

Understanding the School Counselor-Parent Connection

All students can learn. A student who is troubled, however, cannot learn as easily. School counselors can help. Divorce, substance abuse, child abuse, poverty, violence and suicidal thoughts are among the social stressors placing numerous students at-risk of educational failure and dropping out of school. Early intervention is essential, and parents and guardians play a vital role. A guidance program that provides direct services and is directed by a professionally trained school counselor is a critical component of a school's prevention efforts in the 21st century.

As a parent, your past experiences with a school counselor may be vastly different than what your child will have. Today school counselors are certified, specially trained mental health professionals who focus on prevention and wellness through a counseling program that meets the needs of all students, not just a few. The counseling program addresses three areas: academic, career and personal/social. School counselors advocate, mediate, coordinate, consult, lead and collaborate with teachers, administrators and parents to help students be successful. Professional school counselors also help children to understand themselves.

But just what do school counselors do? Today's school counselors:

- Counsel students individually and/or in groups
- Provide systematic and developmental classroom guidance to all students
- Respond to student needs in crisis situations
- Orient students to new school settings
- Work with absentees, potential dropouts and other at-risk students
- Refer students to special programs and/or services when necessary
- Analyze test results to provide information about abilities, achievement, interests and needs
- Coordinate efforts with other school specialists
- Conduct conferences with parents and facilitate parent discussion groups
- Coordinate staff support activities
- Adhere to ethical and legal standards
- Pursue continuous professional growth and development

All of these activities and duties can make a real difference in students' lives, improving their self-understanding and self-confidence, motivation, decision-making, goal-setting, planning and problem solving, interpersonal relationships, communication skills, respect for others and more.

Studies have shown that children have greater academic achievement when their parents are involved in their education. Motivation, positive attitudes about self and sense of control over their environment improve with parental involvement in the schools. Children from minority and low-income families benefit the most from parental involvement.

You, the parent, are the most important resource for the school counselor and others. Your involvement is critical in helping your child to be successful. Ask the school counselor how you can be more involved in what is happening with your child's education.

Information taken from the American School Counseling Association