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Certificate in counselling Children and young people

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Unit 1, essay 1...

"Describe how the child's place in society and other issues related to counselling children and young people have affected your work with a particular client."

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(excluding case sheet, quotations and bibliography)

Client Details Sheet

Name – Cheryl

Gender - Female

Age – 13 years and 10 months

Race - English

Lives with – Mother, Step Father & Sister

Siblings - One sister older by 2 years

Referred by - Mother to myself as a private counsellor

Presenting issue – Anger and aggression

“Describe how the child’s place in society and other issues related to counselling children and young people have affected your work with a particular client.”3261

INTRODUCTION

This title demands understanding of the social status attached to young people. It also requires consideration on how social positioning and other variables linked to counselling have influenced my practice, when working with a person under the age of 18.

A child’s place in society is influenced by numerous factors many of which are outside their control. Geographical location and cultural beliefs represent global factors, but there are subtler influences, which are as potent, such as gender, age, sexual orientation and religion. Social and financial status of their family will also bear influence on how young people are perceived.

Due to the length of this assignment I cannot investigate every aspect mentioned above. However, I will provide a selection of scenarios and statistics worldwide which present my reflection of a young persons social positioning. I will then present a historical portrayal of youth culture in England. After this I’ll focus on issues specific to counselling young people, illustrating their influence on my practise. This will include...

- **Practical Issues**
- **Developmental Stages**
- **Legal aspects of work**

Reports and legislation will evidence my response. Specifics to my client and our working relationship will be woven throughout the text. Client details have been provided in the form of a cover sheet to avoid diluting focus and the pseudonym Cheryl used.

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WORLDWIDE SCENARIOS AND STATISTICS

Various reports through International news reflect the present, complicated and confusing status of children worldwide. The sex trade of children in Thailand, female children killed at birth in China and children being hunted and shot like wild dogs in Brazil, clearly demonstrate the inequality these children experience. In Brazil alone 4,611 children and adolescents were executed between 1988 and 1990. (Butcher 1996). These harsh examples of child status clearly reflect the suffering and injustice that many young people experience worldwide. Other statistics that demonstrate this follow...

- An estimated 100 million children spend their days on city streets around the world (Butcher 1996).
- 10 million of these are totally on their own, uncared for and unprotected (Butcher 1996).
- On a global scale children continue to die at the rate of 30,000 a day from preventable causes (Daniels & Jenkins, 2000 P.7)

With these examples being so dramatic it is difficult for the aforementioned countries to ignore the outcry of others who create legislation to protect children from such abuse, but however 'civilised' the English Law system claims to be in protecting children's rights, they often fail when it comes to implementation. Approximately 6% of child abuse cases reported to the police reach court. Approximately 1% lead to successful convictions. The majority of cases are thrown out due to incorrect procedure when acquiring evidence.

Until recently, children awaiting a hearing were denied therapeutic support until their case was over, in order to avoid their experiences being contaminated. Here, procedures clearly took preference over the young persons emotional well-being. This amendment reflects a prioritising of the child.

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'Child-line' and 'Shelter' have stated that many homeless children site abuse at home as their reason for leaving, seeing it as a last resort to survive emotionally. Research reflects that when a child is especially vulnerable there are adults that still have no problem taking advantage. (South Devon Women's Aid 1995)

- A UK survey of young runaways in 1995 revealed that 1 in 7 had sold sex for money (Butcher 1996).
- More than 25% had been physically or sexually abused while on the streets (Butcher 1996).

As counselling provides a service for those who feel or are considered to be vulnerable for one reason or another, it is important that I mirror a relationship that is non abusive, built on honesty, respect and unconditional positive regard.

YOUTH CULTURE

Before the mid 1950's there was no such thing as 'Youth Culture', you were either a child or an adult. As children approached adulthood they began to dress like and imitate the behaviour of their parents or significant others.

"There was no effort to stake out a difference: being young was no big deal, it simply meant biding time before receiving full pay and being able to marry and raise a family. In no sense was there a feeling of being different and wanting to express it." (P.22 Cashmore1984).

