

## **AN EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL FOR A GROUP COUNSELING PROJECT FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL PUPILS**

Ways to prevent and reduce aggression in the socio-educational context

**Marius-Costel EȘI**

*Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava*

E-mail: mariusesi@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

The existence of a contradictory reality at the social and educational level reveals the need to consider the idea of counseling at the group level in an appropriate organizational environment. The (re)discovery of such a reality highlights the correspondence and interdependence among some components associated with the counseling field. Therefore, within the framework of this project, we intend to make the approaches of an educational and also of a scientific nature more efficient in relation to the field of counseling at group level.

**Keywords:** *Group counseling, secondary school pupils, counseling strategies, aggression;*

### **The motivation for the initiation and development of the counseling project**

The existence of a contradictory reality at the social and educational level reveals the need to consider the idea of counseling at the group level in an appropriate organizational environment. The (re)discovery of such a reality highlights the correspondence and interdependence between some components associated with the Counseling field. Therefore, within the framework of this project, we intend to make the approaches of an educational and also of a scientific nature more efficient in relation to the field of counseling at group level.

This approach assumes as a starting point the need to know the problem cases and the development/application of appropriate/optimal counseling strategies on the counseled pupils. Such an assumption expresses the very dynamic between the counselor and the clients/pupils. (Mitrofan & Nuță, 2001, 11), a dynamics intended to optimize the self-esteem of the latter. (Lupu, 2013) In this context, we believe that it is necessary to apply a bidirectional strategy based on two directions of action: on the one hand, *the counselor and*

*the clients (pupils)*, and on the other hand, *the clients/pupils and clients/ pupils* (through mutual learning and modeling of good practice).

We should add that by applying such a bidirectional strategy, the development of pro-social behaviors aimed at preventing and reducing aggression in a socio-educational context is ensured, precisely by the fact that group members have the opportunity to share their thoughts, emotions and feelings (Geldard, Geldard, Foo, 2019, 145). By means of group counseling, we only encourage the elimination of the individualization of problems (Lemeni & Miclea, 2010) by creating a sense of communion that allows the development of the self and also the clarification of certain aspects related to personal and social needs and security.

**The causes** that generated such a counseling approach at group level are as follows:

- The manifestation of aggressive behaviors by pupils in the school environment;
- The existence of low results in terms of school performance;
- The occurrence of phenomena related to the observance of the main rules of conduct/discipline in certain classes.

**The psycho-pedagogical counseling group** is *homogenous*, because it is made up of clients/pupils who have the same age and similar problems regarding the optimal functioning of their own person. (Dumitru, 2008, 161)

**The target group:** 18 7th grade pupils from the “Al. I. Cuza” secondary school in the city of Suceava

**Period/Date:** October-December 2022

**Venue:** the “Al. I. Cuza” secondary school in the city of Suceava (Counseling Office)

**Topic:** Ways to prevent and reduce aggression in a socio-educational context

**Purpose:** Informing pupils about the main methods to prevent and reduce aggression in a socio-educational context

### **Objectives relating to clients/pupils counseled**

O1. To explain the terms “aggression” and “violence” in a socio-educational context starting from the causes that generate them;

O2. To compare the aggressive and the non-aggressive behavior taking into account the criteria proposed by the counselor;

O3. To interpret certain roles proposing conflicting situations that can generate aggressive behavior;

- O4. To propose ways of managing conflict situations that can lead to aggressive behavior;
- O.5 to participate in the communication and interaction exercises proposed by the counselor.

Starting from the counselor's role in group counseling, such as the facilitation of a safe environment, we can present the following behavioral measures of the counselor, reproduced by us through the stage “objectives related to the counselor”.

### **Counselor Objectives**

- O1. The ensuring of conditions of communication compatibility among clients (counseled pupils), the counselor and the environment (place) where the counseling sessions take place;
- O2. Optimizing communication relationships among the people involved in the counseling activity;
- O3. The training pupils in the participation of various counseling activities at group level in accordance with the fields of intervention associated thereof;
- O4. Initiating communication/interaction activities in order to improve the ability to respond to the manifestation of aggressive and non-aggressive behaviors;
- O.5 Completing the counseling process by evaluating the activities carried out and carrying out a feedback process together with the pupils.

**The counseling model adopted** is **RIS** – Relation – Understanding – Change (Nelson-Jones, 2009, 65) in conjunction with **the Egan Model in three stages**: problem definition, goal setting and action plan (Holdevici & Crăciun, 2019).

