

## Article 18

### **Cognitive Behavioral Play Therapy Techniques in School-Based Group Counseling: Assisting Students in the Development of Social Skills**

Laura J. Fazio-Griffith and Mary B. Ballard

Fazio-Griffith, Laura J., is an assistant professor at Southeastern Louisiana University. She is the coordinator of the play therapy program and her research interests include: group work, child and adolescent counseling, and supervision. Prior to coming to Southeastern, she was the clinical director at a counseling and training center.

Ballard, Mary B., is a professor of counseling at Southeastern Louisiana University. In addition to coordinating the counseling program she also oversees the school counseling concentration. Prior to coming to Southeastern, she worked as a school teacher, counselor, and principal.

#### **Abstract**

Cognitive Behavioral Play Therapy (CBPT) techniques are utilized to illustrate social skills development for elementary school students. A rationale for CBPT and social skills development in the group setting is examined through a case study and an eight session social skills group developed for elementary school children. The need for social skills development in the elementary school setting is discussed in conjunction with the ASCA model for promoting academic and social success in the school setting through this school-based group counseling model.

The universal importance of play to the natural development and wholeness of children has been underscored by the United Nations' proclamation of play as a universal and inalienable right of childhood (1989). Play is the singular central activity of childhood, occurring at all times and at all places, including the school environment (Landreth, 2012). The play of children can be more fully appreciated when recognized as their natural mode of communication. Children express themselves more directly and fully through the use of self-initiated play. Play can be considered a medium of exchange and restricting children to only verbal expression can create a barrier to effective communication and resolution of childhood issues. Play therapy and interventions in the school setting are encouraged to meet a broad range of developmental needs of children including social and emotional needs.

School counselors are tasked with working with children that lack substantial social skills on a daily basis. The daily challenge faced by school counselors when working with children is to enhance their academic, social, and emotional development. Social skills are essential to the development of the child's academic and social functioning in the school environment. The following vignette details a common

presentation of social skills deficits in the school setting that might contribute to inadequate academic and social development.

Greg is a 10-year-old Caucasian male. He was referred to the school counselor, Ms. Snow, by Ms. Grey, his 4<sup>th</sup>-grade teacher, who has noticed ongoing behavioral problems in class. Greg is unable to focus, does not listen, and is having difficulty communicating with classmates. Greg's mother, Shannon, is a 45-year-old, divorced, Caucasian female who has 3 other children. Shannon has reported to that teacher that she has also noticed inappropriate behaviors at home. Greg is unable to play with the neighborhood children without conflict. Greg has a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and is prescribed Concerta. Today, Ms. Snow was observing Greg on the playground and noticed him playing tag with a group of 4<sup>th</sup> grade boys. When the group moves from tag to dodge ball, Greg informs them that he wants to continue to play tag and proceeds to explain to them why the game should be continued. The boys walk away from Greg and do not continue to play with him.

After recess, the students in Greg's class are working on a math worksheet. Greg finishes the worksheet rather quickly, and the teacher instructs him to quietly read a book. Greg turns to the student behind him, who is still working on the math worksheet, and begins to discuss the book he is reading. The student asks Greg to be quiet, but Greg continues to engage the student in conversation about his book.

### **Play as an Intervention in Schools**

The above vignette of Greg illustrates a child who has several deficits in developing relationships and honing in on social cues from peers and teachers. Greg would benefit from a social skills group that integrates play therapy skills and interventions. Cognitive behavioral play therapy (CBPT) would assist Greg in honing his social skills, which in turn could increase his level of academic and emotional functioning. As the group continues, and CBPT is utilized, Greg will become more proficient at developing relationships and reading social cues. The school setting is the ideal place for Greg to acquire effective social skills, as supported by the literature that encourages the use of play therapy as a counseling medium for elementary school counselors (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Newsome & Gladding, 2003; Ray, Muro, & Schumann, 2004; Schmidt, 2003; White & Flynt, 1999). Studies have demonstrated the efficacy of play therapy with elementary school students suffering from conduct disorders (Cochran & Cochran, 1999), autism, obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, cerebral palsy (Johnson, McLeod, & Fall, 1997), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Shen & Sink, 2002), attention and hyperactivity issues (Ray, Schottelkorb, & Tsai, 2007), aggressive behavior (Ray, Blanco, Sullivan, & Holliman, 2009), and children at risk (Post, 1999). All these issues can highly impact the development of prosocial skills, as indicated by the above vignette.

