



More counseling evaluation techniques

Ask what the child's favorite TV show is and then ask, "What is one thing that happened on that show that you remember?" This can also be done with fairy tales, movies, bible stories, video games.

Before asking direct questions about relationships with parents ask the child to tell you what a good mother would be like, and what a bad mother would be like. Ditto for a father.

Ask for five magical wishes. A depressed child may not be able to think of five, a deprived child may wish for a million dollars, conflicts in the family may come up, at-risk for school refusal "I hate school" or "I wish I didn't have to go to school."

Ask about the child's first memory and the happiest, saddest, and angriest memories. A depressed child may have trouble remembering being happy or may say they never were happy. The kid who can't remember ever being angry may have anger repression issues. The angriest memory may have clues about the source of hostility at home or school. The saddest memory suggests feelings about a loss, which is usually of a family member but instead they will mention a pet loss.

Ask about daydreams and night dreams. Have them describe one they can remember. Dreams represent unconscious conflicts and coping mechanisms.

Explore their thoughts and feelings about:

School- what do they think about it, likes and dislikes, how about teachers, grades? If they say it's boring, it's okay to agree that some of it is. Ask if they have noticed any times that it was not boring. See if you can form a therapeutic alliance with them by asking if they will let you work with them to make it a little less boring and be able to deal with the boring moments effectively. Point out that just like basic training for the military, school is basic training for life. Like it or not, so may as well make the best of it we can, right? Tell them how you or a student you know got themselves through their school difficulties and had a successful outcome.

Peers- do they have a lot of friends? A best friend? Who is their best friend, describe what they are like and interests they have separate from your own? When did you guys hang out last? Do any friends come over to your house? Social thinking/skills deficits will be revealed if they don't know the name of the best friend, or they moved away two years ago, or nobody comes to their house to play and they don't go to other kids houses. Not to mention if they think their friend has an identical profile of interests without departure. The socially isolated student is going to have mental health problems and self-esteem issues that interfere with school functioning.

Parents and siblings- what they like, what they would change, if you are in a school setting and it seems clear most of the school issues are secondary



to what is happening at home, it may be better to refer the family out to a private counselor.

Ask about what scares or worries the child, and how they handle these or how they get help. Before asking this question, it would be good to preface by saying all children have fears, and give an example. Tell them about another child you knew or tell about a fear you had as a kid. This normalizes fear and makes it more okay to talk about it. If they say they are not afraid of anything or don't have any worries, well, that's pretty diagnostic in and of itself.

If the student has a specific phobia, fear, or bad dream, try this quick and sometimes problem-ending strategy. Have them draw a picture of their fear, be it a monster under the bed, tornado, spiders, failing, whatever, and make the drawing as scary as possible. Give them colored markers and explain that darker colors make the drawing look scarier. When they are done, agree that it would be scary, and then have them draw the same picture as silly as they can. Explain that lighter brighter colors help make a picture look sillier.

Have them draw a picture of "the problem." They can even create a symbol or abstract drawing, it's okay here for the counselor to not know what the problem is, so this can be good if the student says he knows what the problem is but doesn't want to talk about it. Next have them make a picture of "All better." Finally, put the problem on the student's left side, all better on their right, and a blank sheet of paper in the middle. "Now make a picture or symbol for what needs to happen between here on the left, and here on the right, to make the problem better. This is a strategy borrowed from hypnotherapy and while brief, sometimes creates effective and lasting change. Remember there are only hard problems, no hard solutions. The solution is always easy once you know what it is. This is also a good strategy to try for a student who has cognitive or language delays.

Make a t-chart of strengths and weaknesses, or what I'm good at, what I like about myself, and what I need to work on. If they can't think of much that's good, suspect low self-esteem problems to work on. Find out from parents and teachers and help them list positive traits. Some kids will be extremely defensive and say they don't have any weaknesses or things to work on. You may have to identify what is a source of pain or frustration for the latter type of child response in order to establish a therapeutic alliance.

Observe the child in class, on the playground, during lunch, or in PE.

Play a structured therapeutic game, followed by unstructured play time. During unstructured play time, if you ask a question watch what they do next, as they may act out a real answer they don't put into words for you. How do they react to a perceived failure? Do they persist, give up, want to leave? If they get overstimulated are they able to calm themselves? Reluctance to play indicates significant anxiety. A family autocrat will assert that they already have all these toys, and better ones, or they will say "I know all these games. Deprived or dependent children may want to take a toy home.



Do some projective stories or a Despert fable. If you had to go live on a deserted island and you could take one person, who would you take with you? Or, there was a baby bird in a nest with a mother and father. The baby bird could almost fly. A big wind came and blew the mother bird one way and the father bird another way. What happened to the baby bird? How did it end for the mother and father birds?

Deserted island responses for school-aged child:

Normal- friend

Deprived- God, Jesus, angel

Rivalrous, hurt, or neglected child- go alone, take a sibling or pet

Fearful or obsessive- Superman, superhero- may be an immature dependent child still struggling with oedipal conflict parent

Baby bird- gives clues about the child's fears about being hurt, overall security, reaction to separation and abandonment, hopelessness or trust, feelings of readiness to make it alone and become independent, confidence to cope with dangers, tendencies toward magical solutions.

Ask them to tell a made-up story with a moral or lesson. This can give insight into their internal conflicts, frustrations, defenses.

Do sentence completions.

Kinetic School Drawing (ask them to draw themselves in school, including as many details as they can think of, and include a teacher and at least one other student),
House-tree-person test.

If they seem very depressed ask if they are ever bothered by thoughts of suicide, and if they say yes, be ready to screen them with a suicide screening document, and notify the parents and campus administrator.

If the presenting problems are somatic, have them draw the pain. They can outline the place where the pain is located and draw the size and shape of the pain. Would the pain like to move to a safer, more open part of the body? Can they imagine breathing healing air or light into the pain and make it a little better? How intense is the pain on a scale from 1-10?