



# *The* ELEMENTARY/ MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

THIRD EDITION



- 100+ time-saving letters, checklists, and forms
- Practical tips and troubleshooting advice
- Student diversity, cyber-bullying, crisis intervention, and more

John J. Schmidt, Ed.D.

**J** JOSSEY-BASS TEACHER

GRADES **K-8**



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# ***More Praise for the Elementary/Middle School Counselor's Survival Guide, 3rd Edition***

"This *Survival Guide* is filled with realistic situations that we as counselors face daily. Dr. Schmidt has presented strategies and tools needed to develop a comprehensive counseling program. The book provides sample forms for needs assessments, surveys, and checklists that are essential to all counselors working in schools."

—**Pattie Amundsen**, school counselor, president, Association for Professional Counseling in Schools, Winston-Salem, NC

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—**Dr. Salene Cowher**, professor/program head, Graduate Programs in Counseling, Edinboro University, Edinboro, PA

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—**Dr. Delila Owens**, assistant professor, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI

"Whether a seasoned school counselor or a school counselor-in-training, you will benefit from *The Elementary/Middle School Counselor's Survival Guide, 3rd Edition*. This comprehensive guide to school counseling provides clear direction and offers many tools for developing an effective and inclusive school counseling program."

—**Jeffrey M. Warren**, doctoral candidate, Counselor Education, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC

"School counselors, graduate students, and counselor educators will benefit tremendously from reading this *Survival Guide*. Jack Schmidt has

included the most relevant issues, questions, and challenges facing school counselors and has presented them in a practical and interesting format. I highly recommend this wonderful resource."

**—Dr. Christine Yeh**, professor and chair, Counseling Psychology  
Department, University of San Francisco

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56085-3

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THIRD EDITION

*The* ELEMENTARY/  
MIDDLE SCHOOL  
COUNSELOR'S  
SURVIVAL  
GUIDE

*John J. Schmidt*

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[www.josseybass.com](http://www.josseybass.com)

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Published by Jossey-Bass  
A Wiley Imprint  
989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741—[www.josseybass.com](http://www.josseybass.com)

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## **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Rev. ed. of: Survival guide for the elementary/middle school counselor.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-470-56085-3 (pbk.)

1. Counseling in elementary education—United States. 2. Counseling in middle school education—United States. 3. Student counselors—United States. I.

Schmidt, John J., 1946- Survival guide for the elementary/middle school counselor. II. Title.

LB1027.5.S.14—dc22 2010011066

## ***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<sup>®</sup> ([www.invitationaleducation.net](http://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.

In addition, I appreciate the contributions of a group of elementary and middle school counselors from North Carolina who participated in discussions about surviving elementary and middle school counseling. They are: Patti Amundsen, Cynthia Clodfelter, Ken Dankwardt, Patti Durham, Michelle Gross, Debby Hendrix, Melanie Mills, Brett Pesce, Paulette Ream, Cheryl Tilley, Rinita Williams, Sharon White, and Jim Wuwert. Special thanks to my oldest granddaughter, Evelyn Bergquist, who advised me about kids and technology.

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.

# 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 and professional fitness. Professional fitness includes a practical knowledge of ethical codes, state and federal laws, professional competencies, and local school policies.



## **WHAT'S NEW IN THE THIRD EDITION**

Among the additions to this revision are one or more scenarios in each of the chapters, which demonstrate practical applications of the ideas and suggestions given throughout this guide. Though fictitious, the scenarios are based on my years of school counseling practice, experience as a supervisor, and teaching in counselor preparation programs. In a workshop, practicing school counselors reviewed and tested the scenarios for practicality and realism.

A major change to this revision is a new Chapter Nine, “Responding to Critical Concerns,” which focuses on more serious concerns of students. This edition also includes new material concerning the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, current and emerging communication and learning technologies, the relationship between your philosophy and effectiveness in counseling students, services after trauma and tragedy, cyberbullying, self-injurious students, the impact of poverty, school counselor competencies, and your responsibility to maintain ethical standards.

## **OVERALL PURPOSE AND FOCUS**

*The Elementary/Middle School Counselor's Survival Guide* bridges the gap between theory and practice. Counseling theories help you understand human behavior and development and enable you to choose reliable approaches to professional helping. Practical strategies and materials, such as those in this guide, give you an opportunity to structure your theoretical stance around useful and effective helping behaviors. These practical suggestions encourage you to include many participants—teachers, parents, and

students—in the process of designing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs.

