NCCA

Carolina Counselor

Spring 2021

Official Newsletter of the North Carolina Counseling Association

Carolina Counselor

Official Newsletter of the NCCA

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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2021 NCCA Annual
Conference
a Success!

·

NCCA Supports
Interstate Compact for
Licensure Portability

·

Happy New Year!

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Carolina Counselor Sections

Branch News:
News about the North Carolina branch of the American Counseling Association

Campus Happenings:
News concerning student projects and student work in the department, university, community, and/or professional organizations such as local chapters of CSI and/or state, regional, and national counseling organizations

Diversity and Advocacy:
Discussion of issues related to diversity, multicultural competency, and advocacy; may address the helping professions directly or indirectly

Division News:
Any news related to NCCA division projects

Higher Education in NC:
Comments on the state of higher education in North Carolina and tips for effective teaching/counseling

Legislative News:
State and national news concerning enacted and proposed policy changes related to professional counselors in any setting

Member Spotlight:
NCCA members who deserve the spotlight! Please provide a photo of the nominee, a short summary of the member's accomplishments, and contact information/photo of your nominee

Perspectives From the Field:
Professional and ethical issues in counseling, counseling theory/practice, and/or reflections on work as a student, professional counselor, counselor supervisor, and/or counselor educator

NCCA membership is required to submit articles.

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2021 NCCA Annual Conference a Success!
Stronger Together: Building for the Future of Professional Counseling

21 Contact Hours Offered Synchronously Online

14 Additional Home Study Hours Included

Branch News

2021 NCCA Annual Conference a Success!
February 24-27, 2021

NCCA 2021 Virtual Conference by the Numbers

430 Attendees

176 Presenters

92 Live sessions

40 Community Board discussion topics

25 Volunteers

21 Contest and prize winners

16 Graduate student poster sessions

15 Awards presented (NCCA and division)

14 Recorded sessions offered for additional credit

10 Virtual meet ups

9 Divisions hosting exhibit booths, meet ups and annual meetings

7 Sponsors (3 Platinum, 2 Silver and 2 Bronze)

6 Exhibitors

4 Pre-conference sessions

2 Career Connect panels

2 Game nights

1 Keynote speaker, Dr. Kent Butler

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Branch News

2021 NCCA Annual Conference a Success!
February 24-27, 2021

Most Popular Sessions

Breaking the Barrier: Creative Expressions via Telehealth Counseling

Counseling Theory and Practical Applications for Learning and Teaching Resilience

Helping Clients Process Grief and Loss

Keynote: Humanizing Diversity: Stronger Together

Join us Next Year!

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Diversity and Advocacy

Supporting Parents/Guardians in Broaching Conversations on Race

Regina Gavin Williams and Alyx Beckwith

As individuals experience the impact of racial discrimination, economic disparities, and unequal access to mental health care occurring within communities; there appears to be an increased need for counselors to engage in social justice advocacy within their professional practice. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCCs, Ratts et. al, 2015) were developed in part to address the role counselors have in engaging in social justice advocacy strategies in order to address the inequities occurring within multiple systems. In this regard, counselors in communities and schools can play a pertinent role as social justice advocates with and for children, adolescents, and their families. For instance, social injustice concerns within K-12 schools are embedded in issues related to race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability status; which have a negative impact on students' outcomes (Williams & Greenleaf, 2012). These concerns expose the need for professionals to address any environmental factors that can impede a student's academic, social/emotional, and career development (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009).

Research shows parents who identify as White are more likely to avoid discussing race, racism, or using racial labels in conversation with their children; and in instances when it is discussed, tend to take a color-blind approach (Perry et

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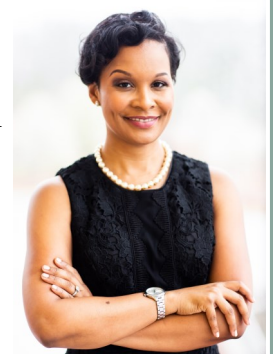
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al., 2019). Yet, it is noted that children and adolescents have an awareness of the abstract ideas related to race and racism (Risman & Banerjee, 2013). Children will often create their own understanding and interpretation of complex social issues in the absence of parents' or guardians' direct communication about race and racism (Vittrup, 2018). In order to create an understanding in the absence of "explicit parent-child conversations about race," children tend to seek out information from media, peers, and other sources to make sense of what they experience of racial issues (Vittrup, 2018, p. 672). Herein, counselors must recognize the need to provide support for parents/guardians in facilitating a color conscious approach to addressing race-related issues with children and adolescents.

