

THE COUNSELING PROCESS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PASTOR  
AND ADOLESCENT MALES WITH NO FATHER FIGURE

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this paper is to inform the reader about challenges that may face the pastor in his counseling relationships with young male adolescents, specifically those who have no father figure. The goal of this paper is not to address all of the problems which may arise, but rather to analyze briefly the differences a pastor may encounter counseling children without a male role-model versus counseling children with such a male figure in their lives. This paper will especially focus on the counseling process through five stages of the relationship: building the relationship, assessment and diagnosis, formulating counseling goals, intervention and problem-solving, and ultimately, termination of the counseling process and follow up. Lastly, this paper will provide insight and practical tips for the pastor to employ while seeking to give spiritual and social guidance to this ever-growing demographic of young men.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PART ONE: SPECIFIC COUNSELING CHALLENGES	4
PART TWO: IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE MALE ROLE MODELS	8
PART THREE: IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELING	11
PART FOUR: THE COUNSELING PROCESS	14
○ Relationship Building	16
○ Assessment and Diagnosis	22
○ Formulation of Counseling Goals	24
○ Intervention and Problem Solving	26
○ Termination and Follow Up	28
PART FIVE: CONCLUDING REMARKS	31
PART SIX: BIBLIOGRAPHY	33
PART SEVEN: APPENDICES	36

“Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”  
Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” John 21:17

## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the course of my Vicar year, I was privileged to have been given the responsibility of teaching the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade Catechism class at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio. Throughout that year, I learned far more from that class of 10 students than I ever could have dreamed of teaching them.

They were what seemed to be an average group of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. All shared a passion for sports, a sincere interest in learning, and were, for the most part, very studious in class. However, each of these young men, at different times during the year, struggled with getting good grades, paying attention in class, and for some, disrespecting their teachers. One young man was especially distracted in class, another struggled doing homework. But there was one young man, though he could be the kindest-hearted gentleman and caring individual, whose temper could flare up at a moment’s notice, and who above all, had a difficult time establishing positive and trust-based relationships with adults. Our relationship together started out no differently.

On our first day of class, this particular individual was loud and uncooperative. I chocked this up to nervousness and apprehension about being in a new school. However, as the year progressed, I strove to establish a more personal relationship with him, and strongly encouraged him to do his memory work and daily homework faithfully. Initially, there was quite a bit of resistance.

As the year progressed, so did our relationship. Every Tuesday and Thursday after class, he would come over to my office, and we would discuss any and everything—including his life at home. His biological father was almost completely out of the picture, and when he did see him, he was afraid of him. His stepdad tried to raise him, but was often too busy. So the weight of rearing him fell almost exclusively on his mother, who also had a young daughter who demanded much of her attention. And for much of his life, he had no positive adult male impact in his life.

Now, for possibly the first time in his life, he was surrounded by Christian teachers whose didn't exasperate him or put him down and beat him, but rather, men and women who truly wanted what was best for him, spiritually and physically. And as it eventually came out in our "counseling" sessions, that scared him. He truthfully had no idea how to interact with them—he did not comprehend that when he was punished, it was for a greater purpose than just the enjoyment of punishing him, he was unable to show them the respect their position warranted (because in his eyes, no man in his life ever "deserved" respect), and even when he was praised for doing something, he always thought there was a hidden agenda behind the praise. Quite simply, here was an adolescent boy, approaching puberty and manhood, who had no idea of what God expected of him—no idea how to be a God-fearing man.

He was not the only one. As it turns out, most of the young men in my Catechism class were in similar situations: no father figure, a new setting where they were surrounded by positive Christian teachers and male role models, and no idea how to grow up to be God-fearing men.

So what was I, as a young Vicar, supposed to do? I saw the amazing potential these students had. Here were five young men with gifts and talents that I saw as being well-suited for use in the public ministry. In my heart, I wanted more than anything for them to succeed in all aspects of life, where for most of their lives up to this point, nobody had pushed them to be anything more than just good at sports, or to simply get good enough grades to get by. And so I took it upon myself to be their mentor, not actively seeking to be a father figure to these boys, but rather to train up these children in the way they should go, so that when they would grow up, they might not depart from that which they had learned.<sup>1</sup>

For most of the year, we had a wonderful relationship. All their grades improved, they took pride in their work, and their relationships with the male and female teachers developed. At times, we were probably too buddy-buddy with each other outside of the classroom, which led to other difficulties in class keeping them on track. But aside from a few minor setbacks, the whole demeanor of the classroom had changed. There was a night and day difference from just a few months previous. Granted, there were still times when each of them reverted back to their old nature, but progress was being made.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pr 22:6. This and all other passages will be cited from The New International Version, 1984 edition.

My Vicar year ended, and I had to leave St. Paul's. These young men and I had made such good progress, and had become such great friends, that in my naïveté, I had overlooked a vital step of our counseling relationship: the end. This will be on my heart and mind for many years to come as being one of my most grievous ministerial flops, as well as the driving factor behind the writing of this thesis—I had not prepared these young men or myself for the physical end of our counseling relationship.

One of these young men was hurt very deeply when I told him I was leaving. The pain in his eyes when I told him I would not be coming back was almost unimaginable. The look of betrayal when I told him that I, one of the few men he could look up to, a role model, was going to leave him too, haunts me still. In those few moments, months of progress was instantly lost, and to him, I was no better than any other adult man he had ever known. I let him down. I hadn't prepared him to be the man God wanted him to be. In his words, "but Vicar, we're not done, I need you to keep helping me." And though his counseling and non-counseling relationship with the pastor at St. Paul's continued, and though he had other male role models in the church and school, I felt as if I had betrayed him.

Looking back, I realize my shortcomings in those counseling relationships. Even though I never want to feel that pain again—the thought of letting somebody down—I know that it will inevitably happen. However, I want to strive to the best of my ability to ensure that it will not be because of ill-preparedness or lack of knowledge or procedure. And for this reason, I have dedicated the last few months of studying to gaining a better understanding into the counseling relationship between the pastor and young men with no father figure. I pray that my research into the subject can benefit you, the reader, as much as it has helped me, and that you too might avoid such counseling flops.

In this paper I will first identify specific counseling challenges that arise from counseling adolescent males. I will strive to show just how important it is that these young men have positive male role models and Christian counseling. Then, I wish to identify five imperative parts of the counseling process.

You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more. Psalm 10:17-18

### **SPECIFIC CHALLENGES**

The pastor's job in the public ministry can be an extremely daunting task as we realize all of the duties involved, and all the people to whom he has been called to shepherd. Intentionally or not, there is a natural inclination in each pastor to spend more time with those people who he has a connection with, be it age, similar interests, or similar beliefs. It is only natural for the pastor to gravitate to such areas, as these connections are often where his particular strengths lie. One area of ministry, however, which should not be neglected no matter the demands or effort and time it may consume is ministering to the youth of the church.

Though it is not necessarily a bad thing, many pastors delegate this ministry to a layperson whom they believe has better qualifications for ministering to youth. It is beneficial, however, for the pastor to still keep an integral role in this particular field. In talking with many WELS pastors concerning this tendency to delegate, what has come across is the underlying belief that they as pastors are inadequate. One of the veteran pastors who was interviewed for this thesis said, "I'm almost completely unable to empathize with them anymore. Sure, I used to be able to understand what they were going through and why they think the way they do, but there are members in my congregation much more capable than I am, that I trust completely to take care of them."<sup>2</sup> Why is this? What has changed in youth today that inhibits pastors from feeling confident to minister to them?

One such change in the youth of today is the demographic of the world we live in. In the 1950's, more than 80 percent of United States children grew up in a family with two biological parents who were married to each other. By 1980, only 50 percent could expect to spend their entire childhood in an intact family. Today, only 30 percent of African-American children in the U.S.A. live with both their parents.<sup>3</sup> In 2010, there were five million more children living in

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<sup>2</sup> Pastor 1, Interview by Ben Zietlow. Personal Interview, Milwaukee, October 11, 2015. Interview questions are found in Appendix E

<sup>3</sup> McDowell, Josh. *Counseling Youth*. P. 211.

single parent homes than in 2000, just ten years previous.<sup>4</sup> That is a staggering statistic, and one that today's pastors must have in mind when dealing with the families in their congregation.

The most common familial makeup in instances when there is only one parent together with children in the household, is when there is a mother but no father in the family. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, out of about 12 million single parent families in 2014, more than 80% were headed by single mothers. Today, 1 in 4 children under the age of 18—a total of about 17.4 million—are being raised without a father.<sup>5</sup>

This crisis presents the counselor with specific challenges, one of which is the relationship within the family. In these “fractured” families, as Armin Schuetze calls them in his book *The Counseling Shepherd*, “relationships are intensified and compounded, and they become more complicated.”<sup>6</sup> These fractured families are marriages that end in divorce, or by death. Children with no active father figure in their lives certainly fall into this category, but are also increasingly born into a family with no father in the familial structure. One pastor, when asked if he had noticed an increase in male children with no father figure, said

Most definitely. Many of the young men in our school do not have a father in the home. Many have no contact with their father. There are more siblings with different fathers than when I was growing up and even ten years ago. Sadly, this has almost become the norm in the inner city and urban settings. Young ladies have slept with a number of different young men and they really don't know who the father is.<sup>7</sup>

In these families with no father figures, one of the problems for the members of the family is the void formed by the lack of an imperative person in this familial structure. This void, far too often, remains in the family. However, sometimes either the mother attempts to fill the void, giving her son a misconception of the true persona of a male adult. Sometimes the oldest male child is assumed into this role. But far more often, when the void becomes problematic for the family, it becomes convenient for mother or son to draw a third party into the family system. Far too often, as one pastor has noticed in familial structure in the past few years, “they [male

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<sup>4</sup> <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau – Table C2. Household Relationship and Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years, by Age and Sex: 2014

<sup>6</sup> *The Counseling Shepherd*. P. 55

<sup>7</sup> Pastor 1, in response to the interview questions found in Appendix E



children] are afraid of the males to a certain extent, because this is a new ‘enemy’ and they don’t know how the males will handle them.”<sup>8</sup>

Though girls in such homes certainly do struggle in ways that girls who have both parents do not, the target of study in this paper is adolescent males with no father figure—whether the father is unknown, has left the family, or has been removed from the family by death. The purpose is not to isolate those boys who have been intentionally abandoned (though certainly that is often the case in today’s world), but rather to minister to all male children who have no such role model in their daily lives.

