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HOPEFUL CHOICES: A SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S GUIDE TO HOPE THEORY

Throughout their school years, students are faced with an array of increasingly important and difficult choices. These range from deciding what to do for the elementary school science fair and whom to ask to the eighth grade dance, if and where to go to college, and the best occupation to pursue, to name but a few. Particularly in adolescence, students are called upon to make monumental choices that may affect their lives well into the future. Beginning in the primary school years, school counselors can prepare students to make adaptive choices by instilling in them what we call 'hope.' Hope, as discussed in this article, is that which enables people to set valued goals, to see the means to achieve those goals, and to find the drive to make those goals happen.

We have three purposes in writing this article. First, we detail a relatively new theory of hopeful thinking and discuss its implications for determining important life choices. Second, we propose a developmental model regarding the formation of hope in children. And third, we discuss counseling techniques for engendering hope and enabling older children and adolescents to make adaptive choices.

Hope Theory: A Model of Goal-Directed Thinking

Most lay people consider hope to be an affective phenomenon—an emotion experienced when all practical ways of achieving a desired end have been exhausted. This notion is evident in phrases such as, ‘cross your fingers and hope for the best,’ and ‘at least we still have hope,’ both of which one might utter when feeling particularly incapable of achieving important goals through one’s own efforts. In contrast, just over a decade ago, C. R. Snyder and members of his University of Kansas Hope Laboratory (1991) reconceptualized hope, not as a passive emotional phenomenon that occurs only in the darkest moments, but as a process through which individuals actively pursue their goals.

In this context, hope is conceptualized as a goal-directed cognitive process. Specifically, Snyder, Harris et al. (1991) defined hope as, “a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed determination) and pathways (planning to meet goals)” (p. 572). As such, hopeful thinking always includes three components: goals, pathways thinking, and agency thinking.

Goals are hoped-for ends. According to the wide definition adopted within the hope-theory framework, a goal is anything that an individual desires to get, do, be, experience, or create. Such goals may be extremely large (taking months or even years to achieve) or extremely small (requiring only minutes or seconds to accomplish); moreover, goals may vary in attainment probability, ranging from very high to very low. In hope theory, goals are the targets of mental action-sequences, and they anchor purposive behavior (Snyder, 1989, 1994, 2000a, 2000b; Snyder, Michael, & Cheavens, 1999). In other words, when an individual initiates an intentional behavior sequence, it must be directed toward achieving some specific outcome. Prior to initiating that behavior sequence, however, one must engage in two other types of cognitions: pathways and agency thinking.

Pathways thoughts reflect a person’s perceived capacity to produce cognitive routes to desired goals (Snyder, 1994). Thus, individuals engage in pathways thinking when they actively construct routes or plans for achieving goals. Because some of these plans may not succeed when set in motion, hopeful persons produce many such plans in order to circumvent possible obstacles to goal accomplishment. Such pathways will not lead to goal attainment, however, without the last cognitive component in the hope-theory model: agency thinking.

Agency cognitions are ‘the thoughts that people have regarding their ability to begin and continue movement on selected pathways toward those goals’ (Snyder, Michael et al., 1999, p. 180). As in Piper’s (1978) *The Little Engine That Could*, agency thoughts such as “I think I can” are the fuel that powers the goal-pursuit engine (for empirical support,

see Snyder, Lapointe, Crowson, & Early, 1998). It is through mobilizing agency thoughts that a person is sufficiently motivated to initiate and sustain movement along pathways toward desired ends.

Although pathways and agency thinking are two distinct components of the hope model, they are functionally inseparable. In fact, they are theorized to influence one another reciprocally, such that a change in one will cause a commensurate change in the other (Snyder, Harris et al., 1991). This assertion makes sense when placed in the context of the goal-pursuit process. If an individual is initially high in agency but cannot develop pathways, his or her upbeat agency thoughts (e.g., 'I can do this,' 'I am capable of accomplishing this goal') soon will sour as the goal-pursuit process begins to stagnate. Likewise, a person who has generated a number of possible pathways to a goal but is unable to conjure sufficient levels of motivating agency thought is likely to begin rejecting many of his or her pathways, believing that they are not achievable. As such, it is important to understand hope as an iterative cognitive process composed of agency and pathways thoughts in the service of important goals.