The school counselor can take play therapy skills, specifically cognitive behavioral play therapy (CBPT), and integrate these skills and interventions into existing school guidance programs. Play therapy can become an integrated part of the responsive services indicated for school counselors by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2012).

Gysbers and Henderson (2011) identified four components of a comprehensive school guidance program in conjunction with the ASCA model (2012). The components include: guidance curriculum, responsive services, individual planning, and systems support. At the elementary school level, the majority of the school counselor's time (75%) should be spent developing and facilitating guidance curriculum and responsive services. Individual planning and systems support should comprise only 25% of the school counselor's time.

ASCA acknowledges that schools are playing increasingly larger roles in assisting students with their development of social skills. Simply defined, social skills are socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable children and adolescents in a school environment to interact with their peers and teachers in ways that elicit positive responses and assist in avoiding negative responses as a result of these interactions. The responsive services provided by school counselors often focus on the social and interpersonal development of students, which can in turn, bolster academic success (McClelland, Morrison, & Holmes, 2000). Elementary and middle school-aged children (ages 6-12) who can successfully navigate peer friendships, as well as other meaningful interpersonal relationships, are much better equipped to cope with the challenges of adolescence and tend to perform better academically (Feldman, 2014). Perhaps more than any other single indicator, according to Landreth, Homeyer, Glover, and Sweeney (2005), social interactions, or lack thereof, provide essential clues to a child's emotional growth and adjustments.

Most children begin to explore complex social relationships with their peers and other significant adults. These early relationships tend to serve as models for social skills development (Galbo, 1983). Learning to problem solve, communicate appropriately with peers, and effectively interact in the classroom are important skills in a child's personal, social and academic development (Eccles, 1995). Social skills development can also enhance and promote the students' interpersonal understanding of their behaviors that lead to social skills deficits. According to Karcher and Lewis (2002), interpersonal understanding is an important social dimension of cognitive development. It includes self-understanding, social reasoning, social problem solving, and behavior regulation (Feffer, 1960; Flavell, 1992; Selman, 1980). Interpersonal understanding reflects the ability to coordinate social perspectives in a way that allows children and adolescents to understand norms, expectations of acceptable behavior, and consequences of misbehavior. The progression of the development of social skills can be influenced by parental/caregiver and school expectations, as well as a student's motivation to achieve new skill levels. Students neglecting this all-important process may later experience, among other things, peer rejection and academic challenges.

It has been found that social skill development can be enriched by successful interactions with skillful peers, as well as appropriate interventions by teachers and school counselors. When students exhibit poor social skills, it is important to provide interventions that can enhance self-concept and promote impulse control and healthy growth and development. One method of teaching social skills, including problem solving skills, negotiation skills, and assertiveness skills, is to use toys, art, play materials, and direct instruction (Kottman, 2011). For those who perceive themselves as different from their peers, or who have poor social interaction skills, group play therapy provides an especially effective modality for them to learn new social skills and to

discover that they are capable of peer acceptance, self-control, and self-acceptance (Shechtman & Pastor, 2005).

### **Social Skills Groups and Play Therapy**

Gould, as cited in Landreth (2001), suggested that “all children could profit or benefit from engaging in play therapy as an opportunity to exercise social skills within a controlled setting” (p. 229). Specifically, group play therapy provides an opportunity for children and adolescents to hone new skills, recognize their social competencies, gain peer acceptance, and build and practice self-control (Landreth et al., 2005). In elementary schools, counseling groups are used to help children learn new skills and become aware of their values, priorities, and communities (Gladding, 2011). Small groups give students the opportunity to “explore and work through their social and emotional challenges with others who are experiencing similar feelings” (Campbell & Bowman, 1993, p. 173).