**The methodology of action:** During the first meetings, we will take care of the knowledge and self-knowledge of the group members, we will establish rules for conducting the activity (for example, “Let's always pay attention to what the other says”, “Let's try to stay on topic”, “Let's not silence our colleagues”, “Everyone's ideas are equally valuable”, and so on), thus guaranteeing trust and confidentiality. In this regard, we propose to use techniques that involve knowledge and communication exercises (“What do I know about the colleague in the group?”) or which reveal the presentation of a person/character whose behavior can be identified.

The targeted activities will also aim at completing the “Mind-Map” on which to specify positive aspects and acquisitions of a behavioral nature, as well as the achievement of an

action plan by calling on the “Self Validation Map” simultaneously with the “Individual Compass” (“What am I allowed to do?” – “What am I not forbidden to do?”).

In carrying out the action plan (intervention) we will establish clear objectives for each meeting/activity, by identifying possible obstacles and strategies to the prevention thereof.

All counseling sessions will end with specific forms of evaluation expressed through questions as follows: “What did I achieve today?”, “How was it?”, “How did you feel today?”, “What do you think that it was good?”. The advisor will also subsequently analyze and interpret the data.

### **Action strategies**

The establishment of such strategies requires ordering and systematic reordering of methods and procedures aimed at a set of actions and decisions that can be capitalized at the level of each counseling session.

In this context, we can state the following:

- **Methods**, such as the exposition, the heuristic conversation, the observation, the algorithmization, the role play, the problematization, the debate, the brainstorming, the Philips 6-6, the cooperation method and the communication exercises
- **Resources:**
  - human resources: the clients (counseled pupils), the specialist (counselor)
  - materials/informational resources: counseling and pedagogical assistance office, didactic-material base, specialized literature, documents and usual training objects specific to the field of counseling (evaluation sheets, sheets, markers and flipchart).
- **The main activity carried out** as a group activity.

**Stages of the activity:** The materialization of the counseling activity as a whole requires the completion of predetermined stages in the form of counseling sessions and each of which has a specific implementation. Also, the materialization of the counseling sessions is carried out by taking into account the counseling approaches as found in the (specialized) literature and practice. In this context, the approaches can be correlated or dispersed depending on the given context and the goal pursued within the activities of each session.

**The activities** carried out have the following structure

Session no. 1 – Activity no. 1: **Let's get to know each other better**

Session no. 2 – Activity no. 2: **CCAA – “What? How? Here and Now”**

Session no. 3 – Activity no. 3: **“Insight: me, you and us”**

Session no. 4 – Activity no. 4: **“New meanings about us”**

Session no. 5 – Activity no. 5 **“Assessment of the entire counseling activity”**

Duration of a counseling session: 1 ½ h.

### ***Session no.1***

***Name of the activity:*** “Let's get to know each other better!”

***Paradigm/ Theoretical substantiation of the activity:*** The activity derives from the theoretical framework of psychological cognitivism, having the encouragement of the identification of the relationship among the members of the group as a priority focus.

***The general objective of the activity:*** The formation of an adequate representation concerning the main aspects that led to the emergence of the counseling situation.

### ***Intermediate objectives (Io):***

Io1. Establishing mutual knowledge relationships necessary for the efficient and harmonious communication within the group;

Io2. The presentation of conflicting situations arising as a result of the manifestation of aggressive behaviors;

Io3. The analysis of the behaviors of the actors involved in the role-playing game;

Io4. The group-level evaluation of the activity carried out.

***Description of the activity scenario:*** The counseling activity is carried out starting from a self-characterization exercise. In this context, an exercise of making sentences about oneself will be carried out.

A second stage will consist in identifying the idea of aggressive behavior and the possible causes that determine such a behavior.

A third stage will focus on a role play in which one of the actors (a pupil from the group) will play the role of a person with aggressive behavior given a certain socio-educational context.

A fourth stage consists in the analysis of the aggressive behavior in relation to the nonaggressive behavior also presented in a certain socio-cultural context by other members of the group.

***Action strategies:***

- *The self-knowledge exercises* – expressed through the construction of specific phrases;
- *The debate* – the presentation of arguments for and against;
- *The role play* – carrying out specific exercises at the counselor's suggestion;
- *The problematization* – discussing and analyzing aggressive behaviors;

***Resources:*** counseling office, educational film, material base, evaluation sheets.

***Session no.2***

***The name of the activity:*** CCAA - "What? How? Here and Now"

***The paradigm/ theoretical foundation of the activity:*** The proposed activity falls within *the gestalt paradigm* because interrogative structures of the type how and what are used, respectively the idea of confronting one's own emotions/cognitions? Also, the exercises will be anchored in the present tense and will involve direct addressing. In addition, the purpose of this activity is that of assumption, responsibility and awareness of the consequences from an integralist perspective.

