

**T**he statistics are grim:  
12 million U.S. children  
live in one-parent homes  
1 million child-abuse  
victims annually

An estimated one-half million children attempted suicide in one recent year.<sup>1</sup>

Just as a child who is hungry cannot learn, so too a child who is racked with emotional problems (anxiety, self-hatred, depression)

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cannot perform well in school. These students are present in our schools at every grade level. They are trying to cope with a world that neither soothes nor sustains them.

Early symptoms of impending problems include disinterest in school, disruptiveness, and truancy. Without early intervention these behaviors can progress to juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, vandalism, teen pregnancy, dropouts, and the loss to society of fully functioning and competent adults.

#### **Early Action Needed**

Early intervention strategies can make a difference in our children's quality of life. Teachers must be trained to detect the signs of depression, substance abuse, and excessive stress. They must apply proven methods to enhance student self-esteem.

However, counseling is not just for the troubled or the troublesome, but for normal students as well. Every child needs the reassurance that help is available if he or she needs it. Seventh-day Adventist schools need to become caring communities in which no child suffers the pains of isolation. We cannot shield children from stress, but we can help them learn to cope.

The services that a guidance program brings to the school will enhance the teacher's effectiveness. Early intervention can prevent small problems from becoming major ones. The elementary school setting provides an opportunity to establish self-discipline and other positive attributes that enhance mental health. Schools should provide guidance services at this level, when such programs can build upon developmental and preventive principles, jointly involving the school, home, and the community.

### Counselor/Student Ratio

This goal of counseling for every student is far from a reality. There

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are only 66,785 elementary and secondary counselors in the American public schools to serve a population of 39.7 million students. "Those assigned to give guidance typically have 400 students to deal with, says Executive Director Frank Burnett of the National Association of College Admission Counselors, and 'unfortunately, in some urban public schools, you will find ratios in excess of 1,000 to 1.'"<sup>2</sup>

The picture in SDA elementary schools and junior academies is just as bleak. Only the four or five largest schools have either a full-time or part-time counselor.

Although the number of counselors in NAD academies looks a bit more impressive, the other duties assigned such persons highlight the lack of emphasis that this area has received. In 1986-1987 only seven of 101 academies and 12-

grade schools in the North American Division had a full-time person who did guidance/counseling/career education.<sup>3</sup> Fifty-six others had guidance counselors who also performed other functions such as principal, registrar, dormitory dean, or teaching assignments.

How little time these people have for counseling becomes clear from the long list of other duties they must perform. For example, an academy in the southern part of the U.S. listed the duties of one staff member as vice principal, guidance counselor, history, math, physics, honors; another school's counselor also taught Religion IV, band, choir, private lessons, and physical education.

Shockingly, 37 academies—more than one-third—did not list anyone on the staff assigned to guidance or counseling.

Even if a school lists a counselor on its staff, there is a good chance that that person has not had much training for this role. Figure 1 shows the percent of certified counselors on the senior academy level in each union in the North American Division.

**Figure 1**  
**Certification of Counselors**  
**NAD Senior Academies**  
**September 1986**  
**(in percent)**

UNIONS	COUNSELORS
Atlantic	14.0
Canadian	25.0
Columbia	12.5
Lake	77.7
Mid-America	25.0
North Pacific	50.0
Pacific	26.0
Southern	60.0
Southwestern	50.0

The percentage of certified counselors in the division ranges from 12.5 percent to 77.7 percent, with an overall average of only 37.8 percent.

A number of factors contribute to this problem. Foremost on the list is *money*, as is the case with so many problems. Most SDA elementary

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8. Give students a clearer concept of the objectives of their learning.

9. Eliminate confusion about assignments.

### Research Supports Contracting

1. Studies have shown that contract students have better attitudes toward study.

2. Grade-point averages are better for contract students and remain so for two years afterward.

3. Contract students learn to organize their work better than do noncontract students.

4. Contract students are better at research, identifying more nontraditional sources.

5. Contract students are more creative and innovative.

6. Contract students have improved oral and written communication.

7. Contract students spend more time on task.

### Student and Parent Response

A student who moved to another school wrote: "I miss working with contracts. We can't do anything without the teacher's permission. I get my assignments done early and then I'm bored and have nothing to do."

A parent commented: "Ken is getting all A's again this year. He never tried to get good grades before he was in your class. You have taught him how to study, how to organize himself, and how to achieve." I didn't really do it; contracts did.

Another parent said, "I don't know what your secret is. Shelly had to work last summer to complete work she hadn't done during the year. Now she brings work home and finishes it every day. She used to hate school. Now she loves it." Contracts motivated her and kept her on task.

For me, contracting has been a key to successful multigrade teaching. □

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## GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING—A CRITICAL NEED

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schools are small multigrade schools whose budgets cannot support even a part-time guidance person. The entire enrollment of SDA students in the Pacific Union (our largest NAD union) equals that of a small public school district in Los Angeles.

But perceptions of need also contribute to the problem. Adventists have traditionally believed themselves immune from many of the problems of society and public education, so we have not thought that we needed counselors. The upward mobility ethic of our church has sometimes fostered an excessive emphasis on academics at the expense of "frills" like guidance and counseling.