One general approach to achieving this goal is for counselors to share strategies that might aid parents/guardians in broaching conversations related to racial issues with their children/adolescents. We recognize these recommendations presented should not be taken as a 'one-size-fits-all' approach (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020). Counselors and parents should also consider various factors as it relates to identity and family dynamics, which is further noted within the literature.

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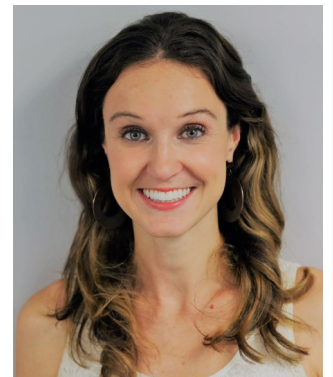
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Benefits of Communicating Racial Issues to Children and Adolescents
Communicating with children and adolescents about race-related issues and racism can be beneficial to their moral development. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986, 1991) posits that parents "play a multifaceted role in their child's moral development" by encouraging behavioral expectations, suggesting options for problem solving, modeling their own behaviors, and engaging in discipline (Eisenberg & Valiente, 2002, p. 113). Findings from empirical studies (Walker & Hennig, 1999; Walker and Taylor, 1991) examining the moral development of children, indicate that attentively asking youth for their opinions and views on real -life scenarios, reflecting back what they share, and checking to ensure their meaning are all predictive of children's growth (Eisenberg & Valiente, 2002).

Data also indicates teaching children about racism results in the children endorsing more positive, and less negative, views toward Black Americans than children who did not receive any lessons about racism (Hughes et al., 2007). Research shows that when children are taught to discuss race and ethnicity in a constructive manner, they develop empathy for other individuals, gain an understanding of their own identity, display less racial bias, avoid being involved in systems that might perpetuate structural inequality, and acquire new perspectives (Sullivan et al., 2021). It is clear, if facilitated effectively, parents broaching conversations related to race have a positive impact on their child's development.

How Counselors Support Parents/Guardians in Having Color Conscious Conversations
Sullivan et al. (2021) suggest it is vital to provide parents with an understanding that is scientifically-grounded of how early some youth might actually develop the capacity for reasoning about race, and provide encouragement and support in the steps it might take for parents to engage in conversations about race with their

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children. Montoya and Sarcedo (2018) contend that "too early is better than too late" for children to learn about racism (p. 71). In this regard, counselors can encourage parents/guardians to take a color conscious approach to broaching earlier conversations on race; that is, take the opportunity to both acknowledge and discuss race-related issues with their children (Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup, 2018).

Moreover, counselors who work with children and teenagers are knowledgeable about the developmental stages of the youth with whom they work. They can share with parents/guardians ways to have developmentally appropriate dialogues about race. Counselors can recommend that parents and caregivers use open-ended questions to explore their child's thoughts, emotions, questions, and opinions about race; and how to avoid lecturing. By suggesting books about diversity and multicultural experiences written by authors of color and the use of art materials, such as skin color markers and paints (Lee et al., 2008), counselors can help parents think practically about how to broach conversations about race and racism. Research from the field of children's literature highlights the need for both "mirror books" and "window books" (Tschida et al., 2014). Mirror books reflect the identities and stories of the youth who are reading them; window books provide a look into a world or experiences previously unknown to the reader.

Additionally, counselors can encourage parents and guardians to begin to reflect on how race operates in their own lives, and how they understand the existence of racism in America; which is a key first step in discussing these issues with youth (Husband, 2012). Self-reflection can "deepen a capacity for self-understanding and bring coherence" to emotions, worldviews, and relationships with one's children (Siegel & Hartzell, 2013). Likewise, it is important for counselors to also reflect

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on their views about race and racism before engaging in efforts to support parents and caregivers in these discussions.

