

School Bullying Crises: Personal Reflection and Self-Care

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Bullying is a form of youth violence that has been quite prevalent and has been a topic that has received much attention in school counseling literature (James & Gilliland, 2017). The CDC (2019) defines bullying as unwanted and aggressive behavior by another youth or group of youths, who are not siblings, dating, and partners. Bullying involves a perceived power imbalance that is perpetrated by another youth or group of youths in which repeated harm or physical, psychological, and social distress is inflicted upon targeted youth. This issue of bullying in schools is a growing crisis, especially with cyberbullying and the spreading of malicious gossip on social media sites, which has created opportunities for an emotional injury that far extends the reach of bullying behavior. Fast (2016) describes bullying as double-edged-sword, the same power that makes shame an unparalleled disciplinary force also makes it a lethal weapon in the hands of bullies and bigots.

This topic of interest hits home quite personally as someone who has been a victim of bullying. As a future clinician, I had pondered on the notion of self-care and have found it to be an essential practice in the counseling service field, taking care of one's self, is often a priority. However, I do acknowledge that shame, and the act of bullying is a problem crisis that I can relate to and is an issue that deeply resonates with my passion as a future clinician. This paper will be a personal reflection regarding bullying and shame, as well as discussing self-care strategies that can be implemented in dealing with this problem crises.

Bullying affects a large number of students each year. According to the National bullying prevention center (2014), one of our every five (20.2) students report being bullied. A higher percentage of males than female students reported being physically bullied (6% vs. 4%), whereas a higher percentage of female students reported being the subject of rumors (18% vs. %) and being excluded from activities (7% vs. 4%). Bullying can take numerous forms of both physical

and psychological, it can be direct, such as hitting, kicking, or pushing a person. It can be verbal, such as malicious taunting, threatening, and teasing (James & Gilliland, 2017). With such an emerging and growing issue, self-care is a topic of great importance not only in the counseling field, but also for students who have experienced bullying. In my experience bullying has had a negative effect on my self-esteem and self-worth. Additionally, my personality and mindset never allowed me to face my aggressors, who often used aggression as a means of control.

Helping yourself is the first principle that should apply to counselors and students in counseling, I've found that to be an essential principle to apply to my own daily life as well. As a future counselor, we are inclined to take care of our own mental, physical, and spiritual self-care so we can have oxygen to breathe. Although most counselors and counseling students are familiar with self-care, many may find it hard to put to practice. In some instances, it is crucial to understand the problem crises that we may have as counseling students. For my specific problem crises, I have experiences with bullying that has given me great insight to develop empathy with future clients who may have experienced the same issues. Tan (2011) notes that some people may misunderstand the term self-care to mean selfish care or self-centered care for oneself, self-care is for the counselor and is utilizing healthy and wise strategies to take care of oneself. However, as a future counselor taking initiatives to identify problem issues, and develop strategies to is essential to counteract burnout and issues of transference

Self-Care Strategies

The American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2015) identifies self-care as a professional responsibility. It states, "counselors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities" (pg.8). Having wellness physically, mentally, and spiritually are

three factors in being a health counselor. We can offer empathy to a client or hear tragic and emotionally difficult stories but often deplete a counselor's energy. If we are called to be future counselors, we need an outlet to receive things back; otherwise, we can end up depleted with nothing to give to our clients. I have personally found individual psychotherapy sessions to be quite useful. Techniques such as reframing, mindfulness, interpersonal effectiveness, and emotional regulation have been constructive in helping uncover emotional baggage and has helped with reframing particular schemas I believed about myself. Also, activities such as pursuing a hobby, and socializing with friends has become activities that I have actively been using currently to take care of myself. According to Tan (2011) research on self-care and burnout reported that out of 365 predoctoral interns, some of the most frequently used strategies for self-care during internship year were social support from family and friends, active problem solving, and humor.

Burn Out

Burnout is a typical term in the counseling profession because burnouts happen gradually, and occurs when counselors are overworked and unsupported. According to Young and Cashwell (2016) burnout is a state of frustration brought about from working with devotion to the work they do, and they understand the importance of that work. The emotional stakes are higher for mental health counselors, as they often work in high-stakes positions. As counselors the profession requires us to be emotionally attuned to our clients so we can be available, and yet we cannot be effective if we are burned out and lack that attentiveness and availability for our clients. Self-care and burnout are in part a balancing act, and self-care strategies in part are ways in which we try to maintain our effectiveness as a therapist. Although most certainly in their career will face with vicarious trauma. This real phenomenon can acutely affect counselors who

work with clients with significant trauma histories and often counselors are not prepared to recognize the effects of extensive trauma clients (Young and Cashwell, 2016).

Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma should not be confused with the term burnout. American Counseling Association (2019) defines the term vicarious trauma is sometimes called compassion fatigue and is generally described as the phenomenon associated with the cost of caring for others. Some of the signs and symptoms to look out for counselors are: having difficulty talking about their feelings, losing sleep over patients, diminished joy, worried they aren't doing enough, and dealing with intrusive thoughts of their clients dealing with trauma. These are only a fraction of the signs and symptoms but can be quite extensive because vicarious trauma can affect a counselor's personal life, such as interpersonal relationships, behavior, personal values, job performance, and counselor health both emotionally and physically.

Mindfulness is a word that is defined as having the ability to be present to what is happening, to what you are doing, in the space you are in. Mindfulness is commonly associated with Zen Buddhist practice. In the therapeutic context, it is bringing one whole self into the encounter with clients, by being aware of the encounter with the client on several different layers: physically emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually (Young and Cashwell, 2016). When a counselor is practicing mindfulness; they enhance their abilities to gain insight and awareness by examining our minds, as well as developing enhanced attention to our clients. Lemon & Wagner (2013) found that in examples of clients dealing with depression, the client can focus on his or her body and pay attention to the physical manifestations of the depression. Often as counselors, it can be easy to make it a priority in a session to talk about the importance of wellness and mindfulness to a client. Even though, mindfulness is not only a model for wellness but an

appropriate strategy that can be used for counselors to deal with vicarious trauma.

Reflection

As a student in counseling, I have been spending time with friends that I met through fellowship. I have utilized much of time in delving into hobbies that I enjoy such as biking, board games and electronics repair. I've also understood that I need to be aware of my own health, happiness, work, and relationships amidst being in school as a student. As for this assignment I chose bullying in school as a topic because it a topic that evokes feelings of shame and weakness when discussed. I think that the mind-body approach is an important step that can help implement this first step of self-introspection. Since the mind-body approach implements neuroscience to the practice of counseling. Simply put, our brain is incredibly malleable and effective counseling can promote the development of neurons. Through my own experiences in counseling, I have seen changes in not only my thoughts but also my emotions and beliefs. Past events can hold us back, but practicing strategies that bring us back to wholeness can help us succeed.

To conclude there is an emerging trend for a holistic approach towards healing (Iemon & Wagner, 2013). As future counselors the use of intuitive awareness and being mindful and ethical are strong foundational pillars. As a counseling student, I should work towards being comfortable talking about areas of life that evoke certain feelings. It is crucial as a therapist to acknowledge and to work through our feelings. The essential role of the counselor is to maintain and develop a therapeutic relationship. It is vital to keep the core of the counseling relationship intact, rather than letting the relationship or therapeutic alliance shatter.

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