A small group counseling intervention can strengthen the development of social skills (Kayler & Sherman, 2009). Group counseling combined with a CBPT approach is valuable because it allows members to experience a sense of belonging, share common problems, find and provide support, facilitate new learning, help ease internal and external pressures, and offer hope and models for change. Group work is efficient, effective, and multifaceted (Akos & Milsom, 2007), an ideal method to meet the needs of at-risk students. Group counseling allows students to develop and maintain connections to others while exploring factors that influence achievement. ASCA (2012) has endorsed group work as a vital component in a comprehensive school counseling program.

### **Cognitive-Behavioral Play Therapy**

Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is a structured, goal-oriented therapy with a strong rationale for its use with children and adolescents (Knell, 2009). The focus of CBT is deficits or distortions in thinking, which are postulated to interfere with appropriate social skills. Increasingly, CBT interventions are being adapted for delivery to groups of children and adolescents in the school setting (Flanagan, Allen, & Henry, 2010). CBT used with children and adolescents in the group setting can have beneficial effects such as peer modeling, interpersonal learning, or group cohesiveness (Yalom, 2005). Several global goals exist for CBT interventions in relation to social skills. These goals may include increasing the student’s ability to express feelings, decreasing maladaptive thoughts and perceptions, increasing adaptive and realistic assessment of relationships, increasing positive self-talk, and increasing appropriate use of problem-solving skills (Kottman, 2011). CBT can be an integral piece for improving students’ social skills in a group counseling setting.

Cognitive behavioral play therapy (CBPT) is a theoretical framework based on cognitive behavioral principles and integrates these principles in a developmentally appropriate manner (Knell, 2009). CBPT incorporates cognitive and behavioral interventions within a play therapy paradigm. CBPT integrates ideas from behavior therapy, cognitive therapy, and cognitive behavioral therapy, which was the impetus for formulating the concepts and theoretical basis for CBPT. Play activities and verbal and nonverbal forms of communication are used to resolve problems. In CBPT, there are

some global goals in addition to the individual goals of each student. The general goal for the student is to increase the ability to cope with problem situations and stressors, master difficult tasks, decrease faulty thinking patterns, and/or assist in achieving developmental milestones that have been delayed for some reason.

CBPT places a very strong emphasis on the student's involvement in the process of developing appropriate social skills. According to Knell (2009), CBPT has six specific properties, or tenets, that provide the foundation for positive outcomes. The tenets are as follows:

1. CBPT involves the child in counseling via play.
2. CBPT focuses on the child's thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and environment.
3. CBPT provides a strategy or strategies for developing more adaptive thoughts and behaviors.
4. CBPT is structured, directive, and goal-oriented, rather than open ended.
5. CBPT incorporates empirically demonstrated techniques such as modeling and role playing.
6. CBPT allows for empirical evaluation of treatment which can enhance the involvement of parents and stakeholders in the school environment.

Although CBPT is very different from traditional play therapy approaches, the development of the relationship and communication patterns established through play are important tenets of this approach. CBPT establishes concrete, objective goals, and movement towards these goals is an important part of the group process. The process of CBPT, promotes collaboration between parties as the students and the school counselor work together to select the play materials and activities.

### **CBPT Techniques**

The following CBPT techniques can be facilitated by school counselors in a group setting to help students develop and hone their social skills.

#### **Modeling**

Most of the techniques in CBPT are delivered by modeling; for example, using a puppet, doll, or stuffed animal to demonstrate the appropriate social skills to children. Several other examples of modeling with puppets can include shaping/positive reinforcement during the social skills group (Knell, 2009). The school counselor selects two puppets along with a social skill to introduce to the small group and may say, "Mr. Dragon is going to practice his listening skills with Ms. Butterfly." The dragon puppet listens to the butterfly puppet and exhibits appropriate listening skills and is provided with encouragement and positive feedback as the dragon puppet exhibits the steps for appropriate listening skills.