Resources

Counselors can share resources with parents/guardians both to aid in the self-knowledge and self-reflection component for adults, and to provide developmentally appropriate resources that parents can use with their children and teenagers to broach conversations on race. There is a myriad of free or low-cost resources on understanding the historical and structural foundations of systemic racism; learning more about issues or privilege and marginalization; and how to raise these topics with youth. These resources include:

- The Anti-Racist Resource Guide compiled by Victoria Alexander: https://www.victorialynnalexander.com/antiracistresourceguide
- Anti-Racism Resources compiled by Vanessa Soleil: https://www.antiracismresources.info
- The Great Unlearn by Rachel Cargle: https://rachel-cargle.com/the-great-unlearn/
- The Conscious Kid (https://www.theconsciouskid.org), an educational and research organization that seeks to promote equity and racial identity development in youth. Conscious Kid provides numerous resources for children of all ages.
- PBS Kids for Parents: Talking to Young Children about Race and Racism: https://www.pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism
- UNICEF-Talking to your Kids about Racism: https://www.unicef.org/parenting/talking-to-your-kids-about-racism

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Division News

NCACES Division Spotlight: Liberty University's Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program
Karin Dumont & Courtney Evans-Thompson

We would love to share with you some highlights from our online Masters of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Liberty University. Due to the online nature of the program, we have students from all over enrolled; however, we also specifically have many students from the state of North Carolina.

The MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Liberty University entails a 60-credit hour master's degree that includes a practicum and 2 semesters of internship; and can be completed in as little as 2 years for enthusiastic students. As defined by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), this online program provides students with the training, knowledge, and experience needed to become a clinical mental health counselor. This degree is accredited by CACREP, demonstrating that the training and expertise have met a high standard of excellence, which is exciting for us.

Our program will equip students to work with individuals, families, and groups in treating mental health and behavioral problems. This online counseling degree develops and enhances an understanding of counseling and human behavior through field-tested techniques and best practices for promoting the mental health and holistic wellness of clients in diverse communities. The program provides students with what they will need to gain North Carolina state licensure and become a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor.

The program stands out for other reasons as well. A major focus over the past few years has been to enrich the understanding of the role of counselor advocacy and the development of counselor identity. Advocacy has been infused throughout the courses to assist students in developing an awareness and plan on how to continue to create this in their identity as they move into the professional counselor role. Along with integrating more advocacy and social justice within the courses,

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Division News

NCACES Division Spotlight: Liberty University's Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program

the Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies began a Courageous Conversations with Counselor Educators opportunity for the students and faculty. These began within the last year and offer the students the ability to join with faculty as we face and support each other with challenges individually, politically, socially, and spiritually. Through these interactions students, faculty, the program, the department, the university, and our profession of counseling grow and enhance. Such events are important, and even necessary, when seeking to accomplish the goal of training counselors who are self-reflective and culturally aware.

The MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Liberty University is online, but fully committed to engage in the lives of the students enrolled. One way we assist students even more as an online program is by ensuring each student not only has an academic advisor, but also a faculty advisor. Some of the roles of the faculty advisor include: assisting his or her advisees with information about careers in counseling; encouraging them in the development of their counselor identity; sharing his or her experiences within the profession; assisting with questions or concerns about the counseling program; providing encouragement; and assisting advisees in understanding practicum, internship, and the process of licensure. We also advocate for our advisees and aid them in obtaining additional services or providing suggestions to enhance their learning experience.

Altogether, the program provides students with a strong academic foundation to develop as professional counselors and supports them in creating a confident, responsible, and progressive counselor identity.

Kind regards, Karin Dumont and Courtney Evans-Thompson

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Division News

NCGSA Call for Mentors

The NCGSA (graduate student association of NCCA) needs mentors!

We have about 20 students who have asked for professional mentors.