The ontological crisis facing these children is made doubly difficult by their lack of life experience and perspective. Whereas an adult, when going through a mid-life crisis, is able to take their own steps to fix their problem (buying “Just for Men”, or new clothes, or a new car, or establishing themselves in a new relationship etc...), children facing such a crisis are often unable to do anything to change their environment, or their ability to reinvent themselves. They are at the mercy of the adult in charge of them, and are forced to cope without a father in their everyday life.

In researching for this paper, it became obvious that most older resources written for counseling strongly encouraged the pastor to counsel the entirety of the family, focusing on parental guidance. In an overwhelming majority of sources written before 2000, the prospect of counseling children individually was either not mentioned, or was merited less than a paragraph. Certainly putting the emphasis on parental guidance (encouraging, informing, advising, supporting, etc.) is by far the best approach, but often times it is not possible. Many Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod pastors have expressed their frustration at the growing apathy of parents toward the academic, worldly, and spiritual training of their children. In such a family, what will happen to the children? “If mothers and fathers are not strong in their faith, the kids will likely pick up that this is not a priority in their life.”<sup>9</sup>

The world we live in is constantly changing, sometimes for the better, often for the worse. Many times, the way in which we deal with this change determines whether we struggle

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix E for survey questions.

<sup>9</sup> Learman, Charles, *How Shall We combat the Confirmation/Graduation Syndrome?* WLS Essay File, 1993. 3.

or succeed. It is imperative for the 21<sup>st</sup> century pastor to be aware of these unique challenges that he will inevitably face, and to take proactive steps in addressing these challenges. One of those steps is counseling the child on his or her own in addition to familial counseling.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4

### **IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE MALE ROLE MODELS**

In ancient mythology, the Romans believed in a god named Janus. He is often represented as having two faces—with one face he could see into the past, and with the other he could see into the future. In Roman culture, he was the god of change and transition, which happens in the progress from past to future. Oftentimes, his name was accompanied by the epithet “*pater*,” meaning “father” so much so, that he was often simply known as *Pater*.<sup>10</sup> Janus was the father-god of the Romans who presided over all passages, and transitions. Because of his believed influence over transition, Janus also symbolized the transformation from boyhood to adulthood.

All of us as Christians have a God watching over us at all times—God the Father. However, imagine never experiencing the overwhelming comfort brought about by knowing God as your father, or the peace which transcends all understanding in believing that God the Father is able to overcome all things—including sin, the devil, and even death. Children with no fathers either do not know this comfort, or have a completely different viewpoint of what a father means to them. They have either never known the peace and structure a father figure can bring, have seen it, but lost their father, or they have seen the negative impact a father can bring to a family broken by divorce.

A vital part of the problem which contributes to weak Christian families is the lack of a spiritual head, namely, the father. In marriage, God has set apart man as the head of the wife, and also over the rest of the household.<sup>11</sup> Above all other things, husbands as head of the households are responsible for feeding their family with spiritual food. “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther also saw the importance of the head of the house being involved in training and instructing children in

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<sup>10</sup> Virgil *Aen.* VIII 357: "Hanc Ianus Pater, hanc Saturnus condidit arcem"; Horace *Epistulae* 16, 59: "Iane pater" clare, clare cum dixit "Apollo" "; Seneca *Apology* IX 2: "primus interrogatur sententiam Ianus pater"; Arnobius *Ad Nationes* III 29: "Incipiamus ...sollemniter ab Iano et nos patre".

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 1Ti 3:4-5, Eph 5:23, Tit 1:6.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Eph 6:4

Biblical truths: “It is therefore the duty of every family head to examine his children and household members at least once a week to see what they have learned of the Catechism. If they do not know it, he should insist earnestly that they keep working at it.”<sup>13</sup> Christian training at home, is necessary to prepare all children, both boys and girls, for the future. This training give children firm foundations which they will build on during their teenage years. It also gives them something to lean on and to turn to when they are assaulted by the temptations of this sinful world. “Teens learn their faith from the faith being modeled by their parents and the values and morals being portrayed by them, as well as how much they value God and religion.”<sup>14</sup>

Single parents—and subsequently their children—face monumental challenges and obstacles. Some that are confronted immediately, while others develop over a longer period of time. Without a father figure, many children today do not know how to handle the feelings and deep questions with which they are faced. Ideally, they would be able to vocalize these feelings and concerns to their father, but many times in today’s world, this is not the case. It is important to remember, however, that while adjusting to and living in a single-parent family can potentially create complex problems and considerable challenges, it does not seal a young person’s fate. In her article “Dan Quayle Was Right,” author Barbara Dafoe Whitehead quotes Nicholas Zill, a psychologist who has written on changing family behavior in the U.S. and its effects on children:

While coming from a disrupted family significantly increases a young adult's risks of experiencing social, emotional or academic difficulties, it does not foreordain such difficulties. The majority of young people from disrupted families have successfully completed high school, do not currently display high levels of emotional distress or problem behavior, and enjoy reasonable relationships.<sup>15</sup>

The most obvious fact in a one-parent family, however, is that one parent is missing. For the remaining parent, there is no relief, as temporary as it may be, in taking care of the children. There is no adult male with whom to confer when her son acts in a way she is unfamiliar with—is Sam behaving wildly, or is that just the way boys just act? Is Aaron a little slow in school? How do I teach Eric to be the man God wants him to be? These are just a few of the problems single mothers will face when rearing their father-less son. And as much as a mother might try to

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<sup>13</sup> Luther, Martin. *Large Catechism* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1978.)

<sup>14</sup> Dean, Kendra. “Faith, Nice and Easy: The Almost-Christian Formation of Teens.” (*Christian Century* vol. 127, no. 16: 22-23, 26-27. Nov. 18, 2015. EBSCOhost.), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Zill, Nicholas, quoted in Whitehead, *Dan Quayle was Right*. 66-70.

be everything her son needs from her, “a woman can never be a father to her son; a man can never be a mother to his daughter. We are what we are by virtue of our birth.”<sup>16</sup>

The importance of a father figure, or even to some extent, a male role model, is vital to the upbringing of an adolescent male. “If there is one area that gives single parents particular difficulty, it is discipline.”<sup>17</sup> While most of us think of punishment, especially in the physical sense, when we hear the word “discipline,” that is only a part of the definition. Discipline is the entire task of rearing a child from infancy up through adulthood, and helping them learn how to live effectively in the world, and for us as Christians, in the light of what God has taught us in his Word.

Single mothers are by no means unable to discipline their children, but when it comes to the unique situation that arises with an adult woman raising an adolescent boy to become a young man, it is only natural to assume there will be difficulties in discipline. The father figure has a natural understanding (as he himself was disciplined through this stage of life) of the inner-workings of the adolescent male psyche. In the first appendix, found on page 35, there is full list, compiled by Paul Agliandolo, which shares how positive father figures can impact the lives of children.<sup>18</sup> In his list he makes mention of seven different ways a father figure or male role-model specifically can positively impact the development of children.

As much as it would seem that a father figure or general male role-model can influence the life of a young man, many leading figures in the field of youth-ministry have seen that a parent’s influence on a child, “has the potential to be much greater and longer lasting than that of any other person, including peers, pastors, or youth ministers.”<sup>19</sup> In his research on the topic of youth ministry, George Barna discovered that nearly 80 percent of adolescents acknowledged that their parents have a profound impact on their thoughts and deeds. No other group, neither friends nor other role-models, came anywhere close to this level of influence.

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<sup>16</sup> Cerling, Charles. *The Divorced Christian*. P. 114-115.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 120

<sup>18</sup> Paul Agliandolo is a former Behavioral Consultant of children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders, worked for nearly 12 years in the field, and who now works for the Children’s Advocacy Center of North-Eastern Pennsylvania.

<sup>19</sup> Barna, George. *Real Teens*. 72

Train a child in the way he should go,  
and when he is old he will not turn from it. Proverbs 22:6

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELING**

In a seminarian's Senior Year Pastoral Counseling class at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, one of the first things Professor John Schuetze makes clear is the distinct difference between clinical and pastoral counseling. Professor Schuetze demonstrated first the difference in goals. A clinical counselor's main goal is to treat the physically or physiologically obvious problem that is affecting the counselee. The tools with which the clinical counselor is equipped can be varied, from Masters and Doctorate degrees in many specialty emphases under the general field of counseling, to the ability to diagnose disorders and prescribe medication to address those disorders. Finally, Professor Schuetze also makes mention of the limitations of clinical counseling.