#### **Behavioral Rehearsal**

Behavioral rehearsal provides an opportunity for school counselors to help children master difficult situations by utilizing appropriate social skills. By rehearsing, new more functional behaviors are observed and practiced by the students. The goal of behavioral rehearsal is for students to recognize and modify social skills deficiencies and ways of responding by role playing a variety of alternative responses. When using

behavioral rehearsal, school counselors can provide immediate, concrete feedback, followed by continued rehearsal of problem situations (Knell, 2009).

School counselors can use dolls or puppets to coach more adaptive responses. In this way social skills are modeled for the students, and the students can rehearse the new skills. For example, school counselors may choose to focus on dealing with anger and recognizing others' anger as the targeted social skills. The selected puppets are having a dialogue about a situation at school that has made them angry. School counselors coach the puppets on the appropriate responses regarding expressing anger in appropriate ways. The students are then given the opportunity to practice with the puppets. School counselors provide feedback regarding the interaction of the puppets and the appropriate responses. The students continue rehearsing until all are satisfied that appropriate responses for expressing anger in the school environment have been expressed.

### **Behavioral Contingencies**

Behavioral contingencies can be used by school counselors to provide rewards in the group setting for acquiring new skills. For example, school counselors can ask the students in the group to pick three rewards they would like to earn during the group. Once the students have mastered the skills, rewards will be given. A chart can be displayed during the group that would indicate the social skills that need to be mastered with each student's name by the specific skills and the rewards once the students master the specific skills. Examples of rewards include: stickers, homework passes, line leaders, and star group members.

### **Coping Self-Statements**

The way in which children interpret events, and not the events themselves, affects their ability to cope and function effectively, both socially and academically. Children's perception of events can negatively influence their social skill development (Knell, 2009). Negative thoughts lead to negative self-statements, which can lead to poor decision making and interactions with peers and adults. For example, a child who predicts no one will want to play hide and seek with her at recess, supported by her negative self-statements, "I cannot run very well or hide as well as my friends." This negative self-talk can lead to poor social interactions and hinder the development of social skills. School counselors can work with students in the group setting to teach them coping self-statements. Students need to learn simple statements about themselves, such as, "I can hide as well as my peers." These positive affirmations can be written down during the group, and the students can apply these affirmations to learning the different social skills.

### **Bibliotherapy**

Bibliotherapy is used to provide a story telling approach for children in a group setting. Children's stories have an abundance of messages regarding specific problems or traumatic events such as divorce, death, or moving (Knell, 2009). School counselors may use these stories to convey a message indirectly, with the hope that the students will learn something through the main character(s) in the book. Children's literature is rich with stories of amazing characters that have successfully coped with problems such as

aggression, bullying, anger, and friendship. Examples of books that can be used to help children develop their social skills can be found in Appendix A.

CBPT techniques provide an excellent intervention for school counselors to utilize in small groups with children needing to develop, remediate, or enhance their social skills. CBPT provides the opportunity for children to experience positive social skills in the presence of their peers through modeling, rehearsing, or learning from fictional characters in a story. This ongoing support and encouragement can be invaluable, especially for children who are struggling socially and academically. School counselors should make every effort to incorporate an intervention of this type into their comprehensive school counseling programs. The following is an example of a social skills group that exemplifies the effectiveness of using CBPT techniques with children in a group setting.

### **Case Study**

Emma Snow, a school counselor at an urban elementary school, worked with teachers to identify and screen six students to participate in a group designed to enhance social skills through self-image enhancement, feeling expression, stress management, and the development of friendships. To best identify potential group members, Ms Snow asked teachers to complete the Teacher/Staff Skillstreaming Checklist (McGinnis & Goldstein, 2011, p.1-11), which is designed to evaluate prosocial skills. Students earning low scores were included as potential members for the group.

The group met for 40 minutes each week for 8 weeks and focused on social skills development using a cognitive behavioral play therapy (CBPT) approach. The six selected students were in grades 4 and 5, and were comprised of one Black male, two Caucasian males, two Caucasian females, and one Black female. After obtaining parental consent, Ms. Snow met with each student individually to explain the purpose of the group. Each of the following sessions demonstrates CBPT techniques designed to enhance the social skill development of each student and to further their academic and social success.