If you are willing to mentor a future counselor, please reach out to Candace Patterson at cnpatterson21@gmail.com

Division News

Military and Government Counseling Association of North Carolina
Suzy Vaile

My name is Suzy Vaile, and I am the Graduate School representative for the Military and Government Counseling Association of NC. I am a graduate student at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC and am an Army brat, born at Fort Hood, Texas. My father was a 30-year Army veteran who served multiple tours in Vietnam; the Army proved to be an amazing life for our family. I am thrilled to be a part of this group in NCCA, and our group has recently made our focus seeking advocacy for clinical counselors working to provide care for veterans and their families, as well as licensure reciprocity for counselors. We are passionate about helping military families and are seeking new members in all areas of North Carolina to help with the progression of our cause. We are in the planning stages for the division, and would love to hear from military families on how we can best serve them. Whether you are a graduate student or a professional counselor, come join the team to make a difference for our military families. Let's work together with our military communities to see how we can best serve them.

Questions? Contact our President, Megan Numbers at megan@playtherapyofthepines.com

Suzy Vaile is the Graduate School representative for the Military and Government Counseling Association of NC. She is a graduate student at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC

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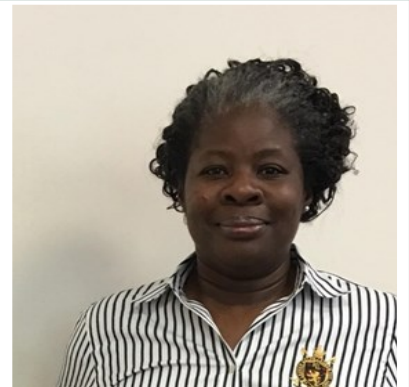
Higher Education in NC

Navigating the Collective Grief of the Counseling Profession: Reflections of Group Supervision during a Pandemic

Sherri Ford-Jacobs, Chelsea Cochrane, Erica Jimenez & Katie Moran

Collateral Damage and Beyond

We assembled for what all of us thought would be a typical group supervision session consisting of the supervisor (Sherri) and three supervisees/future colleagues (Chelsea, Erica, and Katie) all of whom are co-authors of this article. We are 4 women holding various sociopolitical identities with similarities and differences that, in many ways, represent a microcosm of United States society. Group supervision began with Chelsea leading a round table discussion on the exacerbation of the COVID-19 pandemic stressors within our winter seasonal context, and the subsequent implications for the counseling profession. As our group began to discuss the ways in which each of us has been affected by the pandemic, a theme emerged that could not be explained by direct trauma or exposure to the pandemic; but instead, by the *absence of what was*. The collateral damage caused by COVID-19 is quantifiable in countless ways, however, the phenomenon our group explored is the exhaustion attributed to *grieving* the pre-COVID-19 counseling profession. The grieving our group became aware of felt consigned and universal to the counseling profession, as we enter almost a full year of compromising and bargaining our professional identities with the *new*

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Navigating the Collective Grief of the Counseling Profession: Reflections of Group Supervision during a Pandemic
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normal shaped by COVID-19. Holding physical space with our students, supervisees, and clients has become the exception to our now highly-virtual profession, and we struggle to achieve the connection and healing that is created through proxemics and kinesics of face to face interactions. Similarly, challenges exist for the instructor-student and supervisor-supervisee dyads that are primarily virtual and lack the spatial congruence of in person meetings. Hence, managing proxemics and kinesics of counseling profession activities taking place over a virtual medium is becoming increasingly important and an area our group recommends to be a center of focus in future research.

Seasonal mental health concerns are compounded by the cataclysmic effects of COVID-19, as this pandemic permeates every facet of our humanity, particularly our mental health. Overconsumption of media has been perpetuated by confinement to our homes, and has introduced new avenues for vicarious trauma as we repeatedly stream recorded events like the Breonna Taylor case/verdict, the public murder of George Floyd, and most recently, the seizing of our Nation's Capital by domestic terrorists. Consequently, the counseling profession is

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required to operate within an increasingly complex and dynamic environment; one that has resulted from longstanding sociopolitical issues colliding with a destruction filled pandemic.

Who is Helping the Helpers?