Hope, however, is not only a goal-directed cognitive process. It also is a hierarchically organized system of beliefs regarding one's ability to successfully engage such a thought process. These beliefs are organized into three specific levels of abstraction:

- Global or trait hope
- Domain-specific hope
- Goal-specific hope

Individuals' overall evaluation of their ability to construct sufficient pathways and generate the agency thoughts necessary to achieve goals is known as global or trait hope. Global hope is not yoked to anticipated success in working toward any one specific goal. Rather, it is an evaluation of one's ability to achieve goals in general. Moreover, global hope may not accurately reflect one's actual capacity for generating pathways and agency thoughts. Instead, it reflects a perception that effective pathways could be charted and sufficient agency could be generated if desired (Snyder, Michael et al., 1999). Adult and child versions of the Hope Scale have been developed to measure such global hopes (Snyder et al., 1997; Snyder, Harris et al., 1991).

It is possible to be high in global hope and simultaneously have low hope in one or more life arenas. In such a case, one's global evaluation of his or her capability of producing pathways and agency could be high, whereas his or her more specific evaluation of the same capability within a particular life domain could be quite low (or vice versa). As such, it is necessary to posit a second, more concrete level in the system of hope-related beliefs: the domain-specific level. Of course, people who are high in global hope probably also will manifest high hope in most life domains. However, a gap commonly is observed in students who, although quite hopeful about life in general, display low hope in the academic domain. To fill this need, the Domain-Specific Hope Scale (Sympson, 1999) has been developed to assess adolescents' and adults' hope in six life arenas: social relationships, romantic relationships, family life, academics, work, and leisure.

There exists another, still more concrete level in the hope belief hierarchy: the goal-specific level. Even when an individual's global and domain-specific hope levels are quite high, it is still possible that he or she will evidence low hope regarding a specific goal. For instance, a high school student may have high global hope and high academic domain-specific hope, but perceive that he or she is unable to generate pathways and agency toward the goal of earning an 'A' in a mathematics course. The goal-specific level of analysis, then, may be important in understanding perceived deficits in specific goal-pursuits, even when achievement in virtually all other areas is satisfactory. A group of researchers in our laboratory (Feldman, Rand, Kahle, Shorey, & Snyder, 2001) currently is developing the Goal-Specific Hope Scale to measure adolescents' and adults' levels of hope regarding specific, well-defined goals. (We also have developed another approach for tapping a person's hope in a specific context. Namely, Snyder et al. [1996] have developed and validated the State Hope Scale, which is a brief [six-item] index for tapping hope in the "here and now" time frame. Without identifying the goals, this State Hope Scale measures a person's momentary hopeful thinking.)

A comprehensive approach to understanding students' goals for their educations and lives requires assessment of the entire hope hierarchy. This is necessary because each level of the hierarchy interacts with and reciprocally determines each of the other levels. For instance, the effects of a specific hierarchical level can travel up the hierarchy to more abstract levels. This might occur if an individual repeatedly experiences failure in a particular goal pursuit (e.g., to obtain and successfully keep a summer job). In such a case, he or she will likely suffer a loss not only in the goal-specific hope associated with that goal, but also in the domain-specific hope associated with the life area in which that goal falls (i.e., the work domain). Likewise, a decrement in that domain's hope level would be likely to reduce global hope.