***The general objective of the activity:*** Optimizing the interpersonal relationships at the level of the pupils group

***Intermediate objectives (Io):***

- Io1. The development of tools for analysis, reflection and action in order to avoid the emergence of new problems that reveal disapproving behaviors;
- Io2. Psychological and sociological analysis of aggressive and non-aggressive behaviors;
- Io3. The identification of contextual solutions aimed at managing situations arising as a result of the manifestation of aggressive behaviors;
- Io4. Group-level evaluation of the activity carried out.

**Description of the activity scenario:** The counseling activity can be materialized by considering the change of perception starting from the representation (*here and now*) through:

- The performance of the “exercise of passing through the circle” (each person will pass in front of everyone else and express their feelings towards the others; for instance, a phrase like “I can't stand any colleague” can be accompanied by some opinions about each of the participants);
- The performance of the “I take responsibility” exercise (allowing pupils to integrate their own behaviors and perceptions);
- resorting to *the exaggeration* (a series of less pleasant gestures/movements are performed, taking into account the intentional deepening of the meaning thereof).

The purpose of these exercises will be directed towards the behavioral normalization of the pupils in the group and the facilitation of the integration and the improvement of relationships at class level.

**Action strategies:**

- *The observation* – the systematic following by pupils of some (desirable or undesirable) behaviors of certain characters from a thematic film;
- *The problematization* – the questioning and analyzing the behavior of the characters;
- *The role play* – carrying out specific exercises at the counselor's suggestion;
- *The method of cooperation* – through which the socialization process develops, by combining the individual peculiarities with the synthetic ones of the group (Tiron, 2005, 97).
- *The brainstorming* – identifying possible solutions regarding the manifestation of undesirable behaviors that generate aggression;

**Resources:** counseling office, educational film, material resources, assessment sheets

**Session no.3**

**Name of activity:** “Insight: me, you and us”

**Paradigm/ Theoretical foundation of the activity:** The specific paradigm of the activity is *psychodynamic in nature*. Thus, the steps themselves are aimed at reducing symptoms and

improving the “contextual condition of the clients” intended to reduce potential aggressive behavior. Thus, the alleviation of psychic tension involves mechanisms/processes of change through the very analysis of interpersonal relationships at the group level (exploration and further development thereof): the clients (pupils) share the same fear, common fears that they later try to explain.

The mental balance of the pupils and the development of their personality through the power of leading by example/models of good practices can be achieved by taking into account the strengthening of the inner resources of the advised subjects.

***The general objective of the activity:*** Initiating pupils in the use of pragmatic strategies to solve some problem-situations arising as a result of the manifestation of aggressive behavior.

***Intermediate objectives (Io):***

Io1. Obtaining basic knowledge necessary to solve some manifestations aimed at the aggressive behavior;

Io2. The analysis of some case studies to allow the understanding of certain principles of interpersonal communication;

Io3. The identification of intervention strategies with the aim of preventing/reducing/eliminating aggressive behaviors;

Io4. Group-level assessment of the activity carried out.

***The description of the activity scenario:*** The counseling activity will aim at specific methods of discovery (*insight/enlightenment*), through which the pupils will identify/,”decipher” the causes of the problems faced by people who exhibit aggressive behavior.

The clients (pupils) are introduced to techniques and ways of expressing affective experiences (*transfer*), which can later allow for a “reconstructive change of behavior”.

***During the first stage,*** group members are encouraged to speak whatever comes to mind about the context which is being referred to (focusing on the past manifestation of aggressive behavior). They can choose some terms to describe their reactions to the event, their own emotions and associated fears. Each pupil will be invited to participate/express himself or herself in relation to the experienced event precisely to allow a “relaxation” of the bond/emotional connection in relation to the assaulted object/aggressed person (*active listening*). Thus, the way of reacting/the behavior can be changed simultaneously with the phenomenon of psychic discharge (*catharsis*).



***During the second stage***, the insertion of the shared concepts of some role-play games among the group members will be pursued, i.e. games that cause the manifestation of the previously recorded emotions. This part allows an affective/emotional reorganization (energy recovery) intended to illustrate the very dynamics of behavioral manifestations, as well as their psychic nature.

***Action strategies:***

- *The exercise* – consists in the performance of some actions in order to put into practice some behaviors acquired during the activities carried out;
- *The heuristic conversation* – expressed in the form of a series of questions and answers at the end of which a “potential” truth or an element of novelty results for the group members;
- *The role play* – carrying out specific exercises at the counselor's suggestion.