#### **Session 1**

Establishing group rules, developing rapport and building trust were the goals of the first group session, skills important in forming friendships and peer relationships. The students agreed to the following rules: be respectful, talk one at a time, listen, stay in your seat, and participate. Ms. Snow then introduced the first skill by announcing, “We are going to learn how to introduce ourselves and learn about each other.” She then presented small cans of Play Doh and sheets of white paper, and asked each student to select a can and a piece of paper. She then said, “Please take your Play Doh out of the can and look at the color. How are you like the color of your Play Doh? Please write words or draw a picture on your paper that will show the group how you are similar to the color you selected.” The counselor then utilized the technique of modeling by stating, “I have selected the color green. I am like the color green because I am bright, open and free like the trees and grass, and I am calm. But, I can be sad sometimes like when the green leaves fall off the trees and turn brown.” Each group member followed her example by discussing their color and describing the qualities shared with their color choice. The

group ended with Ms. Snow asking each group member to remember their qualities when they are having difficulties in school or at home.

### **Session 2**

Ms. Snow welcomes the group members back and checks in with them by asking them to state something positive about their week. Ms. Snow reminded them about the group rules and praised them for following the rules. Using the technique of behavioral contingencies, she announced that students would receive homework passes for expressing their feelings in group today. She stated, “We are going to focus on learning how to identify and express our feelings by playing a game called ‘Feeling Frog Hot Potato,’ which is going to help us learn how to express our feelings appropriately in class and on the playground.” With students standing in a circle, Ms. Snow selected two bean bag frogs out of a group of five, each labeled with its own feeling word: happy, sad, angry, calm, and scared. As the music began, group members were instructed to pass the two frogs around the circle. When the music stopped, the members holding the two frogs were asked to state the feeling and discuss a time when they felt this particular feeling. The music begins again, and two different feeling frogs are added to the group to pass around until the music stops. Once the game is over, Ms. Snow and the group members process the feelings and how each of the feelings can affect their thoughts and behaviors in the classroom and on the playground. Students were excited to receive their homework passes at the conclusion of the group.

### **Session 3**

Ms. Snow welcomes the students back to group and introduces the skill for the week. “This week we are going to learn how to make appropriate choices.” She began by presenting a story that required a difficult choice in the end. Puppets then modeled a variety of choices that would influence the ending of the story. After the puppets had modeled the activity and made appropriate choices, each group member was directed to create their own ending to the story, based upon the choices they would make. Group members then discussed a variety of appropriate choices that would change the ending of the story. The group also discussed the perceived appropriate versus inappropriate endings to the story. Once again using behavioral contingencies, Ms. Snow ends the group session by giving each member a sticker for following the group rules and providing responses to end the story.

### **Session 4**

Ms. Snow begins the group by reviewing the skills that have been discussed over the past three sessions. The goal of session 4 is to help the students replace negative self-defeating behaviors by utilizing coping self-statements. Ms. Snow says, “Today we are going to learn how to be positive about ourselves and present a positive self-image.” She then pairs the members and gives each pair a piece of poster board, glue stick, glitter, markers, crayons, and yarn, along with appropriate magazines. Ms. Snow instructs each dyad to cut out pictures and words in the magazines that describe their positive qualities, things they like, and activities they like to do when they are not in school. Ms. Snow states, “The goal of the activity is to develop a collage that celebrates who you are.” Once the collages are completed, Ms. Snow says, “Each of you is invited to share your part of

the collage and discuss the pictures and words that are representative of you.” Each group member discusses why certain pictures and words were chosen and how they work to create a positive self-image. Ms. Snow closed the group by asking the members to share one positive thought they have about the group.

