the participants to reflect on their current state of well-being in both personal and professional domains and their self-care practices. Participants will be asked to share their observations and reflections in their output specifically towards the level of stress in personal and work life and how much self-care activities they practice in their daily schedule. The facilitator will present a mini-lecture on risk factors of mental health practitioners to different mental health conditions and the important role of self-care and resiliency to prevent these conditions.

Session 2: Purpose, Activities, and Process

The second session of this intervention will be intended for the first type of self-care strategies which is physical self-care. The purpose of this is to put emphasis on the importance of taking care of one's physical health to function well in daily tasks. Thus, the activity will lead the participants to realize that when an individual starts taking care of his/her body, it will make him/her think and feel positive too.

The facilitator recaps the activities and discussion that took place during the first session and asks each participant what part of the previous session they like most. Then, the facilitator will introduce the different types of self-care to the group. Starting on physical self-care, each participant will be asked to list down all the things that they do to take care of their physical health (examples: sleeping pattern, food intake, rest and relaxation activities, sports, exercise, and other activities that facilitate body movement) which they are going to share to the whole group afterward. The next activity will encourage the participants to experience a simple 20-minute exercise by doing the "Happy Walk Workout" by Leslie Sansone. After this activity, the facilitator will explore participants' reactions, thoughts, and feelings toward the recent activity. This session will underline the benefits of active physical self-care activities to combat stress and burnout due to personal and professional demands.

Session 3: Purpose, Activities, and Process

The purpose of this session is to help the participants become aware of their psychological vulnerability as a school counselor. This aims to help them understand the importance of dealing with their own emotions and to seek professional help when it is necessary as part of their psychological self-care.

The facilitator will again review the previous session and asks the participants for their learning insights then connect it to the new activity for the third session. Each participant will be requested to think of a difficult situation or challenges they face both in their personal and professional life. They will be given art materials to be used to draw an image that will represent how they feel when they are in that current situation. After this, participants will be asked to choose a partner with whom they are comfortable sharing their work. The facilitator will then emphasize the importance of

openness and confidentiality in this activity. Then processing follows which will evolve in what they think and feel towards the activity, participants' ways in managing their own emotions, and strategies they do to help them feel recharged when facing difficult situations. Lastly, in a mini-lecture, the facilitator will discuss the importance of submitting oneself to personal counseling to help the counselor recognize his/her own personal and professional struggles and it gives an opportunity to get support from another person.

Session 4: Purpose, Activities, and Process

The objective of the 4th session is to enable the participants to focus on the spiritual component of self-care. This will help them develop deeper meaning and sense of purpose in their life both in personal and professional aspects. The session will also emphasize that spiritual self-care will help them to improve a healthier lifestyle.

The facilitator will recap on the discussion that took place in the previous session and ask some volunteers to share their realizations from the last activity. For this current session, the facilitator will instruct the participants to walk outside the session room, bring out their cellular phones, and take three photos of things that can represent the meaning or purpose of their life. These can be objects, places, people, pets, scenery, etc. Participants can use symbols and are encouraged to be creative. After completing the three photos, they will be given time to reflect on each photo and write their answers to these questions; "What does this photo represent? and Why it is meaningful for you?". After this, participants will be group into three and ask to share their work with the members. A representative from each group will be requested to make a summary of the individual sharing and give his/her insights from the activity. In conclusion, the facilitator will then engage the participants in an interactive discussion and synthesize the insights gained by the whole group. Emphasis on the importance of nurturing spirit, finding deeper sense of purpose in life, and understanding the connection to the universe.

Session 5: Purpose, Activities, and Process

The objective of this session is to highlight the importance of connecting to others as an essential part of social self-care. Thus, the activity will help the counselors reflect on their own social needs and how they attend and give attention to these needs despite the demanding roles they play both in their personal and professional life.

The facilitator will review what has been discussed in the last session and asked the participants to share what they have learned from spiritual self-care. For this session, the facilitator will show different pictures of places (examples: beach, mountain, park, restaurant, movie house, bowling alley, art gallery, karaoke bar, etc.) on the screen. Participants will be asked to pick and list down 3 places that they like and identify people that they wanted to spend time in their chosen places. They will be asked to look for a partner to share their work and answer these questions; 1.) Do you allocate enough time to spend with your family and friends? and 2.) How do you nurture your relationships with family and friends? After the sharing, the facilitator will synthesize the activity by encouraging the participants to share their insights. Hence, leading the discussion on the importance of addressing their own social needs by establishing and maintaining a healthy relationship with family members, friends, co-workers, and

organizations that can serve as their support system. Moreover, the facilitator will also highlight that socialization and positive relationship with others is an effective self-care strategy and promote wellness.

Session 6: Purpose, Activities, and Process

The purpose of this last session is to accomplish the most important objective of this module which is for the participants to design their own self-care plan that will eventually become part of their daily routine to combat stress brought by their personal and professional life.