For instance, in clinical counseling, oftentimes the counselor and counselee relationship is strictly professional, even in the case of adolescent counseling. Especially during this time when forming relationships is a vital point in their developmental stability, adolescents, both male and female, need to have a bond of trust with a counselor, if the counselor expects any type of open communication to happen.<sup>20</sup> This developmental period also impacts the child for the rest of his or her life; the self-esteem gained through positive and meaningful bond-building during the formative years affects the way in which the child will deal with insecurity later in life.

Another limitation of clinical counselors is the fact that they are often either unable or unwilling to delve into the spiritual aspect of the counselee's life. In today's world, where the majority of single-parent families are no longer the result of the death of a spouse, but rather the result of pre-marital conception or divorce, the clinical counselor finds no fault in the fact that there is now but one parent. If the counselor finds no fault in this issue, why should the child?

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<sup>20</sup> Keeler, Charles. *Serving Our Lutheran Youth: A Handbook for Lutheran Pastors and Youth Leaders*. (Evangelical Lutheran Synod Board for Education and Youth, Youth Subcommittee, 199).

In a phone interview with Richard Halstead, Professor and Chair of Counseling and Applied Behavioral Studies at the University of Saint Joseph, and also the co-author of *Counseling Children: A Core Issues Approach*, Dr. Halstead said that one of the leading misnomers of clinical counselors is the belief that single-parents (especially mothers) often times benefit from divorce or the lack of a male presence.<sup>21</sup> While this may sometimes be the case, the greater mistake is the belief that children almost always benefit from a divorce. “Contrary to popular belief, many children do not ‘bounce back’ after divorce or remarriage. Difficulties that are associated with family breakup often persist into adulthood.”<sup>22</sup> Though a secular counselor himself, Dr. Halstead’s self-proclaimed primary work is to discover the underlying issues facing adolescents needing clinical counseling, rather than treating what he calls “superficial issues.”<sup>23</sup> His goal remains the same as that of most clinical counselors, but the means he implores to achieve that goal are often overlooked by many counselors today.

As there are limitations to the clinical counselor, so too are there limitations to the pastoral counselor. As aforementioned, the pastor is unable to diagnose (oftentimes it is illegal for an un-licensed counselor to diagnose potential disorders) and certainly unable to prescribe any medication to his counselees. As such, it is often necessary for him to refer a counselee to a licensed clinician.

Whenever a problem is complicated or when you feel that it is beyond your training or expertise, refer the person to someone capable. Develop a relationship with a group of trusted professionals to whom you can make referrals... Refer a counselee when you are uncomfortable with the situation because you suspect a personality disorder or feel that the situation is out of your hands. Some issues are beyond the pastor’s level of training. A pastor can also be sued for malpractice if he attempts to give counsel in an area where he has no expertise.<sup>24</sup>

A pastor, though limited in his ability to diagnose and potentially in his knowledge of the subject, certainly has a distinct advantage when it comes to forming relationships with the counselee. There are certainly many different adults in a boy’s life that provide encouragement, support, and guidance, but it is often most well-received when it comes naturally. Clinical

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<sup>21</sup> Phone Interview conducted with Dr. Richard Halstead, 11-06-2015.

<sup>22</sup> Whitehead, Barbara Dafoe. *Dan Quayle Was Right*, The Atlantic, April 1993, at 47. Reprinted by special permission of Barbara Dafoe Whitehead.

<sup>23</sup> Halstead, Phone Interview.

<sup>24</sup> Hart, Gulbranson, Smith. *Mastering Pastoral Counseling*. 62, 37.

counselors are seldom seen when there is no apparent psychological, physical, or physiological problem with the child, and so they are rarely seen before there is a serious irregularity or behavioral disorder. The pastor, given his position as a public minister, is more able to develop a natural counseling relationship with the child, provided that they see each other on a somewhat regular basis. This “‘natural’ mentoring occurs when an adult voluntarily offers guidance, encouragement, and emotional support, as a part of a young person’s normal life course.”<sup>25</sup> These natural relationships will be addressed in more depth in part four of this paper.

The biggest difference between a clinical and a pastoral counselor is their end goal. The pastor’s primary goal in adolescent counseling, as well as any other form of counseling, is not to fix the behavioral or mental or physiological problem, but rather to bring the counselee into a closer relationship with their Savior. As Christ himself says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”<sup>26</sup> The pastor knows the most meaningful relationship is not that between a son and his mother, or son and his father, but rather the eternal relationship between the young man as a redeemed child, and God, his heavenly Father. And that is the most important aspect of any pastor’s ministry, to bring the children of God into a closer relationship with their heavenly Father.

In a sense, the true counseling relationship the pastor desires for all his members is the counseling God himself gives us in his Word. Paul sums up this beautiful relationship between man and God, and the comfort which truly “transcends all understanding” in his final exhortation to the Philippian church: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”<sup>27</sup> For the writer of this paper, the fact that in this verse there is no mention of a promise for physical well-being is a wonderful source of comfort, because truthfully, what need do we have for it? As long as God guides our hearts and minds and keeps us in him and his Word, in respect to our eternal salvation there is nothing else for which we need counseling.

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<sup>25</sup> [http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/volume5/preventing09\\_mentoring.aspx#](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/volume5/preventing09_mentoring.aspx#)

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Mt 11:28

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Php 4:6-7



God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.  
If one part suffers, every part suffers with it;  
if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.  
Now you are the body of Christ,  
and each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:24-27

### **THE COUNSELING PROCESS**

In the passage above from 1 Corinthians, Paul is writing to his brothers and sisters in Corinth, encouraging them to have “concern for each other.” The called ministry of the pastor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is no different. Each pastor in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has received a Divine Call to serve his own congregation. Not only is he the servant of the congregation, but he is also called to be the spiritual leader of that church. Over time, he will develop special relationships with each and every one of his members, and they with him. This professional and spiritual repertoire aids him in the formation of more private relationships, one of which is counseling.

But allow the writer of this paper to pose a question to you, the reader: What comes to mind when you think of counseling? Is it that strictly professional session where the counselor asks a series of penetrating questions desiring to get to the root of the problem? Are the two individuals facing each other, in an office setting, both working toward an understood goal? This exact scenario is one that television often portrays as clinical counseling, and what most people associate when they hear the word “counseling.” Teenagers and pre-teens all watch this same television, and their image of counseling is often the same. Because of this apparently semi-confrontational situation, many children are likely to be initially suspicious and mistrustful of adults—especially authoritative figures like the counselors depicted by society. Young adolescent males, as has been pointed out in previous sections, have all the more reason to doubt the good intentions of a counselor, especially of a male figure.

However, what comes to mind when you think of mentoring? Traditionally, the image of mentorship involves a kind and older adult, someone who is experienced in life, casually

providing guidance to an inquisitive younger person. There is not necessarily a specific or pressing problem being addressed. Rather, there is a general conveyance of life-skills and street-smarts from the older to the younger. As mentioned in part three of this paper, this “natural mentoring” often seems less invasive to the younger generation, and often-times is not viewed as counseling at all.

In a world where there is a gross need for youth counseling, but also where there is a real fear in adolescents of the typecast in-office professional image of counseling, why does there have to be such a stark difference between counseling and mentoring? Some newer resources depict the benefit of “informal” counseling for children, but many counselors, professional and pastoral alike, still focus on familial counseling. In many households, counseling to the family is the best course of action, but often it is not always readily available or appreciated. However, the notion of informal mentoring is much more appealing to many modern families.<sup>28</sup>

In his book *Christian Counseling*, Dr. Gary Collins refers to two Harvard professors who intended to identify one hundred of the greatest American business leaders of the twentieth century. Many of these leaders, as they discovered in their research, had different personalities, leadership styles, and ways of doing their business. But there was one characteristic alone that was shared by each one of these men and women: “each of the business giants had an innate ability to notice the forces that were shaping the times in which they lived. Then, based on what they saw, these leaders were creative enough to think of business ventures that could become successful.”<sup>29</sup> Collins calls these individuals “great noticers” who “had an acute sensitivity to the social, political, technological, and demographic influences that would define the eras in which they lived.”<sup>30</sup> Even in the Bible, in the midst of tens of thousands of warriors who were committed to helping David become King over Israel, there is a group of 200 men who were not fighters, but rather, “men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”<sup>31</sup> We have seen how the demographic of the “normal” household has changed in recent history, and if the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod desire to make a profound impact on

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<sup>28</sup> [http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/volume5/preventing09\\_mentoring.aspx#](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/volume5/preventing09_mentoring.aspx#)

<sup>29</sup> Collins, Gary. *Christian Counseling*. 845.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 845.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. 1Chr 12:32

counseling, we should look at these trends to help us anticipate what might be coming, and to help us find better ways to prepare our pastors for counseling children in the years that lie ahead.

Up to this point, the majority of this paper has been verified by various studies, surveys, and proven facts. Much of the remaining portion of this paper, however, will be somewhat speculative. The following six general subtitles are certainly necessary for any counseling relationship, but the information therein will be pointed to the specific case of the pastor as a counselor to adolescent males with no father figure.