***Resources:*** counseling office, educational film, material resources, assessment sheets.

***Session no.4***

***Name of the activity:*** “New meanings about us”

***The paradigm/ the theoretical foundation of the activity:*** The activity originates in the theoretical framework of *the psychological cognitivism*, following as a priority the encouragement of the identification of the relationship between events – cognitions – consequences (CBT model). According to the theoretical and practical benchmarks, the counselor will intervene as a guide in assisting the self-assessment process.

***The general objective of the activity:*** Reducing the psycho-emotional and behavioral effects of the phenomenon of aggression

***The intermediate objectives (Io):***

Io1. The analysis of some situations – problem by referring to the desirable behavior-undesirable behavior relationship;

Io2: Highlighting the group's interpretations regarding the manifestation of emotions and thoughts associated thereof;

Io3: Determining the conditions for the application of some methods and means on pupils aimed at reducing aggressive behaviors;

Io4. Group-level evaluation of the activity carried out.

***The description of the activity scenario:*** The activity will consist of applying the CBT model at group level, by identifying the correlations among events, behaviors, emotions/cognitions and consequences. First, each member of the group will state a situation of aggression in which they have been and he or she will detail, in the first instance, the associated emotions and thoughts. The identification of emotions (e.g.: shame, anger, anguish, etc.) and the clarification of negative cognitions through specific exercises will be encouraged. Group members will confirm or deny, as appropriate, similar experiences or emotions.

During the second stage, related behaviors and their motivation will be assessed (e.g.: avoidance/withdrawal, aggressive, anxious and so on). The next stage starts from the self-assessment of the impact that the phenomenon has on the individual. The pupil's resources will also be taken into account. Afterwards, the group can provide alternatives, suggestions or coping strategies.

The final stage of the activity is to view the chain “What happened?” – “What did I think about what happened?” – “How did I react?” followed by the self-assessment and sorting based on the reasoning/experiences presented in the group counseling.

***Action strategies:***

- *The problematization* – discussing and analyzing some situations of aggressive behaviors in the pupil's personal lives;
- *The heuristic conversation* – expressed in the form of a number of questions and answers at the end of which a “potential” truth or an element of novelty emerges for the group members;
- *Philips 6-6* – involves the dividing of the group into groups of 6 pupils who try to find solutions to a problem given by the counselor for 6 minutes;
- *The exercise* – consists in the performance of some actions in order to put into practice some behaviors acquired during the activities carried out.

***Resources:*** counseling office, educational film, material resources, assessment sheets.

**Session no.5**

**Name of the activity:** “Evaluation of the entire counseling activity”

**General objective:** Specifying the level of achievement of the results obtained

**Intermediate objectives**

Io1. Establishing the advantages and disadvantages of the main strategies applied in reducing aggressive behaviors;

Io2. Specifying the evaluation criteria specific to solving the topics discussed during the counseling process

Io3. Establishing indicators of success in achieving the proposed goals

**The description of the activity scenario:** Aspects of the supported activities will be discussed and their specific stages will be assessed.

**Action strategies:**

- *The debate:* some aspects related to the subject of counseling will be debated, as well as the way in which the activities of the counseling sessions were carried out.

**Resources:** the counseling office, the material resources, assessment sheets.

**The overall assessment refers to:**

- Resolving the situation** – the fulfillment of the pre-set objectives was successfully achieved; in this case, the counselor will try to silently supervise and maintain the positive behavior of the pupils by means of counseling techniques aimed at preventing some manifestations of an aggressive nature.
- The resumption of the counseling program** – the fulfillment of the objectives did not materialize; in this situation, we will return to the planning and intervention stage by reformulating the objectives and taking into account new methods to the counseling approach.
- Calling for auxiliary services** – in special cases, the counselor will call for auxiliary methods depending on the nature of the situation-problem (the individual counseling of a member of the group, the re-education specialists and so forth).

## References

- Dumitru, I.AI. (2008). *Consiliere Psihopedagogică*, Editura Polirom.
- Geldard, K., Geldard, D. & Foo, R. (2019). *Consilierea copiilor*, Editura Polirom.
- Holdevici, I. & Crăciun, B. (2019). *Orientări contemporane în psihoterapie și consiliere psihologică*, Editura Trei.
- Lemeni, G. & Miclea, M. (2010). *Consiliere și orientare*, Editura ASCR.
- Lupu, D.A, (2013). *Activitățile de consiliere. Relația și stima de sine în viața preadolescenților*, Editura ASCR.
- Mitrofan, I. & Nuță, A. (2001). *Consiliere psihologică. Cine, ce și cum?*, Editura SPER.
- Nelson-Jones, R. (2009). *Manual de consiliere*, Editura Trei.
- Tiron, E. (2005). *Consiliere educațională*, Editura Institut European.