### **Session 5**

Ms. Snow welcomes the students and announces that the today’s focus will be on stress management. Ms. Snow asks the group, “What is stress? What happens when you feel stress?” She talks to the group about how stress can interfere with being productive in the classroom and on the playground. The purpose of the activity is to assist the group members in dealing positively with stress. “Our activity for this session is called ‘Welcome to My World.’ I am passing out a piece of paper and markers. You will notice a big circle on your paper. Please write your name and the word ‘world’ at the top.” The group members divide their paper into four quadrants and label them North, South, East, and West. Members draw in each specific quadrant a source of stress for them at home, in school, with their friends, and alone. Ms. Snow models for the group members some stress reduction activities like breathing exercises and then encourages each group member to share their four quadrants. She and the group members discuss strategies for managing stress using positive self coping statements, as well as how to apply these strategies to the different environments. Ms. Snow closes the session by asking each group member to model what technique for managing stress works best for them. Ms. Snow, using behavioral contingencies, provides each group member a coupon to check out one extra book in the library this week.

### **Session 6**

Ms. Snow begins the by reminding the students that only two groups remain. She praises the group members for coming to the group each week and being active participants. She then introduces the skill for the week by stating, “We are going to work on building our self-esteem by creating a positive self-image using coping self-statements. Sometimes we think negative things about ourselves. So, we are going to learn how to change the negative thinking to positive behaviors that can be used in the classroom and on the playground.” Each group member is asked to draw a self-portrait on one side of the paper. Ms. Snow provides directions, “Please draw on one side of the paper what you see when you look in the mirror. Turn your paper over, and draw how you believe your friends, teachers, and family members see you. What do they see in the mirror?” Once the group members have completed their drawings, Ms. Snow asks each group member to share their pictures and discuss the differences and similarities between the two pictures. Ms. Snow has the group members conceptualize how their perception is usually very different from how others perceive them. Ms. Snow states, “These perceptions can interfere with our ability to learn and make friends. How do you think your pictures will influence your behavior in class and with your friends on the playground?” Ms. Snow closes the group by asking each group member to share one thought about self that will help them have a positive interaction in the classroom or at recess.

### **Session 7**

Ms. Snow welcomes the group back and explains that the group will end next week. She talks with the group members about how to end the group and celebrate the work that the members have done collectively and individually. The group members decide they would like to show their appreciation for each other by creating a keepsake for each group member. Ms. Snow then introduces the skill for the week. “Our focus today will be on expressing your anger in appropriate ways, by having each of you create your own anger basket.” Each member is given a small basket, construction paper, glitter, yarn, paint, and markers. Ms. Snow asks members to decorate the outside of their baskets and then draw or write three things on the slips of paper provided that have made them angry today or over the past week and place these three things inside their basket. Once the baskets are completed, Ms. Snow models the activity, by explaining, “I am going to begin and tell the group what is in my anger basket. After I explain to you what is in my basket, we are going to discuss what I can do to effectively manage what I get angry about. Then it will be your turn; please tell us what you did when you got angry and what you could have done instead.” The alternatives can be written on construction paper and fastened on the outside of the basket or kept inside the basket. The group members and Ms. Snow discuss how to choose appropriate options to manage anger. The group members are asked to leave their issues in the basket but take the list of positive coping alternatives with them. Ms. Snow talks about their anger issues remaining in the basket so the group members would not carry them outside the group. The group discusses what happens when one carries around their anger without healthy alternatives to anger expression.

Ms. Snow ends the session by utilizing the bibliotherapy technique and reading the book *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry* by Molly Bang (1996). Ms. Snow closes the group by asking each group member what else Sophie can do when she gets angry.

### **Session 8**

Ms. Snow begins the final session by thanking members for their active participation and for adhering to the group rules for the past 8 weeks. Ms. Snow tells the group what she appreciates about them and how she has enjoyed watching each of them grow and develop their own set of social skills. Ms. Snow, using the technique of behavioral rehearsal, provides the group members with the opportunity to practice appropriate ways of building relationships and saying goodbye through the selected activity. Ms. Snow introduces the final skill, building interpersonal relationships and saying goodbye. She informs the members that each will leave with a keepsake from the group. “We are going to make an appreciation chain for each other. I am going to pass out 3 strips of construction paper and markers for each of you. On one strip of paper, I would like for you to finish the following sentence: My proudest moment in this group was \_\_\_\_\_. On the second strip of paper, I would like for you to finish this sentence: The skill I have mastered in this group is \_\_\_\_\_. And, finally, on the third strip of paper, write one thing you appreciate about your group members. We will fold your strips of paper to create a paper chain. Once we have made the chain, we will read your responses.” Group members are given the chance to reflect upon their work and gain closure by experiencing appropriate ways to end relationships with each member. Each