### **1. Relationship Building**

Most clinical counseling sessions begin in an artificial way: the counselor introduces themselves, asks the counselee a series of questions, the counselee answers, and from that point onward, the two work together toward a set goal. The person coming into the counseling session has a general understanding that the professional counselor has their best interest in mind, but there is no backstory—no truly sincere development in their non-counseling relationship. Certainly the counselor gives their full attention to the response the counselee gives when posed with a question, and often truly desires to get to know the person better, but the imposed artificial environment of the counseling situation hinders the natural formation of the relationship. This natural formation of the counseling relationship is necessary, especially for adolescent boys who, because of their circumstance in life, already have a hard time trusting adult male figures.

On the other hand, mentoring (and for the most part, also pastoral counseling) is quite the opposite. Here there is almost always a backstory—a non-counseling relationship—that is already well established by the time any advice is given. In considering the counseling process, it helps to think of a beginning, a middle, and an end—each with main areas of focus, and each section with tasks to accomplish. The clinical counseling imposes an unnatural beginning on the relationship, whereas the less-formal mentoring or pastoral counseling allows the counseling relationship to be built naturally. Also, oftentimes clinical counseling is mandatory, having arisen from an issue that has been identified as problematic and in need of correction.

A pastor, as shepherd of the flock to which he has been called, takes a personal responsibility in all of the relationships he pursues. This personal responsibility is by no means a negative job, for what pastor does not love forming a closer bond with the members of his

congregation! Because of these close relationships, a pastor can influence not only the congregation in general, but also the youth of the congregation, by his words and actions. If a pastor is able to develop a deep bond with the children in his Catechism class, that relationship will influence them when they are no longer taking instruction from him. If a pastor acts as if he has no concern or care for the youth or youth ministry, it will definitely have an effect on the adolescents' willingness to participate. But if a pastor shows his youth that they are important, not only to Christ but also to him personally, it can have a lasting impression on them. The knowledge that having meaningful personal relationships is imperative in their role as a public minister of the gospel is by no means mind-boggling news for WELS pastors, but when it comes to dealing with the youth they serve, it is even more necessary.

When a pastor takes a serious interest into the lives and well-being of the youth he serves, they in turn will be able to see that they are truly important to him. This relationship instills in them a sense of trust, and this trust enables the pastor to delve deeper into the minds and lives of his younger flock. This initial trust also allows the pastor to talk to them about serious things going on in their lives, as well as spiritual matters. A pastor who has a good relationship with the teenagers will be more likely to be called upon when something unexpected or difficult arises in the life of one of those adolescents. How much more approachable are these pastors, especially when the youth is a young man who has had no (or few) positive and meaningful relationships with men!

When dealing with boys who, because of their fatherless upbringing, are prone to doubting the permanence of adult male figures in their lives, the first and perhaps most important thing to do at the onset of the relationship is to lay a strong foundation of trust—and this is not just a one-sided formation. Though it is certainly important for the pastor to take personal responsibility for this, it is also very important for him to establish the structure and form the relationship will take. Charles Keeler says this concerning the formation of pastor-adolescent relationships:

Sometimes the best way to help a teen or show care and concern for them is simply to listen. In a world where everyone wants to talk and be heard, what a benefit it is when someone shows interest in just listening to what is going on in their lives. An effective pastor or youth leader learns quickly that all people, especially teenagers, want to be heard and understood. Listening gives the pastor or youth leader the opportunity to

understand them and what is going on in their lives, to counsel them with law and gospel if necessary, and to show Christian love to them.<sup>32</sup>

Laying a strong foundation for trust can be done solely by listening to the young man. However, as the pastor knows full well (being a male himself), actions often speak louder than words, or in this case, lack thereof. Though it is certainly beneficial to listen, it is also beneficial for the pastor to have control over the direction of the relationship. This does not necessarily mean that he controls or restricts options, worried that the youth might choose a poor direction. Carl Rogers, known as the father of client-centered therapy, believed that for a person to “grow” (be it emotionally, psychologically, physiologically, etc.) they needed an environment that provided them with genuineness, acceptance, and empathy.<sup>33</sup> He believed that these three personal characteristics were necessary for the therapist to have in any therapeutic relationship. Though his nondirective counseling (which he later called “client-centered therapy”) has been widely accepted since the 1940s and 1950s, it has only in recent history been applied to education, and to the younger target audience.<sup>34</sup>

Consider how the pastor develops rapport and creates relationships with his members and visitors. What is it that he brings to the relationship that helps him create a foundation of trust and willingness to work collaboratively toward goals? One pastor, when asked to describe the way in which counseling relationships were formed in his life, said:

Forming the relationship was sometimes the result of a simple question of how things were going. If things were not good, I would make myself available to listen and offer some ways to deal with the immediate situation. The child was being counseled without knowing it. Many times they would give themselves guidance by means of my questions. Continuing the relationship was never forced. I would offer my time and ear to them, anytime. If we needed to address a matter deeper, we would set up a time to do that.<sup>35</sup>

First is genuineness; labeled by Rogers as congruence. To him, this was the most important of the three characteristics he deemed necessary for a counselor. This genuineness is fully achieved when “the inner experience matches [the] outer expression of that experience,” or more simply put, when the counselee feels that he can be fully open and be “himself”—when he

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<sup>32</sup> Keeler, Charles. *Serving Our Lutheran Youth: A Handbook for Lutheran Pastors and Youth Leaders*. (Evangelical Lutheran Synod Board for Education and Youth, Youth Subcommittee, 199), 23

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.simplypsychology.org/carl-rogers.html>

<sup>34</sup> <http://primarygoals.org/models/rogers/>

<sup>35</sup> Pastor 2 in response to interview questions found in Appendix E

can be authentic.<sup>36</sup> Authentic means being open about feelings and attitudes, both positive and negative. In a counseling relationship, this does not mean full disclosure about everything, but rather that which is appropriate for the budding relationship. Here the pastor wants to move from abstractions to specifics, not just dealing with emotions (though they certainly are important), but also moving to more concrete issues—the more concrete, the more able they are to connect with their own experience.

Rogers' second necessary characteristic is acceptance, or rather, unconditional positive regard. In the secular world, this one is unanimously accepted as being completely necessary for a positive forward-working relationship. The pastor, however, knows the two sides waging war in the heart and mind of the young man before him: both the Old Adam and the New Man. The secular world says, "I accept you as you are," whereas the pastor must make clear the facets of original sin and regenerate man in the boy's life. However, the benefit of accepting the person as a redeemed child of God is absolutely necessary, even when some behaviors may be less than acceptable. For the pastor counseling a young man with no father figure, he will be sure to not evaluate or judge the individual on a "good" or "bad" scale, but rather a goal-based scale of "forward" or "stagnant."

Finally, Rogers states that an accurate empathetic understanding of counselee experience and feelings gives the counselor a more personal connection with the counselee—that the feelings and experiences are their own. The pastor, in counseling the young man, will desire to dive beneath the superficial feelings to the true cause of all despair: sin. In clinical counseling, this characteristic of an understanding counselor is often made evident in the phrase, "and how does that make you feel?" quickly followed by a response of the counselor's own personal example of a similar feeling.

In 1969, Robert R. Carkhuff supplemented Rogers' three characteristics with his own scale for assessing facilitative interpersonal counseling. Though his scale is primarily used by professionals to evaluate the counselor's proactive responses to statements made by the counselee, it plays a monumental role in the way a counselor, or a pastor, looks at his relationship building both in and out of counseling. His six characteristics are empathy, respect,

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<sup>36</sup> <http://primarygoals.org/models/rogers/>

concreteness, genuineness and self-disclosure, confrontation, and immediacy. An excerpt from his book *Helping and Human Relations*, and also an explanation for each of the characteristics, can be found in Appendix B.

The purpose of including these foundational characteristics is to give the pastor a preemptive tool to evaluate the way in which he deals with people, both in and out of counseling. Many of these things a pastor already does in his day to day dealings with his members, his family, his friends, and everyone he meets. But the author of this paper wants to drive home the point that young men with no father figures especially need to be given special attention, and dealt with very carefully, otherwise there is the very real and very common risk that they might shut down. If and when that does happen, another attempt will have to be made by the pastor at establishing a positive relationship.

Thankfully, pastors have been given something by God that enables them to make this aspect of their call so much easier—their ears. Too often, pastors (and all adults for that matter) are too quick to dismiss speaking an encouraging word to a youth simply because they feel that they are not that influential, or that they have nothing meaningful to say! How easy it would have been for the pastor who said, “I used to be able to understand what they were going through and why they think the way they do” and delegated the youth group entirely to another individual, to just ask the children how school was going, or if the child is excited for sports or drama this school year, and to simply let them do the “work” of talking!

So often we’ve seen youth ministries that go on for years without ever asking the kids for their opinions. Instead, the adults theorize and draw conclusions on their own without going to the source. That’s like trying to determine what childbirth is like, so you ask everyone in the delivery room—except the mother.<sup>37</sup>

Teens in single-parent families need the freedom to express what they are feeling, especially in two areas: he or she needs the freedom to express his feelings about the missing parent, and the freedom to express negative feelings without condemnation. If the youth uses inappropriate language, the adult may request more appropriate words, but the adult will be wise to listen closely to the feelings that lay behind the young person’s words.

Don’t be too quick to judge or correct the young person’s reactions, nor to offer a solution. Initially, take time simply to empathize with him or her. Feel with him. Cry with him. Comfort him. Let him know of your care and concern.