As world war two ended, social unity burgeoned as 'Great Britain' began the rebuild. Work was in abundance, the work ethic upheld and class conflict minimal. In the late 1950's many changes occurred which assisted the phenomenon of developing terms associated with the young, such as 'Adolescent' and 'Yob'. National Service ended, Hire Purchase was

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introduced (Cashmore 1984 P.24) and a massive introduction of consumables aimed at younger people flooded the market. Imitating parents ceased as the younger population began to identify a need to establish their own identity. The music and clothing scene changed dramatically, being seen as a way of expressing the segregation firstly between adults and young people then continuing on to divide and bring together those with common beliefs and experiences. Teddy Boys via Rock 'n' Roll crossed the Atlantic, devoured by those who were starved of individuality. Movies targeted this new sub culture sparking massive curiosity whilst creating huge financial profits. Gyrate and screaming youngsters provided the media with enough material to begin labelling those who enjoyed such activities. Terms such as 'out of control and 'sexual/social deviants' flooded the media. Capitalism flourished alongside the strengthening pound as young people were marketed. Other styles of music and accompanying fashion filtered society providing further outlets for identification.

Mods, Rockers, Skinheads, Bikers, Hippies, Punks, Goths and Trendies are to name but a few. Many of these subcultures were and still are associated with conflict. Belonging to one group seemingly segregated you from another and therefore displays of aggression and riots between groups took their place in History, continuing to feed society with a fear towards 'groups of young people' that is still paramount in the attitudes of many today.

Cheryl's Grandfather contacted Cheryl's mother saying he saw her with a group of youths in town. He felt intimidated, refused to speak and crossed the street. The intimidation expressed was not a direct result of any behaviour but Cheryl was ignored and then punished, being told she is not allowed to hang around her hometown any more. She is experiencing a social inheritance that was not of her making, which is affecting her relationships with her family and friends.

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PRACTICAL ISSUES

Counselling young people as a private practitioner, impacts upon many elements of the counselling relationship. Adult carers often provide the cost for services. First contact usually involves the carer stating what they believe the issues to be. I endeavour to be empathetic but clear that when I meet the young person I will reiterate what has been shared and will only work with issues that they bring to sessions.

Cheryls first session was used to check she wanted counselling, that she had an understanding of what counselling was and that the boundaries of confidentiality were reiterated. I discussed the latter with Cheryl and her mother, to clarify what I would discuss outside session times. I reiterated the importance of having 'the right therapist' and that if Cheryl felt unable to work with me, she could say so. As my therapy room is not in my clients home town, I checked out transportation issues and applied flexibility in my appointment schedules to accommodate school and work times. I do not assume that because I have presented choices young people are empowered enough to choose, however by providing choices I am able to observe my clients response whilst beginning to make sense of their disempowerment. The 1982 'Thompson Report' when reviewing the Youth Service in England stated in section 3.9 that

“Young people need freedom to choose, to experiment and reflect. The experiential need of one young person is different from that of another. Some may need to have their confidence restored, perhaps through the exposure to the probably unfamiliar sensation of being valued for their own sake, before they can be in a position to grasp these freedoms.”

A private service does not facilitate the autonomy of any child who is financially dependent. I recognise carers often hold the power to end the counselling relationship. In order to avoid this situation, I offer reviews

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between the carer/s and child and offer the carers as much support as possible without breaking confidentiality. However, many styles of support provision have their deficits. The variety of need in young people require holistic services, as was recognised in the 1982 Thompson Report, section 7.10.

“Important questions will arise over how information, advice and counselling should be provided in any particular area. Of the three models described earlier (in 5.26)- provision within a club, provision as part of a detached or project work, and specialised local agencies – none seems sufficient in itself. In order to provide an adequate coverage a mixture of all three will usually be necessary and will be essential to build up liaison arrangements with related counselling services run by, for example, Social Services and the carers service. There is therefore much to be done to put the pattern of provision in this field on a satisfactory footing.”

Over the past 22 years young peoples support services have changed. Provisions that are confidential, free, young person friendly and centralised for improved accessibility have increased. However there are geographical inconsistencies in the levels of funding administered, standards of service given and availability/accessibility to services. Rural areas such as Devon, where I practise often experience a tail end offering from National Initiatives. The Bright Futures Report 1999 states that

“Voluntary counselling services have developed on an ad hoc, piecemeal basis. In the absence of a National strategy to respond to young peoples information, advice and counselling needs, this has led to uneven levels and distribution of services, together with variability of skills levels held within services.”

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Therefore, young people like Cheryl, living in rural areas, are less likely to have access to services which have been designed to meet their needs.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Developmental stages impact upon the level and style in which counsellors endeavour to accommodate clients needs. Cheryl was 13 when she first attended counselling, which placed her in Piagets 'Formal Operations Stage' beginning at early adolescence and reaching into adulthood. Adolescence is now the term commonly used to describe the stage between childhood and adulthood. It is a stage of challenges and change and although a young persons adaptation to this stage is a personal one there are many common factors which represent it. Geldard and Geldard 1999 state that

“some young people are more successful than others at confronting and dealing with the challenges of adolescents; This may be partly related to personality traits and partly to past history and the current environment.”

