

Counseling Theory Paper:  
Theoretical Perspective as a Professional School Counselor  
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**Introduction**

As a counselor, being aware of the theoretical approaches and which ones fit more effectively in your perspective on human nature, problems, and change for an individual is essential. Not only is understanding the approaches important, but the counselor's self-knowledge of his or her own values, life philosophy, and worldview is equally vital for the counselor to do his or her job effectively.

This paper will cover multiple theories, such as solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT), rational emotive behavioral therapy (REBT), and person-centered therapy. These theories correlate with the author's own perspectives and beliefs. The view of human nature, the nature of problem, the process of change, and how the author uses the theories in practice are the four main topics that will be discussed in the paper. These topics will also explain, in detail, the effectiveness of each theory and the counselor's role.

**View of Human Nature**

My personal perspective of human nature is that humans are shaped by the world around them. We choose whether we do good or bad based upon our experiences. For example, when a situation arises, we either choose to continue or cease doing what brought about the situation; if we see something that happened to another person, we either choose to do that same thing or to avoid doing it. The interactions, relationships, and everyday activities that humans choose to have are all based on events that have occurred throughout a person's life. I believe that, while the immediate environment and

upbringing that a human has will always be a part of that person's life, it does not define them or hold them back from what they want to become.

My view of human nature is most compatible with two therapies; rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) and person-centered therapy. REBT's view of human nature is that humans are born with the potential for both rational and irrational thinking, along with a tendency toward the latter and to needlessly disturb oneself. REBT also believes that a person has the capacity to change his or her cognitive emotive and behavioral processes. Most importantly, REBT encourages people to accept themselves even though they will make mistakes (Corey, 2013).

Person-centered therapy's view of human nature is that humans are capable of self-understanding and self-direction. A person is able to make constructive changes and live effective and productive lives. Carl Rogers believed that if the counselor is able to experience and communicate his or her realness, support, caring, and nonjudgmental understanding to the client, then significant changes are most likely to occur in the client (Corey, 2013).

As a school counselor I feel that it is essential to build a positive relationship with the students, along with helping the student understand the importance of accepting mistakes. The role of the counselor is to, first, build trust then work together with the student to resolve situations. I feel the process of helping the students understand that mistakes happen and accepting themselves is an essential role for counselors.

### **The Nature of Problems**

I believe that it is not just one situation in a person's life that defines his or her problems. I feel that multiple factors play a role, such as gender, race,

socioeconomic status, sexual identity, religion, expectations, and personal appearance. I also feel that a counselor must view problems not solely based on the situation but also the person's history.

REBT therapy is similar to my view for nature of problems. I believe that many people have irrational beliefs that they follow, which then in turn causes problems. According to Corey, irrational ideas led to self-defeating behavior (2013). An example of irrational idea is that unhappiness results from outside events, so therefore a person has no control over such despair. Another example is that running away from difficulties and responsibilities is easier than facing them. Understanding irrational ideas is beneficial as school counselor because many students will have these thoughts. My goal is to help students understand their irrational thoughts and assist them in changing self-defeating behaviors or views.

### **The Process of Change**

A person's perspective of their problem is not easy to change and will take multiple steps. These steps are different for every counselor based upon his or her perspective and/or process of counseling. I believe that everyone has been through many life experiences to define themselves. Even if two counselors solely based their practice on solution-focused brief therapy, they both will be focusing on different points throughout the session.

For me, I feel the first step must be building a therapeutic relationship with my student. If I do not build a positive rapport, my student may not be as open with me and the process of change could take much longer. Building a therapeutic relationship consists of establishing empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard.

The theory that seems most congruent with my view of my beginning process of change is person-centered therapy. After the therapeutic relationship is built, the counselor will then help the student to achieve a greater degree of independence and assist the student with their growth process. This will help the student cope with their current and future problems. Afterwards, the student and counselor will focus on possibilities, not problems, meaning they will work together to come up with solutions. This is where solution-focused brief therapy comes into the process of change (Corey, 2013). It is important to remember that the student must see that there is a problem before the goal is established. A positive therapeutic relationship with students is important because a lot of the students do not view anything wrong with their behaviors and do not feel that they need to change (Corey, 2013).