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<sup>37</sup> Schultz, Thom and Joani. *Involving Youth in Youth Ministry* (Loveland, CO: Group Books. Loveland, 1987), 32

Communicate acceptance and affirmation to the youth. Remember that he or she may be feeling rejected and alienated; the first step toward healing and progress may be for him or her to know that someone believes in him, that someone thinks she's worth something. Remind the youth (particularly by praying with and for him or her) that both God and you highly value and appreciate him or her. Many people who are struggling in different circumstances need affirmation—reassurance of their own worth and capabilities—more than anything else.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, the early stages of the counseling relationship afford the chance to build counselor understanding of the counselee and the issues being faced. It also gives opportunity to the young man, where the mentoring pastor can show him God's design for a Christian family. The pastor as counselor will use listening skills and attend to the nonverbal, and also listen to the underlying communication that is really happening, when it might seem to be nothing more than insignificant small talk. The pastor is also careful to not be judgmental of either the situation the boy is in, or overly judgmental of the way communication might be starting out. It is a big step for the young man to open up at all to another man, and it is imperative that the pastor does not jump to conclusions.

A pastor is only able to dedicate so much time to the training up of the child with whom he is counseling. But once again, God has given him a useful tool to help in the training up of the young man: the congregation. At a time in his life when an adolescent male is looking more and more to his peers and friends for acceptance and direction, this network of believers can be an invaluable asset in creating and maintaining not just a trusting relationship, but also an environment for the boy. A pastor will be sure to gently encourage attendance at church, certainly for the message of law and gospel—the Word of God—but also for the fellowship which he will undoubtedly be received into. To this young man, whose family life might be struggling as his mother tries to juggle children, undertaking all her single-parent roles, and providing for the family, the church might be the place he feels most secure and comfortable. And why shouldn't he? The church is how a functioning family is supposed to look: rejoicing together, grieving together, a place where one can find their fullness. As one pastor put it, "In our congregation we emphasize the family of believers. We want our children to see the great gift in the church of having believers of all ages to remind us of what Christ has done for us."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> McDowell, *Counseling Youth*. 215

<sup>39</sup> Pastor 3, in response to interview questions found in Appendix E



In a family, everyone is equal, but has their own jobs and responsibilities; so it is in the church. This mentality allows the youth to feel like they belong, and are as much a part of the church as anyone else. It is important that the pastor stress the importance of this “family” atmosphere to his congregation.

## 2. Assessment and Diagnosis

“Knowing who your people are will go a long way in knowing how best to serve them. We can’t creatively minister to those we don’t really know!”<sup>40</sup> How true these words are, not just in the developmental stage of the counseling/non-counseling relationship, but also throughout the pastor’s ministry to the counselee (and even those to whom he does not counsel). When it comes to assessing the situation and internally (not verbally) diagnosing the issue(s) at hand, the pastor is best served to have the complete story of the individual. And this is not just during the formation of the relationship either, for there are certainly things a young man might forget, or, might perhaps intentionally leave out at the onset of the relationship. The pastor must dive fully into a phenomenological investigation.<sup>41</sup> Gene Getz, author of *The Measure of a Family*, puts so much emphasis on this aspect of the counselor’s mission, that he says,

We anger and exasperate children when we abuse them physically [and] abuse them psychologically (by humiliating them and failing to treat them with respect). Neglect them, don’t try to understand them, expect too much from them, withhold love unless they perform, force them to accept our goals or ideas, and refuse to admit our mistakes.<sup>42</sup>

The purpose of this step is to gradually gather information in order to promote pastoral understanding of the young man’s situation and perspective. The pastor’s goal in this “stage,” if you will, is to identify the nature of the problem at hand, and also to gather from the counselee what change he desires for himself. It might happen that the boy does not yet see himself as needing a father figure. Here, the pastor would not want to brazenly contradict the young man’s opinion and impose his own insight into his life, but rather to gently bring to light the advantages (both immediate and ongoing) of having a solid Christian male-model in their life. One pastor’s strategy: “I would make myself available to listen and offer some ways to deal with the

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<sup>40</sup> Thompson, David. *Counseling and Divorce*. 113

<sup>41</sup> Phenomenology as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary is “the study of the development of human consciousness and self-awareness as a preface to or a part of philosophy”

<sup>42</sup> Getz, Gene A. *the Measure of a Family*. 83-94.

immediate situation. The child was being counseled without knowing it. Many times they would give themselves guidance by means of my questions.”<sup>43</sup>

As the aforementioned pastor noted in his response, the task of assessment and diagnosing the underlying issues does not have to be the stark, “What is the problem?” kind of question. Especially for a young man coming into the relationship who might be questioning the sincerity of the pastor from the onset, it is far better for the pastor to help the adolescent articulate the problem on their own (perceived or not) rather than pronouncing it for them. This can be done by indirect questioning—leading the counselee through a series of questions which will enable him to examine his own life in comparison to a family unit with a father figure.

For any person, but especially for the young man who is being “confronted” with this difference in his familial structure for perhaps the first time, this understanding of the difficulties he is faced with can be a huge realization. With this revelation can come an influx of emotions. The pastor is careful not to trample upon his emotions and demand the forward progression of counseling, but empathizes with the child. As much as a growing boy loves to be the center of attention when the attention being given is positive and rewarding, adolescents (as you the reader can assuredly empathize with) detest the idea that they are the problem, and the notion that they are in the center of this negative attention. In such cases, the counselor needs to draw the focus away from the adolescent to the root of all problems we face, sin.<sup>44</sup>

At this stage of a young man’s life, there are at least four major areas in which children need success. “These are (1) material, (2) mental, (3) relational, and (4) self-esteem.”<sup>45</sup> Perceiving that he has lost relational success, as well as his self-esteem having taken a hit, it may happen that the young man shuts down at this time. It is not unusual. It is not unnatural. The understanding pastor will allow him to end the conversation if this happens, but not without imparting a few helpful parting words: the pastor will encourage the boy to pray, showing him that prayer is powerful and effective.”<sup>46</sup> The pastor will also express to the boy that he as his pastor will be praying for him. Finally, it is beneficial to attempt to give the young man a few passages or sections of Scripture he can read until they see each other again. It would be good

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<sup>43</sup> Pastor 1, in response to interview questions found in Appendix E

<sup>44</sup> *The Counseling Shepherd*. 87

<sup>45</sup> Collins, Gary *Resources for Christian Counseling: Counseling and Children*. 112

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Jas 5:13-16

too for the pastor to notice, and also to make mention to the counselee, the strengths he has noticed. Especially for boys, this again gives them a sense of worth—that they mean something—even if their world seems to have turned upside down.

Eventually, the presenting problem will have to be directly addressed. The pastor is careful here to not speak down to the young man, treating him as a child, but rather co-addressing the issue with him, as he would an adult. Most adolescents no longer want to be considered children in their dealing with adults, yet they are not old enough or mature enough to be adults.<sup>47</sup> This goes along with the relationship building, but is especially important to note once counselor and counselee approach this stage. As one pastor said,

One thing I like to do is establish boundaries. I make my position as their pastor clear. I let them know that I love them and enjoy being with them. I try to keep my conversations with them on a mature level; not talking down to them, not trying to use the latest slang, not putting on fronts. I learned very early that they see that as not being genuine. I don't try to be buddy-buddy with them, but a friend. When they get comfortable, they may try to move across the line, so I need to remind them. I have found that as they get older, they respect the friend side of things over the buddy. A friend is someone who will tell you like it is for your good. I still have former students from over 15 years ago contacting me for friendly advice.<sup>48</sup>

At this stage of counseling, the pastor has the important task of diagnosing the extent of the issue(s) at hand. He also needs to be aware as to the extent of his training and ability, not just during the formative stages of the relationship, but throughout. There is much that a theologically and practically trained pastor can do, but there comes a time when he needs to assess his ability, and if necessary, to acknowledge that he is out of his element, and to talk to the mother of the boy concerning referral.<sup>49</sup> Such a referral should only be done with the mother's permission and, preferably, participation.

### **3. Formulation of Counseling Goals**

At this point in the counseling process, the adolescent will now fully know that he is in a counseling relationship with the pastor. Until now, the relationship between the two as counselor and counselee may have been established by both parties, but not necessarily. Now, however, the

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<sup>47</sup> Keeler, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Pastor 1, in response to interview questions found in Appendix E

<sup>49</sup> Consult page 12 of this paper for more information on referrals.

young man is fully aware of his and the pastor's role, and will in essence, be in the driver's seat as to where the relationship goes. The pastor will want for him to take this lead, because it enhances in him a sense of ownership and motivation—factors which are extremely important in the counseling process.<sup>50</sup>

Here, the counselee is faced with a decision; namely, where he wants this counseling relationship to go. As personified in the Roman god Janus, the young man is in a sense looking two different ways; back to the way of life he knew, which at the time will certainly seem the easier course of action, or looking ahead to a new and unknown way of life. Especially now, the strong relationship that has been formed between pastor and counselee will be of even greater value. At this juncture, the young man will either make the decision himself based on what he alone thinks is right, or will have established a strong enough rapport with the pastor that he trusts him sufficiently to strive together with him toward a common goal.

