

**The Experiences and Perceptions of Five
Elementary School Counselors:
Providing Family Counseling
to
Families of Children with Learning Disabilities**

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(ABSTRACT)

Family systems counseling is a powerful and beneficial counseling technique that has been effective in treating families of children with learning disabilities. Family counseling has been effective in many settings, but has not been explored as a school counselor intervention. This research is a qualitative study exploring school counselors' experiences and perceptions while providing family counseling to families of children with learning disabilities. This counseling included a minimum of eight counseling sessions per family.

The results of this study indicate that school counselors must begin to incorporate family counseling into their regular school counseling programs in order to most effectively help children. If family counseling becomes a standard practice for school counselors, counselor education programs will need to incorporate family counseling courses into their school counseling program curricula. School counselors may also obtain family counseling training through workshops, consultation and clinical supervision.

Findings from this study suggest that school systems may need to implement the following changes: 1) provide flexibility in scheduling that allows counselors to meet with families during evenings, Saturdays, and summer months, 2) arrange for accessibility of counselors to families requesting family services, 3) provide availability of counselors as 12-month employees in order to maintain a consistent family counseling program, 4) reduce the counselor-to-pupil ratio by hiring more school counselors, 5) redefine the counselor's role and job description to include providing more counseling services, specifically family counseling, 6) increase opportunities for training and clinical supervision in family

counseling, 7) provide appropriate facilities for family counseling in the schools and 8) provide training of family systems for school administrators and personnel.

The results of this study show that counselors may need to engage in public relations activities so that children and families may be better informed of the variety of counseling services available, including family counseling. Since school counselors spend much of their time working with children with learning disabilities and family counseling is necessary to bring about lasting changes in children and families, school counselors must work with family systems. The results of this study indicate that family counseling needs to be incorporated in school counseling programs.

DEDICATION

“There is a song that needs to be sung in our culture: a song of the rhythms of relationships, a song of people enriching and expanding each other . . . the melodies of mutual accommodation and support that cement human interaction . . . Parent and child define each other in millions of small acts that fit together with the precision of a chemical reaction . . . It is the silent song of life.”

Salvadore Minuchin, 1984

This dissertation is dedicated to the silent song of life.

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