This book sets the stage for you to identify who you want to be as an elementary or middle school counselor. It shows you how to develop ways to make yourself available to a wider audience, expand your knowledge, improve your counseling skills, and measure your effectiveness as a professional counselor. In each chapter you will find ideas to move beyond survival toward flourishing as a counselor in an elementary or middle school. Whereas surviving conjures up an image of desperate endurance, flourishing conveys a notion of thriving and elicits a positive vision of what you can become. This book encourages you to look beyond basic survival skills to develop into a proactive counselor who provides a comprehensive program of responsive services for your school and community.

Throughout this book you will find lists of specific strategies, helpful guidelines, Web sites, and reproducible forms to use in a comprehensive school counseling program. Not all of these will be appropriate or feasible to apply in your school and program, however. Choose the ones that are, and feel free to adjust the others to create new and better strategies.

In an effort to make the *Survival Guide* a practical, readable resource for professional school counselors, I have used references and citations sparingly. You will find an extensive resource list of printed works and Web sites at the end of the book. Although I have made every effort to keep resources as current as possible, today's accelerated information age makes this a daunting task. My hope is that the resources provided will give you a head start on compiling your own list.

Thank you for allowing me to share my experience and suggestions with you. I wish you well in your career as a

professional school counselor, and hope the strategies and tools in this guide are helpful as you move toward a higher level of artful counseling within a scientific framework.

# ***chapter 1***

## **WHAT, WHO, *and* HOW of YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM**

### Scenario 1.1: Why Are Counselors in Schools?

*Some parents were meeting, and one asked, “Why do we need counselors in schools?” Another followed with, “What is a counselor’s primary purpose in providing services in the school?” These were not new questions. Educators, counselors, parents, policymakers, and others had asked similar questions countless times before. If you were listening to this conversation, how would you, as a school counselor, respond? Why are you working in a school, and what is your purpose?*

One possible response to Scenario 1.1 is that you work in a school to help people become “more able” in their respective roles. As a school counselor, you help students become more able learners; assist parents in their nurturing roles; support teachers in providing beneficial instruction for all students; and, with administrators, help lead schools in becoming a more effective part of the community. In sum, everything you do as a school counselor—every program you plan and every service you deliver—aims at helping students, parents, teachers, and schools in the process of human development and learning.

If you agree with this conclusion—that you are in a school to help people become more able—you might also agree that to accomplish this goal, you too need to become more able in your professional knowledge and skills. To become more able as a professional counselor, you want to move beyond survival toward a confident stance that permits you to become identifiable, capable, available, and accountable—four characteristics of a successful school counselor. Being *identifiable* means knowing who you are and what you do in schools as a professional counselor. It also means letting others know about this identity. Being *capable* means practicing at a high level of skill while recognizing the limits of your competencies and professional role in schools. When you are *available*, you are accessible to the students, parents, and teachers you serve. *Accountability* brings together the first three abilities when you assess how you spend your time and measure the effectiveness of the programs you plan and the services you provide. Throughout this *Survival Guide* you will learn ways to accomplish these goals in becoming a successful school counselor. To begin, Chapter One explores the role and identity of counselors in schools.

### Scenario 1.2: Role Identity

*You are an elementary or middle school counselor. A new principal has arrived at the school to start the year, and you have asked to schedule a conference to talk about the counseling program. At the start of your meeting with the new principal, she begins, “I had a good guidance counselor at my previous school, but was never quite sure how he spent most of his time. He was good at helping out in the main office when we were short on staff, and*

*he was quite sociable with the faculty. It was my first position as a principal, however, and I was uncertain how to direct his time and duties. My goal at this school is to take more of a leadership role in all special services, including guidance.” How would you begin responding to the principal’s statements? What key points would you make about the school counseling program, your leadership role, an advisory committee, program evaluation, and consultation with the principal?*

Scenario 1.2 depicts a situation that many school counselors experience during their careers—explaining their roles in their schools and in their comprehensive counseling programs. This chapter will help you both answer the questions in the above scenario and establish your leadership role and identity as a school counselor.

Since its birth during the Industrial Revolution at the turn of the twentieth century, the school counseling profession has searched for an identity and role among the helping professions. Today such questions as Why are counselors in schools? and What are they supposed to do? are as prominent as they were over one hundred years ago. As a member of this profession, you now face the same questions: Why are you here? What are you supposed to do?

As an elementary or middle school counselor, you belong to an expanding profession that includes many areas of professional helping and service. The counseling profession of the twenty-first century has become an important member of mental health services, and school counselors are essential partners in this effort (Falls & Muro, 2009; Schmidt, 2008). Today’s professional counselors work in settings that include mental health centers, family agencies,