Even in SDA schools, students are sliding through some of their most productive years without learning basic skills to make meaningful academic choices and with little help in career planning. Students need to learn how to cope with feelings of low self-worth, peer pressure, and the stresses caused by divorce, death, and interpersonal problems. Growing up is not easy, and students need a trusted adult with whom they can feel safe to share concerns and confidences.

### How to Begin

Since early intervention can help prevent small problems from reaching crisis proportions, a strong guidance program in elementary and junior academy years

can make a difference in the quality of life for our children.

A counselor should be available to handle "people problems" in every elementary and secondary school. Crisis intervention, group and individual counseling should be provided as needed on a daily and weekly basis.

Each conference could hire one or more counselors to travel to schools throughout its territory to assist teachers and students with guidance/counseling problems. These professionals could also hold workshops and in-service seminars for teachers. Such programs can help teachers to become skilled in meeting the needs of their students, and give them enough information to know when they should refer a problem to a psychologist or other professional.

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**Only four or five of the largest SDA elementary schools have counselors on their staffs, and about a third of NAD academies do not list anyone as assigned to do guidance counseling.**

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Training sessions might be held during holiday breaks, in the summer, or on weekday evenings. To avoid burdening teachers, they should receive release time during school hours to compensate for this time.

Each school should designate one staff member to coordinate the guidance service and act as a team leader to the staff. The person responsible for discipline should not participate in guidance functions.

In some cases, community professionals may be willing to contribute their time or charge a reduced fee to assist the school in dealing with counseling problems. For example, when an academy student in the Washington, D.C., suburbs discovered the dismembered body of her nephew, the

academy she attended immediately called in a counselor to help her cope with this trauma. The counselor came to the school a number of times to assist the student.

### School/Church Cooperation

Working together with the local church can serve not only to enhance counseling services, but also foster a spirit of cooperation and mutual concern for the young people of the church.

Joint church/school projects include (1) a combined home visitation program by counselor and pastor/Bible worker; (2) substance abuse hotlines managed by trained

volunteers from church colleges or local churches. Support services could be inexpensively provided by local elders, deacons, and deaconesses.

Today's schools are expected by society to take on many responsibilities that used to be handled by parents, church, and extended family. For most teachers, simply teaching the eight or so subjects required and grading papers takes most of their time.

School boards, administrators, and the church must recognize the necessity of providing extra help for children in our schools. Guidance and counseling is no "frill." For some students it may literally mean

the difference between life and death; for others, the difference between a minimal existence and achievement of their full potential as children of God.

Assisting in the development of a human being is a sacred responsibility with which parents and teachers are entrusted for only a little while. By offering a program that balances academic, spiritual, and emotional elements, Adventist schools can help children fulfill the promise of this statement by Ellen G. White: "Our first duty to God and our fellow beings is self-development. Every faculty with which the Creator has endowed us should be cultivated to the highest degree of perfection, that we may be able to do the greatest good of which we are capable."<sup>4</sup> □

### Benefits of a School Counseling Program

- Guidance and counseling can have a powerful effect on scholastic performance, school attendance, and drug and alcohol use.

- A professional counselor can serve as a link to the workforce, helping students explore potential careers and discover undetected talents and interests.

- Counselors can intervene in crisis situations to help young people cope with family problems, suicidal feelings, and failing grades.

- Counselors can test students with learning problems and help parents and teachers implement strategies for overcoming such difficulties.

- Counselors can keep track of young people considered "at risk," such as minorities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. They can encourage them to stay in school, provide a positive role model, and help such students plan their school program so that they can prepare for challenging careers. The economic and human implications of such support and guidance are inestimable.

- Counselors can identify gifted students, helping them choose academic work that will qualify them to enter fields where they can best serve God and their fellow human beings.

- Counselors can act as intermediaries between parents and

children to facilitate communication and help families work together to find solutions to their common problems.

- Counselors have special training to help them detect physical and sexual abuse, and offer support and assistance to the abused child. The counselor may be the only person who carries through in reporting and follow up with local authorities to resolve abuse situations.

- Research seems to indicate that students who receive counseling are more likely to delay becoming sexually active.

- The counselor can implement a home visitation program that promotes cooperation and better understanding between parents and teachers.

- The counselor can work with local officials and the media to raise public consciousness about issues of general concern, such as crisis hot lines, drug abuse, and the need for referral services for children with learning or behavioral problems.

- Counselors can assist other staff members by offering strategies for balancing family life and career, coping with burnout, and handling classroom management problems. They can also act as a confidant for teachers who feel uncomfortable about discussing their problems with the principal or superintendent.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Mary Hatwood Futrell, in a National Educational Association advertisement in *Washington Post*, April 21, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Gallagher, "College Bound, Without a Map," *Time* (February 23, 1987), p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Information compiled from union conference listings of teachers, 1986-1987 and research by the NAD Board of Higher Education, and includes self-supporting schools.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1954), p. 164.

## AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS

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ally keep the farms but fail to devote much imagination to their operation. Such farms struggle along, but rarely operate at their full potential. Thus the school farm and the agricultural program become symbols of corporate guilt rather than sources of unlimited opportunity.

### Sell School Farms?

I heard recently that the administrator of one of our major educational institutions used the arguments I set forth in the last chapter of *Myths in Adventism*<sup>5</sup> to justify selling the institution's extensive farm. I certainly never intended such conclusions when I penned that chapter on manual labor and agriculture. However, selling school farms might be the most sensible action if Adventists are going to operate them largely the same way as they were run in