member will receive a piece of the chain to symbolize the work accomplished individually and collectively. Ms. Snow closes the group by asking each member to reflect upon one skill that they have learned and utilized in the classroom or on the playground. To show her appreciation for the group members and using behavioral contingencies, Ms. Snow gives each member a coupon for a free ice cream in the cafeteria.

### **Teacher Follow-Up**

Three weeks after the last group session, Ms. Snow asks the teachers to complete the same checklist that they completed on each student before the group sessions began. Ms. Snow compares the results of the post-checklist to the pre-checklist to determine the students' progress during the duration of the group and the application of appropriate social skills beyond the group. Ms. Snow works with the teachers to encourage the continued progress of all group members in implementing appropriate social skills to increase academic, social, and emotional growth in the school environment.

### **Conclusion**

Many elementary school children have maladaptive social skills. These skills may include poor interpersonal relationships, inability to make friends, issues with controlling emotions, and stress management. These deficiencies can negatively affect their academic, personal, social and emotional functioning in and outside the classroom. It is imperative that school counselors and teachers recognize these maladaptive skills and provide responsive services in the form of individual or small group counseling services. School counselors can adapt the cognitive behavioral play therapy approach when teaching social skills in small group settings. The CBPT approach will teach children varying social skills and how to apply these social skills to relationships in and outside the classroom. Additionally, classroom guidance lessons can also provide an opportunity to teach social skills that will improve academic and social functioning. For the purpose of this manuscript, CBPT was demonstrated in a series of eight group sessions to improve social skills. School counselors should consider the flexibility needed in comprehensive school counseling programs when examining how to improve a student's social skills. Individual and group counseling, as well as classroom guidance, can be beneficial when using this approach.

### **References**

- Akos, P., & Milsom, A. (2007). Introduction to special issue: Group work in K-12 schools. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 32*, 5-7.
- American School Counselor Association. (2012). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Baker, S., & Gerler, E. (2004). *School counseling for the twenty-first century* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Campbell, C., & Bowman, R. P. (1993). The "fresh start" support club: Small group counseling for academically retained children. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling, 27*, 172-185.

- Cochran, J., & Cochran, N. (1999). Using the counseling relationship to facilitate change in students with conduct disorders. *Professional School Counseling, 2*, 395-403.
- Eccles, J. S. (1995). School and family effects on the ontogeny of children's interactions, self-perceptions, and activity choices. In J. E. Jacobs (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation* (vol. 40, pp. 145-208), Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Feffer, M. H. (1960). Cognitive aspects of role-taking in children. *Journal of Personality, 28*, 383-396.
- Feldman, R. S. (2014). *Development across the life span* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Flanagan, R., Allen, K., & Henry, D. J. (2010). The impact of anger management treatment and rational emotive behavior therapy in a public school setting on social skills, anger management, and depression. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive Behavior Therapy, 28*, 87-99.
- Flavell, J. H. (1992). Perspectives on perspective taking. In H. Beilin (Ed.), *Piaget's theory: Prospects and possibilities. The Jean Piaget symposium series* (pp. 107-139). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Galbo, J. J. (1983). Adolescents' perceptions of significant adults. *Adolescence, 18*, 417-428.
- Gladding, S. T. (2011). *Counseling a group specialty* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Gysbers, N., & Henderson, P. (2011). *Developing & managing your school guidance program* (5th ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Johnson, L., McLeod, E., & Fall, M. (1997). Play therapy with labeled children in schools. *Professional School Counseling, 1*, 31-34.
- Karcher, M. J., & Lewis, S. S. (2002). Pair counseling: The effects of a dyadic developmental play therapy on interpersonal understanding and externalizing behaviors. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 10*, 19-41.
- Kayler, H., & Sherman, J. (2009). At-risk ninth grade students: A psychoeducational group approach to increase study skills and grade point averages. *Professional School Counseling, 12*, 434-439.
- Knell, S. M. (2009). *Cognitive-behavioral play therapy*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc.
- Kottman, T. (2011). *Play therapy basics and beyond* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Landreth, G. (2001). *Innovations in play therapy: Issues, process, and special population*. New York, NY: Taylor Francis.
- Landreth, G. (2012). *Play therapy: The art of the relationship* (3rd ed.). London, England: Routledge.
- Landreth, G., Homeyer, L., Glover, G., & Sweeney, D. (2005). *Play therapy interventions with children's problems* (2nd ed.). Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- McClelland, M., Morrison, F., & Holmes, D. (2000). Children at risk for early academic problems: The role of learning related social skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 8*(3), 327-329.
- McGinnis, E., & Goldstein, A. P. (2011). *Skillstreaming the elementary school child: Program forms*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

