

APPENDIX 7.1. Sample Letter to School Personnel

Welcome to a new school year. Once again we face the collective challenge of educating our students for academic achievement and social and emotional success. We know that we can't accomplish one without the other; and yet, there are so many competing pressures and mandates that it is hard to find the time to accomplish this dual vision. But we try.

The Counseling Team wants to remind you of some of the issues many of your students face on a day-to-day basis. We all know that middle-school kids experience puberty and body development changes, peer relationship problems, family difficulties, questions or experimentation regarding sex and drugs, and academic challenges, and that this is a developmentally disorganized time in general for virtually all of them.

What is less known and acknowledged is just how much more so many of our students are living through each day. The following list is not simply what some of our students *could* go through, it is what they *are* going through *right now*:

ABUSE, TRAUMA ISSUES, VIOLENCE, DEATH

- Being involved in fights in which someone is seriously injured or killed.
- Traumatic events in their past and/or present, including beatings, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and abandonment, exposure to war, refugee camps.
- Attempted or actual murder and/or suicide of a student/family member/friend.
- Death of a parent/sibling/extended family member/friend/pet due to illness or accident.
- Home and all possessions destroyed by fire.
- Living in a high-crime, high-violence neighborhood.
- Being involved in a car crash or other life-threatening accident.
- Being a witness to traumatic events.

FAMILY ISSUES

- Divorce or separation of parents; frequent or constant parental arguing in the home; wife abuse; being “in the middle” in parental disputes; living in multiple households.
- Serious problems interacting with a steppartner/parent.
- Physical, life-threatening, or terminal illness for themselves, siblings, parents, other family members, friends.

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- Physical abuse by parents and/or siblings.
- Homelessness.
- Lack of food or clothing.
- Poverty and/or unemployment.
- Students who have to take care of younger siblings, cook their family's meals, clean their homes, and so on.
- Immigration issues (e.g., new to this country, family members facing deportation, difficulty speaking and/or understanding English, etc.).
- Parents who have significant mental health issues that affect the student.
- Parents who have addiction issues.
- Parents or siblings who are in jail.
- Students who are raising themselves and have no adult supervision.
- Constant moving to new residences or shelters.
- Family members or relatives in gangs.
- Family members or relatives in the military/stationed overseas.
- Being in foster care/adopted or living in a group home.

PERSONAL ISSUES

- Depression and anxiety states.
- Attempted suicide or thoughts of suicide.
- Eating disorders.
- Sleep difficulties.
- Self-harm, such as cutting.
- Drug and/or alcohol and/or tobacco use.
- Involvement in criminal activities and the criminal justice system.
- Sexual involvement with peers.
- Friendship difficulties (including having no friends).
- Sexual orientation/identity issues.
- Electronic aggression and cyberbullying.

SCHOOL ISSUES

- Being bullied and/or harassed and/or excluded.
- Difficult student–teacher relationships.
- Test anxiety; academic hopelessness.
- Failing classes.

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- Being absent frequently.
- Changing schools often.
- Lack of friends or poor social relationships.
- Poor organization.

We see a number of these students weekly, and we can offer more intensive services. There are many other students who could benefit from regular group and individual counseling services, more than we can hope to serve, so we often have to refer students and families to services outside the school.

Research has shown that children involved in traumatic events such as those included in the previous list may be *2 to 3 years behind* academically, and will often be seen as “disorganized, lazy, unfocused, enabled, unmotivated, the class clown, uncaring, bored, and/or failing in their potential.”

What may really be going on, in other words, is that their learning is being disrupted by the impact of what they are going through in the rest of their life. Please keep this in mind when trying to assess the reasons for a student’s not turning work in or working below expectations.

We also want you to know this because when we make a *Request for the Student to Report for Counseling*, it is highly probable that the student we are asking for is dealing with one or more of the above issues. The student’s leaving your class for a short time and having a chance to talk about this will likely improve his or her ability to focus in your classroom, learn better in general, and be more academically successful. This is just one of the ways counseling can help support students as well as your learning environment.

APPENDIX 7.2. Student Survey

Last name

First name

Grade

Please help us get to know you better. The Social Work Department wants to know what students think about in four different areas that affect all young people: social situations, emotions, stress, and worries. Below are some topics in those different areas that middle school students sometimes have concerns about, want to discuss, or need support with. If you would like to talk about these topics or would like more information about them, you can let us know here. **Please put an X in either the Yes or the No column for each item.**

THANK YOU!

MANAGING EMOTIONS	Yes	No
Problems with anger		
Feelings of sadness or loneliness		
Being anxious or worried about: (write in what you are worried about)		
Other feelings: (write in the feelings you are concerned about)		

COPING WITH STRESS	Yes	No
Time management or goal setting		
School problems		
Home or family concerns		
Decision making: (write in the current decisions causing you trouble)		
Other issues: (write in the issues causing you stress)		

SOCIAL SITUATIONS	Yes	No
Problems with bullying or harassment at school		
Friendship troubles or concerns		
Understanding crushes or attractions to others		
Other social issue: (write in the issue you are concerned about)		

THINGS THAT WORRY ME	Yes	No
My health or the health of someone I care about		
The way my body looks or feels		
Divorce, separation, or other changes in my family		
My safety at school or on the bus or the safety of myself or others at home		
Someone in my life that is drinking or using drugs in ways that could hurt them		
My family member that is in the military		
Other worries: (write in anything causing you to worry in school, at home, or in your community)		

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Are there any other topics or concerns that you would like to tell us about or would like information about?