Such understanding of adolescents has led to counselling and support services being seen as a progressive way in assisting a young person to cope with these challenges which affect the biological, cognitive, psychological, social, moral and spiritual aspects of the self.

Much of my work with Cheryl has been centred around understanding and establishing her sense of self. When working one to one, I will only support a young person to work on variables they have the power to change. In doing this I must also be aware of the impact our work has on surrounding systems which impinge on Cheryl. Cheryl has limited autonomy as early adolescence renders dependence on her family system for many of her basic needs. In return It is expected that she displays a level of compromise in her behaviour at home. This norm however, can lead to much frustration.

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Cheryl's stepfather has banned friends from entering the family home if they wear certain items of clothing. Adolescence is a time when friends are of great importance. This rule has ostracised her from her peers, adding to her sense of isolation. Cheryl is aware society makes judgements about people by the way they dress. She understands that experiences influence beliefs and she has shared some of her stepfathers' childhood experiences and how this shapes his response towards her friends. We have explored her understanding of the need for rules in society. She acknowledges the need for rules but demands an understanding of them in order for her to embrace conformity. With this in mind, Cheryl has found many house rules aggravating and embarrassing. This is compounded by the fluctuation of consistency in these rules. Cheryl's sister who also lives at home is 2 years her senior so is also an adolescent. Cheryl perceives her sister to have far more leeway than herself. This has enhanced sibling rivalry and has led to too much competition between them for independence and for the affection and approval of their mother.

A young person's sense of self is influenced by the way in which people who are significant respond. Cheryl's friends have more freedom which gives Cheryl the message that she is not trusted. This has reiterated the importance for me to trust and believe in her when others do not in order to challenge her perception that she is not trustworthy.

Exploring perception has assisted Cheryl's understanding of others but adolescence is a predominantly egocentric space, therefore consideration and compromise can feel restrictive at a time when freedom versus conformity is being tested. With this in mind, it is vital that Cheryl's experience of the world takes precedence. Cheryl's world is so different from the world her mother, father, stepfather, grandfather and her counsellor have experienced so in order to begin to understand her, I have to enter her world. This does not suggest I act out a younger persona to engage her as congruence is vital to

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the counselling relationship, but that I am aware of how my life experiences could influence my interventions. This will assist me in managing them effectively enough to not encourage transference or make value judgements against Cheryl. This is especially important, as this is her present experience of adult relationships.

Cheryl's mum and step father endeavour to be an open system. I have passed on much information around adolescence. Mum has sought reading material and is open about the difficulties she is having communicating with Cheryl. I have shared tools in order to assist communication. In extending my empathy and understanding of her situation I hope to engage her continued support in accommodating her daughters need for external support. I feel there is more of an emphasis for private practitioners to work in this way, as Cheryl's parents are paying for this service. That aside, I feel it is holistic to work in the acknowledgement of systems theory whatever support style is offered. Every human being is a part of many systems. It is impossible to change one system without having an impact on another which is why I believe it productive to maintain and work with a young persons family whenever possible and not detrimental to the safety and emotional well being of my client. Child protection issues would influence the viability of this approach.

LEGAL ASPECTS

Prioritising the emotional and physical well being of the child historically through law, is a recent phenomenon. The Children Act 1989 has fashioned statements such as "best interest of the child" and 'significant risk', and when first coined, brought about much celebration and excitement throughout young peoples support services. However, these terms have been interpreted in such a variety of ways that an inconsistency in the application of it has not been as liberating as its publication first presumed. It seems what one judge believes to be 'significant' and in 'the best interest of the child' will differ to the next. A recent example of this interpretation follows.

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In May 2004 a man was charged in England with child cruelty for swinging a 2 and half-year old girl around the room by her ankles. Her mother had noted Bruising and clinginess, and her suspicions led to her placing a video camera in their front room. The video showed a hysterical child being violently swung around and then thrown onto the sofa whilst being verbally chastised and threatened. The evidence was undisputable, yet the boyfriend walked free without sentence stating he experienced post traumatic stress from a robbery at work. The mother stated this experience completely changed her daughters personality changing her from a happy toddler to a child displaying classic signs of trauma. (Daily Mail May 2004)

There is also much interpretation around such terms as confidentiality. A counsellors duty regarding client confidentiality, differs in accordance to the working environment and the policies and procedures which underpin their working contract. As I work privately, I am not bound to respond in a specific way to information shared unless my client or others will be at 'significant risk' as a result. However I work in accordance to the BACP ethical framework and use supervision to check the way that I am working is in my clients best interests.