The effects of a specific hierarchical level also can filter down to more concrete levels. For example, young children do not participate in all of the life domains that adolescents might. Thus, if a young child who is low in global hope begins to participate in a newly discovered domain upon reaching adolescence (e.g., the romantic domain), he or she will likely automatically transfer his or her low global hope to that domain (thus, having low romantic domain-specific hope). Likewise, that adolescent will suffer low goal-specific hope associated with most of the individual objectives in that domain (e.g., talking with persons of the opposite sex, asking someone out on a date).

As such, it is important that school counselors pay close attention not only to global hope, but also to domain- and goal-specific hope. Only by considering the entire hierarchy can one begin to understand the complex web of hope-related beliefs that individuals possess. At this point, one may wonder why it is so important to go to such lengths to assess hope. We have thus far provided a model of hope, but we have yet to address the role of hope in determining success in academics and in life. The next section deals with this issue.

The Predictive Power of Hope

Hope predicts many important outcomes, from physical and mental health to academic and athletic performance. In this section, we discuss hope's predictive power with regard to these outcomes. We begin by discussing hope's relevance to the physical health arena, proceed to a discussion of its predictive power in the mental health domain, and conclude by detailing its importance in the area of academic performance.

Researchers and clinicians in the field of health psychology are concerned with the promotion of good health and the prevention, detection, and treatment of physical illness (Matarazzo, 1982). Hope makes contributions in each of these areas (Irving, Snyder, & Crowson, 1998; Snyder, 1996, 1998; Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991). For instance, higher hope has been found to predict better performance on a cancer facts test among college women (Irving et al., 1998). These higher hope women also reported stronger intentions to engage in cancer-prevention activities. Similarly, higher hope gay men have reported that they are less likely to engage in high-risk sex (Floyd & McDermott, 1998). High-hope people relative to low-hope people also have engaged in more health-enhancing activities such as physical exercise (Harney, 1990). In addition, the greater physical health associated with higher levels of hope should lead to greater psychological adjustment.

Regarding mental health, hope theory (Snyder, 2000b) proposed that emotions are a by-product of goal-directed thought. As such, the more important a goal and the greater the perceived likelihood of success in attaining that goal, the greater will be the positive affect experienced by the person. Supporting this proposition, Snyder et al. (1996) found that persons who pursue their goals under unimpeded circumstances experience positive emotions, whereas persons who are confronted with obstacles in their goal pursuits experience negative emotions. Similarly, Snyder, Harris et al. (1991) found that higher scores on the Hope Scale correlate positively with measures of positive emotions and negatively with indices of negative emotions. In relation to depressed mood, other researchers have found that lower hope predicts depressive symptoms (Kwon, 2000) independent of appraisals and other coping strategies (Chang & DeSimone, 2001).

One reason that low hope may be related to poor psychological adjustment stems from the fact that low-hope persons often do not use feedback from failure experiences to improve future performance. Instead of deriving benefit from such feedback, these individuals engage in self-doubt and negative rumination (Michael, 2000; Snyder, 1999). Such rumination has been found to foster aggression in response to perceived insults (Collins & Bell, 1997) and to prolong psychological distress after interpersonal stressors (Greenberg, 1995).

The negative ruminations may be one reason that low-hope students experience more anxiety and are more likely to be sidetracked by self-deprecatory thoughts when taking tests (Onwuegbuzie & Snyder, 2000; Snyder, 1999). This assertion is supported by findings that high-hope students experience less generalized anxiety and less test-taking anxiety than do their low-hope counterparts (Snyder). Similarly, Onwuegbuzie (1998) found that low- as opposed to high-hope students experienced significantly more anxiety about statistics classes.

