

5 Counselling Services Available for Children with Special Needs

Introduction

What Counselling?

Counselling is a professional services aimed at guiding an individual with a problem. Counselling offers an opportunity to explore alternative plans of actions and decisions, which are helpful to the client in over-coming blocks to his personal development. Cottle and Downie (1970) define counselling as the process by which the counselor assists the client to face, understand, and concept information about himself and his interactions with others, so that he can make effective decision about various life choices (Thompson & Popped, (1972). Hansen, Steve and Wanner (1972) define the concept of counselling as "the process that assists an individual in learning about himself, his environment, and method of handling his roles and relationship. This means that counselling does not remedy but only assists in overcoming the problem.

Counselling is the medium through which the professional guides a person in need to solve certain problems of adjustment. One can equally define vocational counselling as the introduction of skills which are designed to provide individuals with solutions to their problems to enable them become more familiar with the community services and how to get access to them. It also helps to prevent problems from getting worse.

Parent's Involvement

Parents' involvement in the programme for the disabled is very

important. Parents have a right under the laws protecting their children to fight for the right of their children. They need to be informed and need to work with the school system about their children. Parents are supposed to get in touch with the school if their child is handicapped and are not in school. They should work with the child's classroom teacher if the child has problems. Parents may resort to due procedures as a kind of protection against any actions that may be harmful to their children ... These procedures are usually written in the law to say their rights and the right of their children. It is important for parents to join Parents Teachers Associations and know about testing and evaluation. They should attend Individualized Educational Programme (I.E.P.) meetings and should use their rights to check school records making sure they are assertive without taking over or antagonizing other people. They should insist on essential services-organizing the child's potentials and the like.

Parent Counselling

Parental counselling is very important towards acceptance of such a child in the family. After the shock of having a disabled child and the accompanying feelings of depression, denial and anger, most parents need an understanding and supporting counselor who does not consider his role as completed as soon as he announces the disability to the parents but continues to share the burden and guide them through the difficult phases of bringing up a disabled child. The parents should be counseled as they are briefed: they are ashamed, guilty, have lost hope and so on. The parents' helplessness is best handled by giving them specific things to do and by stressing their crucial roles in helping the child to develop as normal as possible.

Denga (1983) stated that parenting a child with impairment is a responsibility which requires special guidance and counselling to enable parents learn less painful ways of dealing with the mental, physical and emotional adjustment required to parent a

child. The superstitious belief which surrounds the arrival of a child with impairment into a family and which could further aggravate to be emotional problems of the parents suggest that adequate information and guidance should be provided to clear the myths that surround the arrival of a child with disability into a family. The needs of the parents and content of the guidance counselling programme from one parent to another. The specific goal for a school counselling programme when dealing with parents of handicapped children must include:

- a) Presentation of information on the child's disability, e.g. does it relate to factors that affect the child's learning potentials;
- b) The development of realistic supportive educational plans within the school;
- c) Offering support to parents in dealing with their feelings relative to the problems associated with the handicap;
- d) Allowing parents to enhance their general understanding and acceptance of the disability the child is suffering from;
- e) Teaching parents about strategies of behaviour management. Parents should be actively involved in the training programme and this may likely yield more positive results.

Finally, advice or information given to parents of handicapped children in any guidance session must be practical. Information must be given to parents in the language they understand.

Counselling of Handicapped Persons

The presence of a handicapping condition in an individual or person can negatively affect both the social and psychological development of the individual concerned, thus, affecting the overall adjustment of such individual to the society where he lives.

Disabled children need to be given care and respect. This is important because of their observed laws of concept, self-esteem, and their failure to accept their conditions. When parents and others treat them with respect, they are likely to develop self-respect

and self-understanding.

The effects of the presence of handicapping conditions in an individual and particularly in school-aged children can be minimized or reduced through the provision of appropriate counselling services.

Counselling the handicapped individuals can be carried out using two approaches:

a) *Informational Counselling*

This approach involves educating the handicapped children regarding the causes and the implications of the disability the child is suffering from, so as to help remove the myths that often surround the presence of a disability in an individual person. Inform him about possible career, his legislative rights and information regarding the social, psychological and medical services available in the society for him.

b) *Personal Adjustment Counselling*

It involves helping the handicapped individuals come into real terms, i.e. accept the reality of the handicapping condition he or she is suffering from. The counselor must use counselling expertise to help and support the individuals concerned towards accepting the handicap and its implications on the subsequent social and emotional adjustment of life. The counselor to achieve this must learn to accommodate anger and abuse from the clients.

Focus Questions

1. Explain the concept of counselling.
2. Why must parents be actively involved in providing counselling services to their children.
3. What do you take parental counselling to mean.
4. Why do we heed parent counselling in service delivery to special need families.
5. Explain the two approaches to counselling the disabled.