



The ELEMENTARY/ MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

THIRD EDITION



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- Practical tips and troubleshooting advice
- Student diversity, cyber-bullying, crisis intervention, and more

John J. Schmidt, Ed.D.

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The ELEMENTARY/
MIDDLE SCHOOL
COUNSELOR'S
SURVIVAL
GUIDE

John J. Schmidt

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About This Book

The Elementary/Middle School Counselor's Survival Guide, 3rd Edition, continues the philosophy of the original publication and expands its practical application. This book encourages you to develop a comprehensive school counseling program comprising services for students, parents, and teachers, with the ultimate goal of helping all students succeed both academically and in their personal relationships and begin exploring career information and interests.

This edition is expanded to thirteen chapters, each beginning with a scenario relevant to that chapter's topic. These vignettes offer opportunities for practical application of the information presented throughout the guide. All chapters also include worksheets and exhibits you can use or adapt in your own practice.

This edition of the *Survival Guide* will help you

- Plan, deliver, and evaluate a comprehensive program of services for elementary or middle school students, parents, and teachers
- Integrate your counseling program with the overall mission of the school
- Select and assess the effectiveness of appropriate counseling, consulting, and coordinating services to address developmental and critical concerns of your students
- Perform within the ethical and legal parameters of the counseling profession
- Take care of yourself personally and professionally as a school counselor

By focusing on these professional behaviors and competencies, this *Survival Guide* will become an essential resource as you strive to perform at an optimal level.

About the Author

John J. (Jack) Schmidt, Ed.D., is professor emeritus of counselor education at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. During his career, Dr. Schmidt has been a social studies teacher; elementary, middle, and high school counselor; school district supervisor of counseling and testing services; state coordinator of school counseling programs; licensed professional counselor; and university professor and department chair. From 2006 through 2009, he was executive director of the International Alliance for Invitational Education® (www.invitationaleducation.net).

An active writer and presenter, Dr. Schmidt has published over fifty articles, book reviews, and manuals, and more than a dozen books. His books include *Counseling in Schools: Comprehensive Programs of Responsive Services for All Students*; *Social and Cultural Foundations of Counseling and Human Services*; *Intentional Helping: A Philosophy for Proficient Caring Relationships*; *Making and Keeping Friends: Ready-to-Use Lessons, Stories, and Activities for Building Relationships*; *Living Intentionally and Making Life Happen*; *Invitational Counseling: A Self-Concept Approach to Professional Practice*, with Dr. William W. Purkey; and *From Conflict to Conciliation: How to Defuse Difficult Situations*, with Dr. Purkey and Dr. John M. Novak.

Dr. Schmidt is a former president of the North Carolina Counseling Association and the North Carolina Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. He has received recognition from professional associations and universities for his leadership, research, and publications, particularly in the field of school counseling. He was awarded the Elementary Counselor of the Year Award by the North Carolina School Counselor Association in 1978, is a two-time recipient of the Ella Stephens Barrett Leadership Award from the North Carolina Counseling Association (1997 and 2007), and received the Ruth C. McSwain Distinguished Professional Service Award from the North Carolina School Counselor Association in 2002. In 1999, the College of Education at East Carolina University named him a distinguished professor for his teaching, scholarship, and service to the university. In 2005, he received a Distinguished Career Award from the School of Education at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro.

Dr. Schmidt is a member of Chi Sigma Iota, the international counseling honor society, and has served on numerous boards, including the North Carolina Board of Licensed Professional Counselors (1997–2004) and the National Board of Certified Counselors (2005–2008). He lives in Roaring Gap, North Carolina, with his wife, Pat.

To my grandchildren,

Evelyn, Erica, Aidan, and Addyson

May their years in school and throughout life be enriching, empowering, and enjoyable

Acknowledgments

It is an honor to share this third edition of *The Elementary/Middle School Counselor's Survival Guide*. I thank Jossey-Bass for its continued support, and am particularly grateful to senior editor Marjorie McAneny and her assistant Julia Palmer for their superb guidance during this revision.

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This book, as with all my others, would not have been possible without the support of my wife, partner, and best friend, Pat. Her patience and flexibility have allowed me to complete such projects and to enjoy my career in counseling so fully. I am deeply indebted to her.

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INTRODUCTION

Successful elementary and middle school counselors continuously search for useful information and ideas in order to deliver program services effectively. *The Elementary/Middle School Counselor's Survival Guide* is a resource to help you identify who you are and what you do, become more capable and available, and account for your time and effectiveness in surviving and eventually flourishing as a school counselor. This third edition continues the focus of the original *Survival Guide* to help elementary and middle school counselors design comprehensive programs of responsive services to fit unique professional settings and address the needs of students, parents, and teachers.

As an elementary or middle school counselor, you might find the following exchange familiar. Two counselors were talking at a state counseling conference. One, a new elementary counselor, confessed, "I have so much to do and so little time to do it. I go from one crisis to the next or from one administrative task to another." The other, a middle school counselor, responded, "Me too! So many things take time away from students—coordinating the testing program and responsibility for exceptional children's referrals take up much of my time, not to mention application of Section 504 of the disabilities act! I need practical ideas and strategies to handle students' concerns and everything else that goes on in my school." This exchange reveals that the two counselors are struggling with their *identity*, questioning their *capability* to meet demands, and going in too many directions. They want to be *available* to students and are looking for ways to be *accountable* in their schools. For them and many other school counselors, the transition

from learning about the art and science of counseling to being an artful and scientific practitioner is challenging.

Simply learning about art does not make you a masterful artist. Only with sufficient practice and personalization of the techniques learned can you approach an artistic level. Similarly, learning what the research says about a particular issue does not make you a scientific practitioner. Consistent application of such knowledge, evaluation of outcomes, and reflection on what you have done are mandatory for success.

Similar to an artist or a scientist, you seek practical and beneficial ways to apply your knowledge. In elementary and middle schools, where the counseling profession searches for clear, understandable roles, but where case loads often reach astronomical ratios, successful counselors establish a professional identity by emphasizing their capabilities, serving a wide audience, and accounting for the programs they establish and services they deliver. To be successful, these counselors structure comprehensive school counseling programs that permit optimal use of the time available.

This *Survival Guide* operates on the assumption that although the developmental needs of students in elementary and middle schools vary, counselors at these two levels have similar goals and objectives and facilitate comparable program services and activities. Although some specific activities and strategies in this guide are more suitable at one level than the other, this guide will, for the most part, be useful across elementary and middle schools.

HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

Chapters One through Four of this revision of the *Survival Guide* describe the general components and aspects of a comprehensive school counseling program. A comprehensive program includes a clear definition and description of your identity and role, input from those who use your services, and strategies to allow the most efficient use of time. An efficient use of time requires planning, coordination, and evaluation, as well as purposeful selection of responsive services.

Chapters Five through Nine present ideas and strategies to integrate your counseling program with the overall mission of your school. These include aligning your counseling program with the school curriculum, focusing on educational development for all students, reaching out to diverse populations, preparing for school and community crises, and helping with a broad range of student concerns that affect learning and development. The goals of these chapters are to enhance your capability as an elementary or middle school counselor and emphasize the importance of accountability in measuring your effectiveness.

Chapters Ten through Thirteen focus on relationships with colleagues, parents, and the community, and on you as a counselor. A counseling program is as strong as the staff that support and guide its development. Likewise, the strength of your assistance to students is contingent on parents' and guardians' involvement in the counseling process. In addition, your ability to function effectively is influenced by your own well-being—your personal