Consistent with this discussion of hope and test-taking performance, higher hope has related to higher scores on achievement tests for grade-school children (Snyder et al., 1997) and higher overall grade point averages for high school (Snyder, Harris et al., 1991) and college students (Chang, 1998; Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997). Likewise, among college students, higher Hope Scale scores predicted higher cumulative grade point averages, higher graduation rates, and lower dropout rates over a 6-year Period (Snyder, Shorey, Cheavens, Pulvers Adams, & Wiklund, in press; Snyder, Wiklund, & Cheavens, 1999). These latter findings hold even when removing the shared variances related to entrance examination scores. Hope Scale scores also have correlated positively with perceived self-worth, scholastic competence, social competence, and creativity (Onwuegbuzie, 1999). Moreover, high-hope students have reported significantly greater academic and interpersonal life satisfaction than their low-hope counterparts (Chang). In examining the overall relationship between the Hope Scale, coping, and life satisfaction among college students, Chang found that high-hope as opposed to low-hope students have greater problem-solving abilities, and they use fewer disengagement strategies when dealing with stressful academic situations.

Just as high hope enables students to stay on task in their academic endeavors, it also enables them to maintain their focus in relation to athletics. High-hope children in summer sports camps have been found to be less likely to entertain thoughts of quitting their sports (Brown, Curry, Hagstrom, & Sandstedt, 1999). Higher hope is positively related to superior athletic and academic performance among student athletes. Curry et al. (1997) found that high-hope male and female collegiate athletes performed significantly better than their low-hope counterparts, even after statistically controlling for variance due to natural ability. Among track athletes, trait Hope Scale scores taken at the beginning of the season and State Hope Scale scores taken before each track meet together accounted for 56% of the variance in competitive performance. As a result, Curry, Maniar, Sondag, and Sandstedt (1999) instituted a college class at the University of Wyoming to raise students' levels of hope. Consequently, students manifested increased confidence in their athletic ability, academic achievement, and self-esteem. These positive outcomes were maintained at a one-year follow-up (Curry & Snyder, 2000).

Given the pragmatic, goal-focused model of hope with which we are working in this article, it should not be surprising that high hope is associated with beneficial outcomes. Because all human behavior is anchored by goals in hope theory, pathways and agency are necessary to achieve virtually any task (Snyder, 1994). As such, individuals with an abundance rather than a dearth of agency and pathways should experience more positive life outcomes. This especially holds for the academic and vocational behaviors with which school counselors are concerned.

Consider the goal of achieving satisfactory grades on exams. In order to do this effectively, students must plot many pathways including, but not limited to, reading textbooks, attending class, completing homework, taking notes, reviewing notes, outlining, forming study groups, and looking up information on the Internet (Snyder, 2001). If performance falls below an acceptable level, alternate pathways such as seeking

teacher assistance and obtaining private tutoring may be generated and pursued. These pathways, however, are useless without agency thinking. To motivate students to utilize their pathways and achieve adequate grades, they must generate agency thoughts. Thoughts such as “I think I can do it if I study hard enough,” and “I can do anything that I put effort into” mobilize goal-pursuit activity. Conversely, thoughts such as “I’ll fail whether I study or not,” and “This material is just too difficult for me” drain motivation and cause students to surrender their efforts prematurely. In the next section, we discuss this process of surrender and the resulting abandonment of goals.

When Goals Are Abandoned: The Choice to Give Up

It is not always maladaptive, however, to relinquish goals (Snyder, 1996, 1998). In our theory, we have devoted attention to the healthy process of “re-goaling.” This process occurs in three stages: (a) active pursuit of a given goal is terminated; (b) the goal is relinquished altogether; and (c) a new, replacement goal is acquired. In our estimation, the choice to stop pursuing and eventually relinquish a goal most likely is related to the person's level of goal-specific hope. Specifically, we hold that people who are high in global/trait hope will relinquish a goal when their goal-specific hope for that particular goal is low. This may occur because globally high-hope thinkers carefully choose where they want to invest their energies. After all, why would someone who believed him or herself to be a generally capable person waste time and effort on goals perceived to be unachievable? According to hope theory, they would not.

The re-goaling process does not stop, however, with the elimination of a low-hope goal. The last step of the process involves the acquisition of a new goal for which pathways and agency can be generated more easily. If a functional new goal is adopted in this last step, then the re-goaling process has been adaptive. On the other hand, if a nonfunctional goal is adopted or no goal at all is substituted, the re-goaling process has been maladaptive.