The implications of COVID-19 to the counseling profession are numerous and are far too many to name. The counseling profession, and honestly all helping professions, are becoming overextended, burned out, medically ill, and just plain exhausted. Increased mental health concerns due to increased death, job loss, and sick family members, just to name a few, have left our supervision group asking "who is helping the helpers?" The answer is: we are left to collectively help ourselves, in addition to helping others. Thus, now more than ever, self-care is no longer an option, it must become a mandate (Corey et al., 2017). Additionally, a renewed focus on peer support and collaboration at all levels may provide increased opportunities for the counseling profession to generate internal support for one another. Lastly, taking our own counseling advice of recognizing and focusing on changing that which is within our control, and not engaging in

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excessive worry, anxiety, and energy expenditure on what is not within our control would prove beneficial for everyone.

Stronger Together

Providing anti-oppressive counselor education, counselor supervision, and counseling services, now more than ever, requires our profession to operate from a praxis of social justice. Marginalized groups have been negatively affected by COVID-19 disproportionately, and the counseling profession must be cognizant of the emergence of additional barriers making access to services even more of a challenge. Therefore, this article is a call for all members of the counseling profession to elevate their level of social justice engagement. Social justice, when operationalized, is about taking action and doing. While we acknowledge and appreciate all the hard work many are already doing, 2021 has to become the year of doing more. Not merely talking more, meeting more, writing more, and thinking more; but actually doing more.

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As a final point, in support of operationalizing our North Carolina Counseling Association (NCCA) 2021 conference theme "Stronger Together", we challenge ourselves and each member of the counseling profession to identify and engage in at least one more action involving social justice practices than they did in 2020. The counseling profession, and all that it encompasses, really is "Stronger Together"!

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Perspectives from the Field

Masks and the Therapeutic Alliance
Bailey MacLeod

The impact of the past year has certainly touched every single aspect of our lives. Much like our clients, counselors are struggling with the impact of a pandemic, political and social upheaval, and economic stress. The changes have also forced counselors to adapt in ways we could not have predicted or prepared for; making the time especially stressful when it comes to providing care to clients and students. While these accommodations are necessary for counselors to continue providing services in a way that protects everyone's safety, they may have unexpected and surprising consequences that can creep into the therapeutic relationship. In my work as a licensed clinical mental health counselor in private practice, I've noticed the requirement of face masks in session have brought about a range of reactions from clients.

Our society has had a complicated relationship with face masks since the inception of the pandemic. Drawn largely across political lines, there are some who strongly believe that wearing a face mask is one part of a series of steps to curb the pandemic and protect others from illness. Others believe that face masks are more of a hindrance than a help and their requirement interferes with an individual's right to autonomy and freedom. Whether we intend to or not, our approach to face masks may send a signal of which side we stand on in this debate. However, my concern as a counselor when it comes to face masks had to do with the process of our work. We communicate so much non-verbally through

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facial expressions alone. How can I do my job properly if half of all communication is hidden from myself and my clients?

Teletherapy was a common, although not perfect, solution to this dilemma; however, not all clients have the confidential space to do teletherapy, nor do they feel comfortable with the technology. After weighing the pros and cons for myself personally and professionally, I decided it was best to offer teletherapy sessions and in-person sessions with the requirement of face masks at all times.

For the most part, clients were accepting and understanding of these options. However, a number of clients had some interesting reactions to the in-session mask mandate. One client would come in each week asking, "Are we okay?" even though nothing had changed in our working relationship. Another, less subtle, client told me that he was against the masks in session because he was concerned about being "judged" by me and would take up a good portion of his session each week complaining about it. A young woman visibly recoiled at the mention of masks in session.

The concept of visibility in counseling goes back to the early days of "talk therapy" with Freud. Freud understood that people's reactions to the therapist changed when they could no longer see him; and they began to have unusual reactions mirroring relationships with important people from their pasts. (Freud also utilized the couch because he was tired of clients looking at him all day [McWilliams, 1994]). Freud coined this phenomenon "transference" and believed the analysis of this transference was vital to a client's success in therapy (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). No other time has this concept become clearer than with the mask mandate in session. Without non-verbal feedback, clients' assumptions about what a therapist is thinking or feeling becomes more apparent and can provide rich information to explore in the here-and-now (McWilliams, 2004). On a broader perspective, this may even explain the large

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Masks and the Therapeutic Alliance
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amount of dissent towards masks in our society in general.