Now it is time for pastor and adolescent to work together to establish well-identified goals. The greatest of these goals is to establish and strengthen the relationship between the young man and his heavenly Father. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the pastor will strive to ensure that this is the underlying theme for the entirety of their relationship—that though the adolescent might be developing without an earthly father, he has a heavenly Father who has done so much more for him than any earthly father ever could.

In addition to the greatest goal of growing the bond between the young man and his heavenly Father, there are a number of “categories” of goals toward which the pastor and adolescent can work. The two can work together to change an unwanted or unwelcome behavior. They can work together to help the young man better cope with either the absence of his father, or another issue; to enhance relationships, to make and implement decisions. Ultimately, whatever the goal, the pastor will be there with him to help his journey of growth to work toward the potential God has enabled him to achieve.

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<sup>50</sup> Appendix C has a diagram which is helpful to understand the advantages of working together in an interdependent way versus alternative options. From <http://www.freedomblog.com/2008/01/02/2-interdependent-relating/>

#### 4. Intervention and Problem Solving

Once the goals have been established, pastor and counselee need to collaboratively work to establish a plan to achieve those goals. To the boy, this is completely new territory for him, and the pastor, as an experienced mentor, will educate him as to the different options for achieving the goals they have decided upon. The goals toward which both pastor and adolescent work toward should be clearly defined and reachable. This last point is extremely important, especially early on in their relationship. To the young man, if the goal seems unattainable, his motivation and willingness to follow the established plan for achieving the goal will be diminished.

In order to keep the young man interested and motivated to achieve the goals they have agreed upon, the pastor will want to play to his strengths. “Children this age are quite prone to striving for success and achievement; they do this to win approval. Therefore, helping a child set realistic academic, athletic, spiritual, and social goals is quite important.”<sup>51</sup> In order to play to his strengths, the pastor must first identify what those strengths are. Oftentimes with teens, it will be obvious as to what their particular gifts are: athleticism, personable, perfectionism, as well as many others.<sup>52,53</sup>

One of the greatest problems professional and Christian counselors alike face at this stage of the counseling process is the constantly changing nature of the young man. There are physical changes, sexual changes, interpersonal changes, changing morals and values, the sense of

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<sup>51</sup> Resources for Christian Counseling: Counseling and Children. P. 135.

<sup>52</sup> According to the Barna Research Group, teenagers can be divided up into four overlapping personality niches: Interactives (which included almost half the teenage population, are highly personable, focused on relationships, and sensitive to others. They live with a relaxed approach to problem solving and tend to be hospitable and minimally influenced by stress), Dynamos (represent one-quarter of the teen world. They are aggressive, focused, driven, above average in productivity, and effective problem solvers. They also can irritate others with their high energy, competitiveness, and self-assurance), Stabilizers (describe about one-fifth of adolescents. They are marked by consistency, loyalty, thoroughness, and predictability, but they can also be rigid and lacking in creativity), and Evaluators (the smallest group. They like details and insist on accuracy and completeness. They tend to be perfectionists who put high demands on themselves and others).

<sup>53</sup> In researching a strength-based counseling approach, the author of this paper found an insightful diagram on a site dedicated to “optimizing strengths and actualizing potential” not in youth counseling scenarios, but rather in management consultation. This chart can be found in Appendix D, or in its entirety, together with the article, at <http://www.psychai.co.za/our-strengths-based-coaching-approach/>

independence, and of course, discovering themselves. Though the writer of this paper will not go into detail regarding the specifics in each of these areas, the pastor desiring to be prepared for such an undertaking as counseling a pubescent male will do good to refresh himself in these matters.

The pastor and youth will be working toward an end goal, but for many children, their ability to go that long without achieving some sort of checkpoint is lacking. So the understanding pastor will set more quickly attainable short-term goals. When the child achieves the set goal, the pastor, together with the parent, needs to appropriately reinforce this goal. This approval is a powerful reinforcement to the adolescent's self-esteem, especially since it is from an adult (the age group whom they are trying to impress the most). If and when the adolescent does not achieve the goal, the pastor and parent must still remain supportive. "Failure to meet a goal should never affect a relationship's strength."<sup>54</sup> The young man must never feel like he's "doing this for pastor" or for his parent, but rather he should be continually reinforced to believe that he is in fact doing this to better himself—to become the man God expects him to be.

Just as there are goals which the young man should strive to achieve, there are also limits he should be encouraged to avoid. In a home-setting where the adolescent knows the only attention he might receive is negative attention, this is an area of the counseling process the pastor needs to be extremely cautious in addressing. Though it is often a necessary step in the young man's development, a pastor must be proactive in dealing with the issues when they develop, and also enforce them against a backdrop of acceptance and love that is readily communicated by the counselor to the counselee.

Especially to the image of "young man stuck in the boy's body," where the adolescent wants to be seen and accepted as an adult to his peers and other adults, responsibilities are a good way for him to learn healthy and workable options to meet his needs. Here, the pastor will want to work with the mother and perhaps even other siblings, to encourage the young man to become responsible and to learn the satisfaction of accomplishing tasks. These responsibilities are a great example of a stepping-stone goal, and should be utilized throughout counseling. With greater age

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<sup>54</sup> Counseling and Children. 135

comes greater responsibilities, and with greater responsibilities (and the young man's faithful follow-through with these responsibilities) comes a greater level of privilege.

## 5. Termination and Follow Up

With the ending of any relationship, including a counseling relationship, there are many emotions that the individuals involved in the relationship will experience. In one way, the termination stage is the last step of the counseling process. The time dedicated toward working together toward a common goal is drawing to a close, and the emotions between both counselor and counselee can be quite varied. This step in their relationship will have just as large of an impact on both of them, and is every bit as important as the initial phases of the counseling process. The way in which pastor and counselee close their relationship can have an extremely significant impact on the young man's view of the entire experience, as well as affecting the likelihood of their continued progress and practicing what has been learned in counseling, even after direct sessions have ended.

God-willing, the termination of counseling, in its specific sense, happens when the goals which have been mutually agreed upon by both counselor and counselee have been achieved, or when the problems being addressed have become either more manageable, or completely resolved.<sup>55</sup> Though this is the last step in their counseling relationship, the pastor will be sure to broach this step in their relationship well before the last session. He will want to do this so that the young man, who may still be in an impressionable state in regards to his relationship with men, will be able to ask questions and to come to grips with what he will need to do when the relationship ends. "The [counselor] must be clear from the first contact, unless there are mitigating circumstances, that the intent of treatment is to help him [counselee] function without the therapist."<sup>56</sup> Though this quote was taken in the context of a therapist working with a client in a psychotherapeutic session, nevertheless it still applies to the pastor and adolescent in their counseling relationship.

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<sup>55</sup>[http://soe.syr.edu/academic/counseling\\_and\\_human\\_services/modules/Termination/moving\\_toward\\_termination\\_of\\_theory.aspx](http://soe.syr.edu/academic/counseling_and_human_services/modules/Termination/moving_toward_termination_of_theory.aspx)

<sup>56</sup> Kramer, Stephen A. *Positive Endings in Psychotherapy: Bringing Meaningful Closure to Therapeutic Relationships*, 1990. 188

In a clinical counseling scenario, termination happens either at the end of a successful relationship, or when counseling seems to not be helping. For the pastor, however, informal counseling can, and often will continue for as long as he and the young man are blessed to be able to communicate with each other. The immediate conflict has been resolved, but there are many other aspects of their relationship that will continue, including support, self-development, and especially spiritual growth and wholeness. The counselor, called to be the young man's pastor, will certainly strive for all of these things, especially the spiritual aspects. For no matter the level of success of the counseling, a pastor will consider their relationship a victory, if for no other reason than he has brought the adolescent to a more intimate and more meaningful relationship with his God.

In ending their relationship of meeting together on a regular basis, the pastor will encourage the boy and his mother, together with whomever else may be at home, to take the progress that has happened thus far, and to continue it at home. Many adults learn from hearing and seeing what the counselor shows and tells them to do. Children, and especially young men, often learn best by doing. This is in direct connection with the progressive-goal achieving method the pastor utilized in their counseling. This "homework" can include written activities (though for many adolescent boys, this method is of less interest than other forms of take-home progressive work), behavioral assignments, reading either books or internet sources, and projects.

The pastor also will encourage the youth, as he should be during the entirety of the counseling process, to participate in the church youth group. This is beneficial not only for the boy, but also for his mother and perhaps other siblings. "A healthy and vibrant youth group is an important part of a young person's life—especially for a child from a single-parent home. Youth workers need single parents, and single parents need them."<sup>57</sup>

There is much in a single parent family that no one can change. Mom and Dad probably won't get back together; things will never be like they were. The pastor, parent, teacher, or youth worker can help by enlisting the youth's cooperation and participation in acknowledging and devising the things he or she *can* change, and the things he or she *can*

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<sup>57</sup> McDowell, 215.



improve. Focus his or her attention on constructive things that are within his or her power to do, and encourage such things.<sup>58</sup>

Though the youth will be entrusted to working toward a closer and more meaningful relationship with his savior in many ways, the fact of the matter is that at this point, he and the pastor will have formed a close bond. One of the greatest challenges the compassionate pastor will face in this whole process is the temptation to get overly involved—either physically or emotionally. “You need to have a balance and help the young man and his mom understand the boundaries. You still have a family and a ministry and others who need your care and attention.”<sup>59</sup>

Here, the issues of dependency and codependency may arise. These can stem from transference<sup>60</sup> and countertransference.<sup>61</sup> Having established such a strong working relationship with each other, both counselor and counselee need to be made aware that this is not a permanent project. “The development of an attitude of dependence upon the caring person is often the result of a helping relationship. The young person may show an increasing demand for the adult’s time and attention and an increasing reliance on his or her approval and advice.”<sup>62</sup> If and when this happens, it is imperative that the pastor set well-defined and understood limits for himself and the counselee. These limits may include the boy calling the pastor at home, how often they will meet, the non-counseling amount of time spent together, etc. These limits are not intended to stagnate the relationship, or to separate the pastor and young man, but rather to help the counselor be objective in his dealings, making him as helpful as possible. “The counselor must maintain a vigilant attitude,” Collins says, “if he or she is to avoid hazards... As Christian helpers we honor God by doing the best job possible, by apologizing when we make mistakes, and by using our mistakes as learning situations and stepping stones to improvement.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> McDowell, 216.