Once the student sees that there is a problem, establishing an effective process of change occurs. As the counselor, I will be helping the student focus on the positive, or what is going well in their life. Focusing on the positive will help the student see the good things in life rather than the bad. This process is similar to solution focused brief therapy (Corey, 2013).

### **My Theory in Practice**

As a school counselor, I need to help every student develop a positive lifestyle and social interest. My goal is to establish positive self-esteem, and to help students understand the importance of valuing cooperation over competition. When I am counseling students, I will be using different approaches based on situations that occur. My approach will be different for each student because my approach pertains solely on the situation. The techniques, strategies, and tools that I believe will assist in the process

of change will also be based on each individual's situation. For example, when I need a quick solution to a problem, I will use solution-focused techniques. If I have a student who needs long-term counseling, I would be using more person-centered or rational emotive behavioral therapy. Each day is unique as a school counselor and students present different problems throughout the day.

According to Wood (2007), one of the most common problems facing youth that can negatively impact many areas of their lives, such as school performance, is excessive anxiety. "Children who are highly anxious may be overly reticent, may avoid peer interaction, or may act in a less competent manner when around peers because of preoccupation with threat and an inability to focus on the social cues at hand" (Wood, 2007, pg. 345). The process of REBT could help those students who are anxious about situations that occur in school. Wood's study found that rational emotive behavior therapy was helpful for the students who had anxiety (Wood, 2007).

A major concern that is presented to school counselors is student performance in the schools. Students are considered at-risk youth when they do not meet the academic performances or have behavioral problems. One study examined the impact of solution-focused therapy with such students (Corcoran, 1998). According to Corcoran (1998), they set up concrete goals that are achievable within a brief time period for these at-risk students. There was a three step process: the counselor making a goal, the counselor placing responsibility for change on the student, and applying change in the desired direction and allowing the student to take credit for changes made (Corcoran, 1998). This study shows the benefits of using a step process technique, based on solution-

focused therapy, and gives another example of how important therapy is in a school setting.

While working in a school it is essential to build rapport with not only the students but also the staff members. Meeting with teachers will provide information about situations that occur in the classroom, as a school counselor is not able to be involved in the classroom at all times. The information received from the teachers will help me prepare for my weekly psychological educational presentations in the classrooms. As a school counselor, I not only have individual and group meetings with students, but also go into classrooms to educate students on academic success, career guidance, and personal/social development. (Fisher, Masia-Warner, & Klein, 2010).

Another topic that is important to understand and comprehend is how to assist students in the process of change when a traumatic event occurs. “Traumatic events are typically defined as incidents that are perceived as terrifying, shocking, sudden, or that potentially pose a threat to one’s life, safety, or personal integrity” (Black, Woodworth, Tremblay, & Carpenter, 2012, pg. 192). Some examples of traumatic events about which a school counselor may hear is students who have faced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, being a victim of or witnessing a crime, abuse in the household, surviving a natural disaster, or a school shooting. As a school counselor, it is important to remember that a traumatic event is subjective and if the student is genuinely traumatized then the student will experience the negative effects associated with trauma. REBT is used in the case of a traumatic situation that occurred in a student’s life (Black, Woodworth, Tremblay, & Carpenter, 2012). However, REBT is not the only therapy that can be used to help students with traumatic events.

Another article explains how the need is great for effective treatment approaches for children and adolescents exposed to trauma. According to Wethington et al. (2008) group interventions for children who are effected by natural disasters or school shootings are highly important and results showed that symptoms of depression and anxiety were reduced when cognitive behavioral therapy, specifically rational emotive behavioral therapy, was used.

### **Summary**

As a professional school counselor, I plan to have a self-integrated theoretical orientation that combines solution-focused brief therapy, rational emotive behavioral therapy, and person-centered therapy. There are many environmental factors that strongly influence youth perspective, though biological factors play a role as well. Each student presents unique challenges, which require different approaches to help the student. However, I will use solution-focused based techniques most often while working in the school.

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