The facilitator will review to the participants the different types of self-care that they have experienced in the previous sessions. Underlining their learning especially on the significance of self-care activities in building resilience and boosting the positive wellbeing of school counselors. For the last activity, participants will be given different writing and art materials that they can utilize in creating a self-care plan for a month. This can be in a form of a bucket list, scrapbook, planner, or any other creative output setting in mind the areas in their life that need more attention and self-care. After finishing the task, all participants will be given a chance to present their work to the whole group. Then, the facilitator affirms the active participation of the group and their efforts to achieve the goals of each session. In addition, the facilitator encourages the commitment of each participant to implement their self-care plan, assess its positive effect on their mental health, and eventually continue their attempts to consciously incorporate self-care strategies every day.

Strategies to Evaluate the Group

In the last session, participants will be asked to accomplish an evaluation made by the researcher to measure the effectiveness of the program. Specifically, a Likert scale will be utilized to determine if the objectives are met in terms of the content, delivery method, activities, and strategies utilized by the facilitator. Also, a qualitative part will also be provided by asking the participants to write their insight gained throughout the whole six sessions.

The facilitator takes note of the different processes, participation, group dynamics, and individual learning insights of the group at the end of each session. This will help in documenting the progress of the group and monitoring if the objectives are being achieved.

Referral Procedure

The participants who will be needing further assessment, individual counseling, or other therapeutic intervention will be properly referred to a psychologist or psychiatrist with their consent to address their mental health concerns and improve wellbeing.

Implications to Counseling

This proposed manual can be used and incorporated in the professional development program of different guidance center to help promote mental health and wellbeing among school counselors. A proactive approach in promoting self-care practices and increasing resilience among counselors is vital to prevent stress, burnout, and other mental health concerns due to the nature of their workload. In addition, a counselor with a sound mind and body is more likely to fulfill tasks effectively. A counselor with positive mental and physical health can build a therapeutic relationship, compassionate, committed, accountable, shows genuine concern, and able to can design an evidenced-based intervention programs for his/her clients. More so, prioritizing self-care improves resilience in coping with daily challenges, reduce the risk of illness brought by personal and professional life. Thus, it helps increase happiness, job satisfaction, quality of life, personal and professional relationship, and overall wellness.

References

American Counseling Association (2014). 2014 American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. Retrieved from <https://www.counseling.org/Resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>

Catlin-Rakoski, S. (2012). Therapist's perceptions of self-care.

Code of Technical Standard for Registered Guidance Counselors (2015). Code of Ethics for Registered and Licensed Guidance Counselors in the Philippines. Retrieved from <http://filpsy counseling.blogspot.com/2015/02/code-of-ethics-for-registered-and.html>

Connor, K. M., & Davidson, J. R. (2003). Development of a new resilience scale: The Connor-Davidson resilience scale (CD-RISC). *Depression and anxiety*, 18(2), 76-82.

Lambie, G. W. (2006). Burnout prevention: A humanistic perspective and structured group supervision activity. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 45(1), 32-44.

Leipold, B., & Greve, W. (2009). Resilience: A conceptual bridge between coping and development. *European Psychologist*, 14(1), 40-50.

Maslach, C. (2003). Burnout: The cost of caring. *Ishk*.

McCubbin, L. (2001). Challenges to the Definition of Resilience.

Pooley, J. A., & Cohen, L. (2010). Resilience: A definition in context. *Australian Community Psychologist*, 22(1), 30-37.

Posluns, K., & Gall, T. L. (2020). Dear mental health practitioners, take care of yourselves: A literature review on self-care. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 42(1), 1-20.

Richards, K., Campenni, C., & Muse-Burke, J. (2010). Self-care and well-being in mental health professionals: The mediating effects of self-awareness and mindfulness. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 32(3), 247-264.

Robino, A. E. (2019). Global Compassion Fatigue: A New Perspective in Counselor Wellness. *Professional Counselor*, 9(4), 272-284.

Roach, L. F., & Young, M. E. (2007). Do counselor education programs promote wellness in their students?. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 47(1), 29-45.

Rupert, P. A., & Dorociak, K. E. (2019). Self-care, stress, and well-being among practicing psychologists. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*.

Sadler-Gerhardt, C. J., & Stevenson, D. L. (2012). When it all hits the fan: Helping counselors build resilience and avoid burnout. *Ideas and Research You Can Use: VISTAS 2012*, 1, 1-8.

Skovholt, T. M., Grier, T. L., & Hanson, M. R. (2001). Career counseling for longevity: Self-care and burnout prevention strategies for counselor resilience. *Journal of Career Development*, 27(3), 167-176.

Tyre, Y., Griffin, M., & Simmons, R. T. (2016). Building Resiliency in Counselors in Training for Counselors Educators. *Alabama Counseling Association Journal*, 41(1).

World Health Organization (2000). Health Promotion Glossary Update. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/healthpromotion/about/HPR%20Glossary_New%20Terms.pdf

Contact email: rosemarie.aquino@dlsu.edu.ph