<sup>59</sup> Pastor 1, in response to interview questions found in Appendix E.

<sup>60</sup> Transference is the tendency for some individuals, especially children, to transfer feelings about a person in the past to a person in the present.

<sup>61</sup> Countertransference refers to the counselor’s tendency to see similarities between the counselee and some other person.

<sup>62</sup> McDowell, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Collins, 28.

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor... Isaiah 9:6

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this paper, I have identified specific counseling challenges that arise from counseling adolescent males. I have also clarified five important steps in the counseling process. Jesus Christ is the best model of Christian counseling we have; he is the perfect counselor. In a pastor's attempt to emulate the counseling of Jesus, he will undoubtedly look to the basic essence of Jesus' teaching. The message was the same of that as John the Baptist: repent for the kingdom of heaven is here. Repent, for I am here.<sup>64</sup>

In his teaching, caring, and counseling, he demonstrated those traits, attitudes, and values that made him effective as a people-helper, and that serve as a model for us. Jesus was absolutely honest, deeply compassionate, highly sensitive, and spiritually mature in all his dealings with people. He was committed to serving his heavenly Father and his fellow human beings (in that order), prepared for his work through frequent periods of prayer and meditation, was deeply familiar with Scripture, and sought to help needy persons turn to him, in whom they could find ultimate peace, hope, and security.<sup>65</sup>

At the center of all Christian counseling—be it to adults seeking marriage counseling, help for depression, grief, developmental or identity issues—the Holy Spirit works through the Word to make this counseling unlike any other. The Wonderful Counselor himself gives pastors the words to say, gives young boys the willingness to listen, gives mothers the desire for what is best for their son, gives love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>66</sup> He works his law into hearts hardened by the experiences of this world and sin, showing each person their egregious errors against God and their fellow man. And without ever failing, he bestows on us the beautiful gospel message found only in God the Son: Jesus. He alone is able to take away the sins and shortcomings we commit every day, through his perfect life and death and resurrection. This saving message and the God who gave this message to the whole world is what makes the Christian counseling process unique. The pastor is but an instrument through whom the Holy Spirit works, but the message he has been entrusted with is

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Mt 3:2, 4:17

<sup>65</sup> Collins, p. 30. Referencing John 14.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Gal 5:22-23

“the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, [it] will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Php 4:7

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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A: A List Compiled by Paul Aglialoro, Which Illustrates How Positive Father Figures Can Impact the Lives of Children.*<sup>68</sup>

#### *1. What emotional benefits can a child gain from having a father figure?*

Children with present father figures benefit by having a wider range of emotional expression modeled for them as they grow and face new experiences. With this wider range of expressiveness, a child will in turn be more able to recognize and express their own emotions all through their lives.

#### *2. What impact does a father figure have on a child's academic abilities?*

To say that having a father present would positively impact a child's academics would be to say that single mothers aren't able to handle those same academics themselves. This isn't true, but in my experiences with my own children I have learned that there are subjects that my wife tackles with the children, and other subjects that I help with. So by having a father figure in their lives, my children's academic abilities are stronger, and their school experiences are better than if they only had one parent.

#### *3. Does having a father figure impact a child's social behaviors?*

One of the most important functions of both parents is to prepare our children for the social world. Boys learn to be men by watching and emulating their fathers, they learn gender stereotypical roles and norms. Although they may eventually determine to act against those stereotypes in the future, knowing them and following them in early adolescents is vital in developing healthy social interactions and friendships.

#### *4. Are children without father figures more likely to experience depression or anxiety?*

There is a myriad of studies all of which indicate that girls with absentee fathers have a far higher prevalence of depression later in life. Although the correlation data is clear, the actual process by which this depression is developed is less clear. There is far less research, and

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<sup>68</sup> This article can be found in its entirety at <http://www.happeningsmagazinepa.com/2014/06/18/benefits-present-father-figure/>

therefore knowledge, about the role of the absentee father in boys' mental health. This is most likely due to depression and anxiety not being as readily diagnosed in boys as in girls.

*5. What can a father figure provide that a mother cannot?*

There is nothing a man can do or teach their child that a mother cannot do or teach. However, a mother isn't able to model male emotional expressiveness, machismo or 'guy code' for their sons. Mothers also cannot demonstrate to their daughters the type of love they get from their dad. Girls develop a sense for the 'ideal' mate from their fathers, we are their first loves and their first heroes. Not to say mothers aren't heroes in their own way, but girls see dad as their Prince Charming. Girls also pick up their more masculine traits and mannerisms from their fathers.

*6. How does an involved father figure positively impact a father-son bond?*

The father-son bond is an important first step in a child's social growth, it can influence their friendships, their work ethics, their romantic involvements and so many more aspects of the boy's life. Having a present and involved father allows a boy to be involved in social, academic, scouting and athletic activities. This involvement keeps a boy busy and well-rounded, which in turn helps the boy stay out of trouble. Additionally, the emotional benefits from a present father are innumerable to a young boy, and directly impact their emotional and behavioral stability throughout their lives.

*7. How does an involved father figure positively impact a father-daughter relationship?*

The father-daughter bond is one of the most important emotional bonds a girl will make. Girls, like boys, will cycle back and forth between loving mom and pushing dad away, then loving dad and pushing mom away. Without a present father, she will be left pushing away from her mother with no one to attach to during that time. This bond also sets the daughter's ideal for future partners, in play, school and eventually in love. Girls, more than boys, develop their sense of self-worth and self-esteem based in a large part on the attention and love they perceive from their fathers. With a present and attentive father, girls tend to have better self-esteem and therefore stronger emotional health in all aspects of the development.



## *Appendix B – Carkhuff's Examination of Adolescent Psychology*<sup>69</sup>

The facilitator is a person who is living effectively himself and who discloses himself in a genuine and constructive fashion in his response to others. He communicates an accurate empathic understanding and a respect for all of the feelings of other persons and guides discussions with those persons into specific feelings and experiences. He communicates confidence in what he is doing and is spontaneous and intense. In addition, while he is open and flexible in his relations with others, in his commitment to the welfare of the other person he is quite capable of active, assertive, and even confronting behavior when it is appropriate.

A. Empathy: The ultimate purpose of the empathic response is to communicate to the client a depth of understanding of him and his predicament in such a manner that he can expand and clarify his own self-understanding as well as his understanding of others. The guidelines for empathy are: (1) the helper concentrates with intensity upon the client's expressions, both verbal and nonverbal; (2) the counselor concentrates upon responses that are interchangeable with those of the client; (3) the counselor formulates his responses in language that is most attuned to the client; (4) the counselor responds in a feeling tone similar to that communicated by the client; (5) the counselor is most effective in communicating empathic understanding when he is most responsive; (6) the counselor moves tentatively toward expanding and clarifying the client's experiences at higher levels; (7) the counselor concentrates upon what is not being said; (8) and the counselor employs the client's behavior as the best guideline to assess the effectiveness of his responses.

B. Respect: The communication of respect to the client has several purposes: (1) to establish a relationship based upon trust and confidence in which the client can explore relevant concerns; (2) to establish a basis on which the client can come to respect himself in areas relevant to his effective functioning; (3) and to establish a modality through which the client can, with

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<sup>69</sup> Carkhuff examined seven major characteristics he thought a facilitator should possess. The following material is taken from Carkhuff's book: *Helping and Human Relations, Vol. I.*

appropriate discriminations, come to respect others in areas relevant to his own functioning. The guidelines for the communication of respect are as follows: (1) the counselor suspends all critical judgments concerning the client; (2) the counselor communicates to the client in at least minimally warm and modulated tones; (3) the counselor concentrates upon understanding the client; (4) the counselor gives the client the opportunity to make himself known in ways that might elicit positive regard from the counselor; (5) and the counselor communicates in a genuine and spontaneous manner.

C. **Concreteness:** The communication of concreteness enables the client both within and outside of therapy to deal specifically with all areas of personally relevant concern. The guidelines for the communication of concreteness are: (1) the counselor makes concrete his own reflections and interpretations; (2) the counselor emphasizes the personal relevance of the client's communications; (3) the counselor asks for specific details and specific instances; (4) and the counselor relies upon his own experiences as a guideline for determining whether concreteness is appropriate or not.