Most people have moderate to high levels of global hope. As such, most people will relinquish goals about which they have low goal-specific hope. In fact, they may eliminate whole goal domains when domain-specific hope is diminished sufficiently. This potentially poses a danger for students who have low goal-specific hope regarding specific academic goals or low domain-specific hope regarding academics in general, because such students prematurely may cut themselves off from important long-term goals. These students may stop trying to achieve good grades, and in so doing, they have undermined their efforts to succeed academically. Instead, they may replace these goals (or the entire academic domain) with other goals about which they are more hopeful. Unfortunately, these new goals may be counterproductive—or even antisocial in the long term. In other words, students may make bad choices.

Therefore, it is important to detect decrements in goal-specific and domain-specific hope early in order to aid students in developing strategies (pathways) and confidence (agency) regarding the pursuit of appropriate goals. We do not argue, however, that goal standards should be lowered to accommodate students. Rather, because high hope is dependent on

the perception that pathways and agency could be generated if needed, we suggest that most students who have low goal-specific hope regarding a certain objective (e.g., to achieve a passing grade in an algebra course) could be helped by changing their perceptions without ever altering objective standards. Such a change in perception could be realized through such simple activities as brainstorming new pathways and offering social reassurance, or by more complex cognitive therapy strategies designed to replace low-agency with high-agency automatic thoughts.

At this point, it should be somewhat clearer how hope affects one's choices. Our model is the following: $\text{Value} \times \text{Interest} \times \text{Hope} = \text{Goal Choice}$. That is, one's choice to pursue a particular goal (whether academic, vocational, or otherwise) is determined by the interaction of the value of that goal (i.e., the extent to which it actualizes important personal values), the interest one has in pursuing the goal, and hope. This model is quite similar to Rotter's (1954,1982) expectancy-value theory in that individuals will be likely to pursue a goal when the levels of all three of these variables are high. On the other hand, if the level of any one of these variables is low, it is unlikely that a person will choose to pursue that goal. Because every goal that has ever crossed an individual's mind has levels of value, interest, and goal-specific hope associated with it, every goal has a probability of being pursued. The individual will be most likely to choose goals that have the largest product of these variables.

This model is by no means original with us. The first two variables, values and interest, are routinely considered when counseling students. Many assessments of vocational interest pay close attention to individuals' levels of these variables. Likewise, when a student performs badly in school, many teachers, counselors, and parents alike may ask whether the student is just not interested. Or, perhaps the fear may be that the student is developing a maladaptive set of values. The role of hope in determining students' choices, however, is rarely considered. In contrast, our position is that hope is as important a variable in determining students' choices to pursue or reject certain activities/goals as are those students' interests and values. As such, school counselors should pay close attention to how students' hope belief hierarchies are affecting their decisions regarding academics and life in general. Students may be relinquishing goals of potentially great value just because they have low hope regarding those goals.

The Birth of Hope

In order to understand methods for bolstering students' hope, however, it is necessary to elucidate the mechanisms through which hopeful thought develops in children in the first place. Snyder (1994,2000a, 2000b) established a developmental framework for how hopeful thought takes form. Central to this conceptualization is the idea that humans are innately motivated to understand their world. One of the first goals of a newborn is to establish an ability to predict and control its environment.

The drive to acquire this ability has evolved because it is necessary for survival. In fact, many theorists (Berlyne, 1960; Kagan, 1972) have held that feelings of bewilderment and confusion motivationally prompt individuals to improve their causal understanding. For

example, Heider (as cited in Weary & Edwards, 1996) stated that “man grasps reality and can predict and control it by referring transient and variable behaviors and events to relatively unchanging conditions, the so-called dispositional properties of the world” (p. 79). Similarly, Weary and Edwards argued that theories of uncertainty in humans have three common themes: (a) knowledge of the world is important for People's survival; (b) uncertainty prompts people to do things to improve their knowledge; and (c) people have several means for reducing uncertainty, with some methods being preferred over others. As we illustrate below, uncertainty and confusion reflect unfulfilled needs in infants that are ultimately sated by the development of hopeful thought.