How can this be used clinically? I have found that clients with strong reactions towards masks tend to start off with more severe interpersonal difficulties. If anything, this can provide an opportunity to explore the origins of their interactions in the here-and-now of the therapeutic relationship. It can be helpful to provide a rationale for the use of masks in session (i.e., health and safety of everyone), and provide possible explanations for their sudden, strong reactions to you as the therapist. Even making the observation of how their reactions started at the time of the in-session mask mandate can open the door to exploration about why the introduction of masks has suddenly become so disruptive to the therapeutic relationship. Even though some clients have found the introduction of masks to be initially disruptive to the therapeutic process, the exploration and processing of these reactions can open the door to new and insightful paths in a client's journey of self-understanding and growth.

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FIVE MINDFUL STRATEGIES TO REDUCE RELAPSE RISK IN ADDICTED CLIENTS

FRIDAY, APRIL 9TH, 12-2PM

THIS WORKSHOP HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR UP TO 2 CONTACT HOURS SS BY THE NORTH CAROLINA SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE BOARD. APPROVAL # 21-281-S.
UP TO 2 NBCC CLOCK HOURS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE UPON COMPLETION.

This free training will explore the theory, research and practice of various mindfulness philosophies and interventions as related to relapse prevention in addiction counseling. The focus will be on 5 specific mindfulness-based strategies that clients can use in everyday life as a mediator of relapse craving and triggers.

Learning Objectives
- Learn an operational definition of mindfulness and its usefulness in preventing or reducing relapse in clients with SUDs.
- Conduct a critical review of relapse models and discuss the efficacy of these models.
- Introduce and provide experiential exploration of five mindful strategies to reduce relapse potential.
- Learn how to measure mindfulness and use as a tracking intervention.

Dr. Mark Schwarze, LCMHCS, LCAS, NCC, CCS is an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Development and Psychological Counseling and Director of the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. He also coordinates the Addiction Counseling Certificate housed in the CMHC Program.

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AN INTERACTIVE EXPLORATION OF TELEMENTAL HEALTH BEST PRACTICE AND ETHICS FOR INDIVIDUAL THERAPY

Presented by Drs. Dominique Hammonds and Christina Rosen

FRIDAY, APRIL 16TH, 9AM-12PM

UP TO 3 NBCC CLOCK HOURS ARE AVAILABLE UPON COMPLETION

As a result of the pandemic, behavioral health care providers rapidly adjusted to a "new normal", with telemental health becoming a mainstay for many practitioners and clients. Now is the time to tune-up your policies, check your Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act security processes and protocols, review ethical considerations, and interactively explore strategies around providing both telemental health and in-office therapy to individual clients.

Objectives: Attendees will:
1) Describe telemental health protocols and ethical considerations
2) Discuss ways to overcome challenges such as confidentiality and other common concerns
3) Learn strategies to perform a health check on their policies and procedures for telemental and in-office security of Protected Health Information.

Dominique Hammonds, Ph.D., LCMHC, NCC, BC-TMH is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Human Development and Psychological Counseling at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. Her scholarship and professional service activities center around a variety of subjects including: a) culturally responsive teaching, counseling and clinical supervision, b) creative teaching and supervision methods, and c) technology in counseling.

Christina Rosen, EdD., LCMHCS, LCAS, CCS, ICADC, NCC is a Professor in the Human Development and Psychological Counseling Department at Appalachian State University. Her experience includes over 28 years as a Licensed Clinical Counselor, 23 years as a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor, and 13 years as a Counselor Educator.

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Perspectives from the Field

Less Screen Time More Green Time: Ecotherapy in the School Setting

Allyson Murphy

Anxiety and depression in adolescents have increased steadily for years (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020); and though it is too soon to see lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that anxiety, depression, and other mental health needs will continue to rise in youth (Loades, et al. 2020). Research shows the detrimental physiological and psychological effects prolonged screen-time has on children and adolescents (Lissak, 2018). While technology allows students to connect virtually, screen addiction may be exacerbated by online learning. The effects of COVID-19 have also caused many living in urban areas to have even less exposure to nature through the use of public parks and other public spaces (McCunn, 2020).