- Newsome, D., & Gladding, S. (2003). Counseling individuals and groups in school. In B. Erford (Ed.), *Transforming the school counseling profession* (pp. 209-229). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Brunner-Routledge.
- Post, P. (1999). Impact of child-centered play therapy on the self-esteem, locus of control, and anxiety of at-risk 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 8* 1-18.
- Ray, D. C., Blanco, P. J., Sullivan, J. M., & Holliman, R. (2009). An exploratory study of child-centered play therapy with aggressive children. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 18*, 162-175. doi: 10.1037/a0014742
- Ray, D., Muro, J., & Schumann, B. (2004). Implementing play therapy in the schools: Lessons learned. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 13*(1), 79-100.
- Ray, D. C., Schottelkorb, A., & Tsai, M. (2007). Play therapy with children exhibiting symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 16*, 95-111. doi: 10.1037/1555-6824.16.2.95
- Shechtman, Z., & Pastor, R. (2005). Cognitive-behavioral and humanistic group treatment for children with disabilities: A comparison of outcome and process. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(3), 322-326.
- Schmidt, J. (2003). *Counseling in schools: Essential services and comprehensive programs* (4th ed.). Boston, IL: Allyn & Bacon.
- Selman, R. (1980). *The growth of interpersonal understanding: Developmental and clinical analyses*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Shen, Y., & Sink, C. (2002). *Helping elementary-aged children cope with disasters*, *Professional School Counseling, 5*, 322-330.
- United Nations. (1989). Article 31, UN Convention: Proclamation of Play.
- White, J., & Flynt, M. (1999). Play groups in elementary school. In D. S. Sweeney & L. E. Homeyer (Eds.), *Group play therapy: How to do it, how it works, and whom* (pp. 336-358). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Yalom, I. D. (2005). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Basic Books.

*Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: [http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS\\_Home.htm](http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS_Home.htm)*

## **Appendix A**

### **Bibliotherapy Resources for Social Skills Development**

**Double-Dip Feelings: A Book to Help Children Understand Emotions** by Barbara Cain 1990. Grades K-4.

**I Like Me** by Nancy Carlson 1988. Grades K-4.

**When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry** by Molly Bang 1996. Grades K-4.

**I'm Gonna Like Me: Letting Off a Little Self-Esteem** by Jamie Lee Curtis. Illus. by Laura Cornell 1998. Grades k-5.

**Where Do Balloons Go? An Uplifting Mystery** by Jamie Lee Curtis. Illus. by Laura Cornell 1998. Grades K-3.

**Whoever You Are** by Mem Fox. Illus. by Leslie Staub 1997. Grades K-5.

**Go Away, Big Green Monster!** By Ed Emberley 1992. Grades K-2.

**Hands Are Not For Hitting** by Martine Agassi. Illus. by Marieka Heinlen 2006. Grades K-2.

**Words Are Not For Hurting** by Elizabeth Verdick Illus by Marieka Heinlen 2003. Grades K-3.

**Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day** by Judith Viorst. Illus. by Ray Cruz 1972. Grades K-5.