Pathways Thought

Pathways thinking is the first component of hope to develop in children. Upon birth, infants are inundated with sensory input. At first, this sensory onslaught is bewildering. With time, however, infants begin to imbue each sensation with meaning so as to structure and make sense out of the world around them. For example, an infant quickly learns the familiar sound of mother's voice. This sound eventually becomes associated with security and comfort, because it usually is accompanied by the satiation of needs (e.g., hunger, affection, changed diaper).

Eventually, the infant begins to link sensations together temporally. These connections turn into anticipatory thoughts in the infant's mind. For example, an infant's cries lessen upon hearing its mother's voice because the infant has learned that this voice predicts eventual feelings of comfort (e.g., being full, being warm, being dry). This anticipation is the mechanism by which children later are able to cognitively chain events together to form pathways thinking.

Agency Thought

Agency thought also develops early in life. Prior to having a sense of being able to effect change in the world, however, children must establish a sense of self. This self-identity is formed by the age of 12 to 21 months (Kaplan, 1978). Soon the child begins to use the term I, further evincing self-awareness. This self-awareness is followed by the realization that one can act as a causal agent in the world. Children begin to make comments that suggest that they are learning their capabilities to be authors in their world (e.g., I can ...). This sense of self, combined with the recognition that one can initiate change in the environment is the basis of agency thought.

Important Factors in the Development of Hope: Attachment and Challenge

A trusting connection with a caregiver appears to be important in the development of hope. Children who establish a strong bond with caregivers develop the greatest amount of hope (Bowlby, 1980). In support of this assertion, Shorey, Lewin, and Snyder (in press) found that high- as opposed to low-hope adults are more securely attached and recall more caring and nurturing parenting in childhood. Such a secure attachment gives children a sense of empowerment to go after desired goals (Snyder, McDermott, Cook, &

Rapoff, 1997). Hence, it is important to ensure that children have individuals with whom they can form such attachments. Although these individuals can be parents or other family members, attachments to other important people in a child's life (e.g., teachers, school counselors) also are useful in the development of hope.

Part of a caregiver's role is protecting children from harm. Caregivers should not shield children too much from challenges and possible failures, however, because making life too easy for children can circumvent the development of hopeful thinking (Snyder, 1994, 2000b; Snyder, et al., 1997). On this point, children need to learn to cope with barriers to goals in order to fully develop their sense of agency. Eventually, a child must have the sense that he or she can overcome impediments—even if mom and dad are not around. Allowing children to encounter, struggle with, and overcome barriers to their goals can show them their own capabilities.

Development of Hopeful Thought in Later Childhood and Adolescence

Hopeful thought becomes more refined as the child matures. Natural cognitive developments such as expanded vocabulary, increased memory capacity and speed, and the ability to think more abstractly enable children to use hope more productively. This improvement in hopeful thinking throughout the developmental process not only helps children to achieve personal goals, but it also facilitates their sense of identity and formation of peer relationships (e.g., friends, boyfriends, girlfriends) when the tribulations of adolescence emerge.

Disruptions in the Development of Hope

Because the development of hope is sequential and builds upon initial stages of achievement, interruptions at any stage can compromise the formation of hope. For example, a child in a chaotic family environment may find it difficult to learn the cause-effect relationships between certain events. Suppose that a child's father drinks alcohol to excess, and this man also becomes abusive when drunk. The child quickly learns that the father's actions are unpredictable. If enough segments of this child's life become chaotic, then the ability to predict and control his or her own actions will fail to take hold. Because the ability to generate goals and pathways is rooted in the supposition that the world is stable and predictable, the child's hope would stagnate.