With knowledge of these adverse ramifications, it is imperative for school counselors to incorporate programs that support student's social emotional wellness and ability to foster connection with self and others. While mindfulness has gained momentum recently in schools, so has the implementation of nature-based programming (Ozer, 2007). Similar to traditional mindfulness practices like meditation, research indicates that spending time in nature, helps individuals feel a greater sense of peace, calm, and connectedness to oneself and others (Bahamonde, 2019; Harris, 2017). This literature will show how ecotherapy is an

Allyson Murphy is in her final semester of the Professional School Counseling graduate program at Appalachian State University. She is passionate about advocating for and supporting students and hopes to incorporate her love of outdoor education (what originally brought her into this field) into her future professional work.
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effective way to support students as they cope with the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a study on the benefits of horticultural school counselors in urban Title 1 schools, there were promising findings that included students gaining a sense of responsibility and compassion from tending to plants in their classrooms as well as creating an aspect of school culture that could involve the greater community (Bahamonde, 2019). Participants also noted that vertical gardens, which are space and cost effective, allowed students to have the greatest sense of belonging, accomplishment, and happiness (Bahmonde, 2019).

School gardens can also connect schools with community stakeholders through equity-based collaborative efforts (Harrison, 2009). Researchers investigating the holistic, not just nutritional, health benefits of community gardens found that even when community garden members did not have prior interest in gardening, continual involvement was motivated by the desire for positive social contact (Harris, 2017). As schools are a microcosm of the greater community, it is reasonable to suggest that links exist between social justice competencies, such as students from diverse backgrounds collaboratively working together and fostering positive social contact (i.e. peer relationships) with each other inside and outside the school setting (Harrison, 2009; Teaching Tolerance, n.d).

School gardens can also facilitate a space for group learning alongside classmates (Ozer, 2007). Given that gardening relies on diverse strengths, students who do not perform as well academically may find leadership and confidence through experiential learning involving visual-spatial considerations, physical strength, etc. (Ozer, 2007). An apt reference (and fitting last name) for the purpose of this review, one would be remiss not to connect Howard Gardner's seminal theory of

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multiple intelligences (1983), to these findings. By positing eight types of intelligence exist, developmental psychologist Gardner suggested that intelligence exists across numerous domains with the final amended type of intelligence being "the naturalist," someone with unique abilities to care and tend to nature (Phillips, 2010).

Nature-Based Child-Centered Play Therapy is another domain of ecotherapy whose early research shows promise (Swank, 2014). Utilizing child-centered play therapy, as established by Gary Landreth, researchers conducted case studies of elementary students with identified behavioral issues (Swank, 2014). At school, children participated in individual sessions where the counseling room was replaced with the outdoors and their "toys" consisted of natural objects (leaves, sticks, rocks) and minimal extra supplies (i.e. shovels and buckets). Upon completion of the intervention, three of the four students showed behavioral improvement (Swank, 2014).

Creating a school-wide ecotherapy program is an ambitious task, and school counselors should feel encouraged to start small while aligning programming with relevant ASCA-identified student mindsets and behaviors. A few suggested interventions for the comprehensive school counselor to implement through MTSS are as follows. As part of a Tier 1 program for all students, encourage teachers to keep plants in their classroom and assign care of the plants (watering, ensuring light exposure if needed, etc.) as jobs for students. During classroom lessons, facilitate student dialogue centered on responsibility, compassion and care as it relates to these plants and connect this with their own responsibility to be a compassionate and caring friend. Tier 2 interventions can include facilitating group sessions for students with anxiety where they can take part in nature-based mindfulness practices such as creating nature mandalas. Lastly, while it is critical

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that counselors conducting Child-Centered Play Therapy have a thorough understanding of this theory and practice, counselors with less experience can still utilize outdoor environments in Tier 3 individual sessions. For instance, a student could do grounding exercises experiencing their senses while holding an item from nature such a stick, leaf, or seashell.

Utilizing ecotherapy through nature-based programming in the school setting is an effective way for school counselors to support student social emotional development, bolster student sense of belonging through culturally sensitive programming, and mitigate negative mental health ramifications caused by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Happy New Year!

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- To provide a united organization though which all persons engaged or interested in any phase of the counseling profession can exchange ideas, seek solutions to common problems, and stimulate their professional growth.
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