Cheryl shared that her father is verbally and sometimes physically abusive towards her. She felt unable to confide in her mother as she did not want to instigate fighting between them. Certainly domestic violence and its impact on the child is accepted as being damaging and abusive. Through my experience of working and training in areas of domestic violence I am aware that the extent of injury, lack of evidence and the victims unwillingness to share this information with anyone else would result in no action being taken. I used supervision to explore the child protection issues this information catalysed and decided it would be more harmful for Cheryl to be placed in a position whereby she would terminate her counselling support. I provided Cheryl with information on domestic violence and its impact on young people and she eventually chose to disclose to her mum. I had the freedom to work in this

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way as It is not mandatory to report child abuse in England although many agencies for young people have policies whereby disclosure of abuse is passed on automatically in belief that this is in the 'best interest of the child'.

Until very recently the rights of the child gave little consideration as to what they actually wanted. Cases such as the 1985 'Victoria Gillick' case, highlighted that young people are capable of making responsible decisions about their own life and set the precedent of 'mature understanding' being a contributing factor to a young persons autonomy in making decision for themselves without parental consent. This has enabled services to offer support to young people without parental consent. As 13 seems to be the youngest age whereby 'Gillick' can be a ruling, Cheryl would not have needed her mums permission to enter therapy. This ruling also means that Cheryl has the right to a confidential service and therefore I do not have to share her disclosures with her parents. Cases such as this heavily influenced the shape of 'The 1989 Children Act', however there have been cases where 'Gillick' was apparent that have been overturned by courts, especially in the arena of medical or psychiatric treatment. (Jenkins & Daniels 2000)

“At the same time in practise courts have the right to judge the childs competence to make autonomous decisions and may, as a result, disregard childrens wishes in the wider context of 'the best interest of the child'.” (Sharp & Cowie 1998 P.4)

CONCLUSION

The fact that I am writing this essay from my beliefs and experiences as a young persons counsellor will inevitably influence the evidence I have selected. I have displayed Global and National examples of young people as underdogs, with little or low status, providing handsomely for capitalism and the media.

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I have also demonstrated ways in which children acquire their place in society, how this positioning influences perceptions of young people and how this portrayal manifests itself through the young persons perception of themselves. Therefore, I have no issue with the perception that young people are marked historically and circumstantially.

The power divide that exists between adults and young people creates complications when trying to prioritise the child through support services. Autonomy, accessibility, confidentiality and appropriateness of service delivery bring additional challenges into the arena. I have a duty as a young persons counsellor to practise in a manner that focuses primarily on the young persons needs. However, it is imperative that I am able to work with knowledge of the systems that are influential to my client, in order to maximise the productiveness of therapy. Clients may arrive in isolation but belief systems are complex and have many external influences. Sharp and Cowie 1998 state that

“Social context is an important protective or risk factor. Family background factors such as parenting style and parent-child relationships influence the skill and attitudes of the young person. Other environmental influences such as cultural style, socio economic status and religious belief have also been implicated.”

Adolescence is a period in which a young person battles with change. With this awareness, an exploration of beliefs and influences are a prerequisite when counselling these young people who are trying to establish a sense of self. The way in which I respond can either validate or challenge these beliefs. This is relevant whatever the developmental stage my client may be in.

Social responses to young people demonstrate inconsistency that transmits mixed messages. Young people maybe an integral part of capitalism but this

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does little in promoting service consistency as thousands of specialist services battle for funding, then disappear.

The fact that research is initiated, acts reformed and laws amended, reflect a consideration and concern for child welfare. A young person certainly has more human rights than reflected in past times, however child protection remains a loose term, open to interpretation and failing many at risk. There is

a disparity between the word and application of the law regarding children's rights and many findings established from an investigation of need, fall on half listening and sometimes completely closed ears. I believe counsellors have a duty to challenge social deafness by using these reports, acts and legislation to provide guidance. Their information can be used to...

- Protect client rights
- Challenge the actions, beliefs and work of others and
- Supervise my own practise

and that is what I shall continue to do.

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