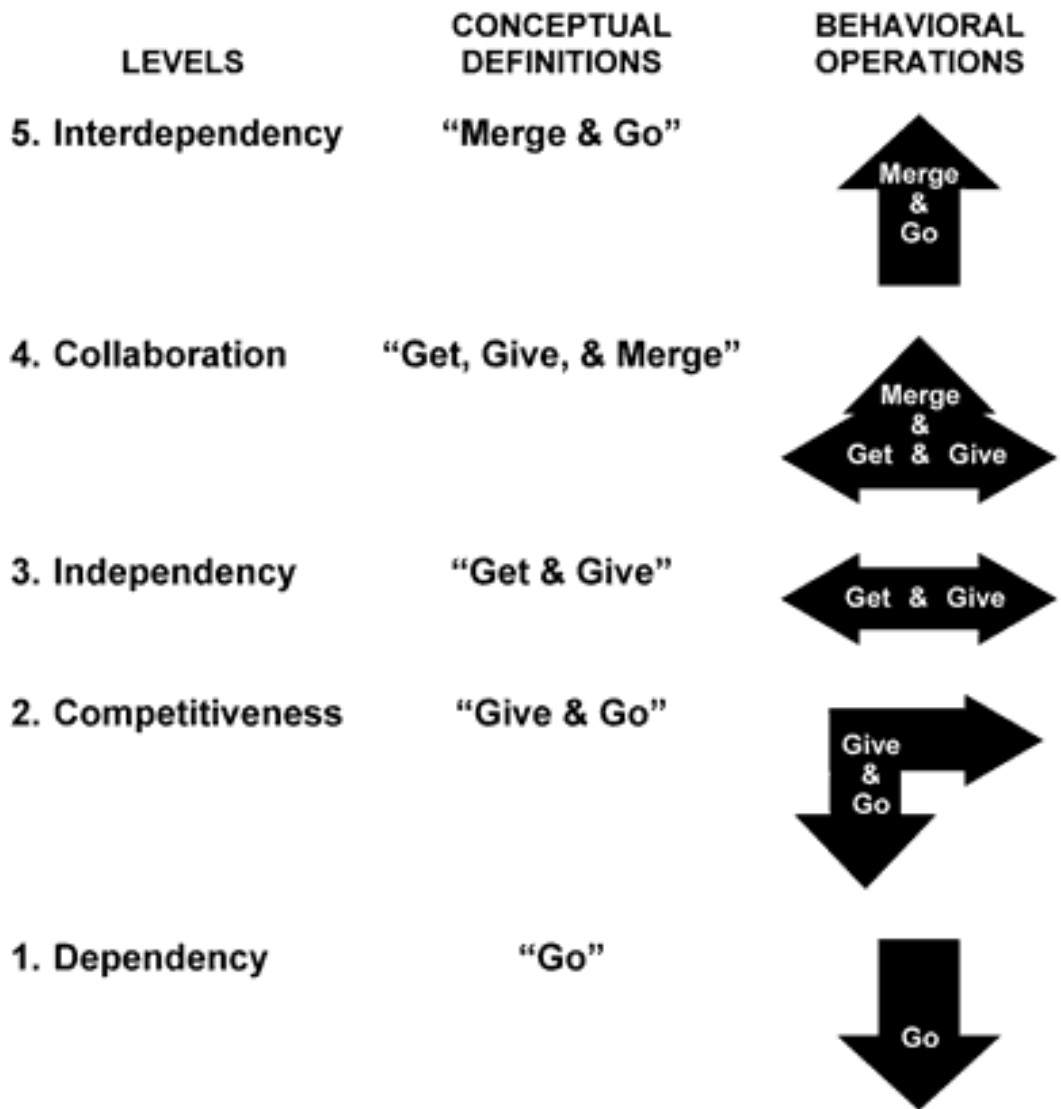
D. **Genuineness and Self-Disclosure:** Genuineness provides both the goal of helping and the necessary contextual base within which helping takes place. The dimension of self-disclosure serves a complementary role to genuineness. The guidelines for communication of these dimensions are as follows: (1) the counselor attempts to minimize the effects of his role, professional or otherwise; (2) the counselor communicates no inauthentic responses while he demonstrates an openness to authentic ones; (3) the counselor increasingly attempts to be as open and free within the helping relationship as possible; (4) the counselor can share experiences with the client as fully as possible; (5) the counselor can learn to make open-ended inquiries into the most difficult areas of his experience; (6) and the counselor relies upon his experiences as the best guideline.

E. **Confrontation:** In order to enable the client to confront himself and others effectively when appropriate, the counselor must confront the client for the following discrepancies in his

behavior: discrepancies between the client's expression of who or what he wishes to be and how he actually experiences himself; discrepancies between the client's verbal expression of his awareness of himself and his observable or reported behavior; and discrepancies between how the counselor experiences the client and the client's expression of his own experiences. The following guidelines may be employed in formulating confrontation responses: (1) the counselor concentrates upon the client's expressions, both verbal and non-verbal; (2) and the counselor concentrates initially upon raising questions concerning discrepant communications from the client.

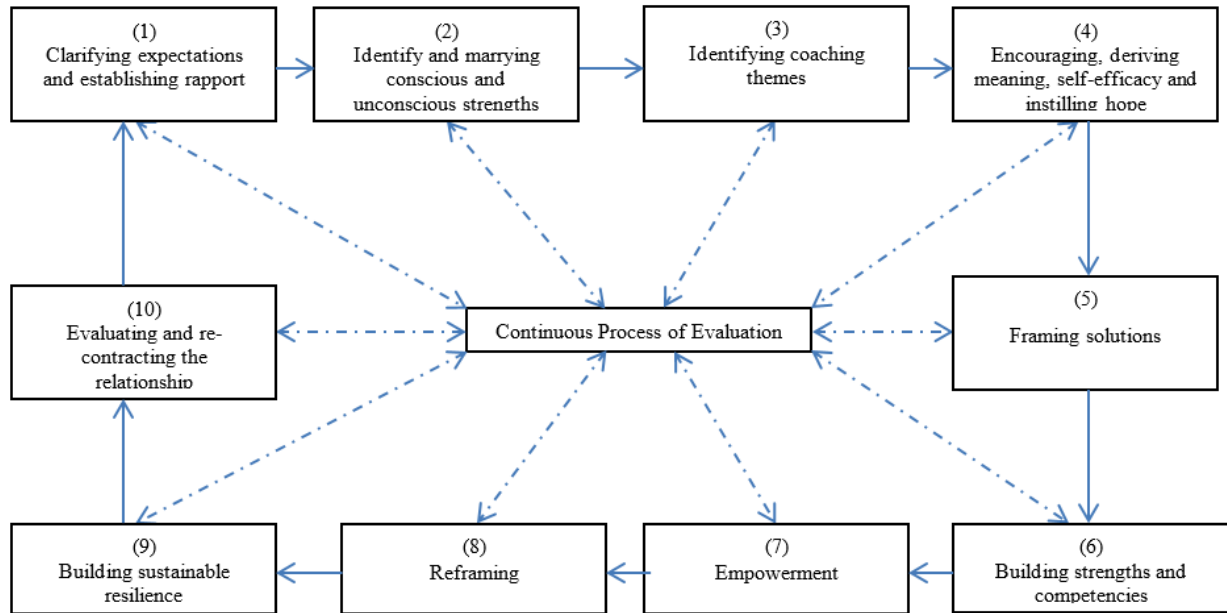
F. Immediacy: With regard to interpretation of the immediacy of the relationship, the key question is: "What is the client really trying to tell me that he cannot directly tell me?" The guidelines for communication of immediacy are as follows: (1) the counselor concentrates on his own personal experience in the immediate moment; (2) the counselor temporarily disregards for the moment the content of the client's expression; (3) the counselor employs the frustrating, directionless moments of helping to search the question of immediacy; (4) and the counselor periodically sits back and searches the key question of immediacy.

*Appendix C: Stages of Relating*<sup>70</sup>



<sup>70</sup> The supportive evidence for this chart can be found in its entirety at <http://www.freedomblog.com/2008/01/02/2-interdependent-relating/>

*Appendix D: Optimizing Strengths and Analyzing Potential*<sup>71</sup>



*Figure 1. The strengths based coaching model*

<sup>71</sup> This chart can be found in its entirety, together with the article, at <http://www.psychai.co.za/our-strengths-based-coaching-approach/>

*Appendix E – Pastoral Interview Questionnaire*

- 1) Have you noticed an increase in male children with no father figure?
- 2) Have you noticed an increased need for attention/discipline with such figures?  
(Especially in the classroom or church setting)
- 3) Have you pursued individual counseling with the child and/or family counseling with his caretaker(s)?
- 4) What problems have you noticed in interactions or counseling with the child/his caretaker(s)?
- 5) In interacting/counseling the child, what unique tactics/strategies have you had to use?
- 6) Describe the non-counseling relationship between you and the counselee, both forming the relationship, continuing the relationship, and if applicable, ending the relationship. (For example: Were you buddies in and out of the counseling sessions, was catechism/other class "normal," etc...)
- 7) Describe the counseling relationship between you and the counselee, both forming the relationship, continuing the relationship, and if applicable, ending the relationship. Please make mention if there was a difference between children with and without father figures. (For example: difficulties in establishing trust, difficulties working together, pastor's struggles, child's struggles, "what works" etc...)
- 8) What resource(s) served as most beneficial in your endeavors in forming the relationship?
- 9) In what ways was the counseling between you and this father figure-less child different than other child-counseling sessions?
- 10) How would you advise/encourage other pastors in their counseling endeavors to boys with no father figure?