Research on the concept of causal uncertainty (Weary & Edwards, 1994, 1996) shows the deleterious effects of disruptions in the development of hope. According to the causal uncertainty model of Weary and her colleagues, people with feelings of uncertainty about their understanding of causes in the social environment develop fundamental social behavioral, cognitive, and affective deficits. Of course, all individuals occasionally encounter such causal uncertainty beliefs. People who have chronic expectations about the loss of control, however, will repeatedly encounter feelings of causal uncertainty. Although the “feeling” of causal uncertainty is theorized to be a cognitive rather than emotional phenomenon, the negative affect occurs in conjunction with causal uncertainty. Related to this point, research has shown that there is a strong relationship between a

perceived lack of control and higher depression (e.g., Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Marsh & Weary, 1989). This may occur because hopeful thinking is disrupted.

Nurturing Hope

Once a foundation of hopeful thinking is established during early childhood, the stage is set for later goal accomplishment. Such hopeful thinking is crucial in adolescence. During adolescence, young people are called upon to make many of the choices. As we have stated, hope is essential in determining the outcomes of these choices. As such, it is essential that adolescents have the ability to establish meaningful goals, that they can perceive themselves as capable of achieving those goals, and that they are able to identify and implement realistic specific strategies for attaining those goals. In this section, we discuss the continued nurturing of hope during adolescence. Because school counselors can influence students during this time of life, we present our discussion in terms of specific techniques for bolstering adolescents' hopefulness.

A brief intervention to raise hope in depressed and anxious persons has been implemented at the University of Kamas (Cheavens et al., 2001). The strategies used in this intervention are easily applicable in educational settings. These strategies are broken down into three types: goal techniques, pathways techniques, and agency techniques.

Goal Techniques

The first step in building hope is to help students identify a set of goals. Students should be encouraged to set goals in various life domains, from choosing a career or belting into college, to feeling less depressed or meeting new people. Because goal failure is a part of daily experiences, setting many goals in multiple life domains provides adolescents with a "buffer" so that failure in one domain will not affect their global hope too dramatically (Snyder, Rand, King, Feldman, & Taylor, in press). Although teenage students should be given a good deal of leeway in their goal choices, counselors may find that students' goals are not ambitious or that they have problems developing a list. As such, most students require help in the goal-setting process.

Developing a list of meaningful goals may be a very difficult task for low-hope adolescents. Having developed what Abramson and colleagues (Abramson, Metalsky, & Alloy, 1989) term hopelessness, these individuals have come to believe, perhaps through bitter experience, that they have little or no control over their lives. This perception leads to apathy and an absence of goals. If students have difficulty generating a list of goals, two goal-setting techniques are especially helpful. First, counselors can administer a variety of values and interest instruments to students. The results of these instruments can then be used to generate lists of goals that conform to students' important values and interests. Second, students may be encouraged to recall recent goals that were important to them. Often, young people can remember working on a project or engaging in an activity that was enjoyable. With some work, this past activity can be translated into a future goal. After students develop a list of goals, they should rank the goals in order of personal importance. This allows students to learn important skills of prioritization. It is

impossible to pursue all goals at once; therefore, a rank ordering is useful in deciding which goals should be sought first.

Once preliminary goals are generated, it is important to aid students in setting clear endpoints to show that a goal has been achieved. For instance, the goal “to get good grades” has no endpoint, whereas the goal “to achieve a B on the upcoming earth science test” does. Without distinct endpoints, it is difficult for students to know when their goals have been met. Another important reason to set goals with clear endpoints is that such endpoints enable students to experience success, and perceiving success leads to positive emotions. Because it is unclear when the goal “to achieve good grades” has been fully attained, students with this goal never may feel the satisfaction of accomplishing it.

People also take longer to achieve abstract goals (Emmons, 1992). In addition, whenever it is difficult to monitor one's progress toward a goal, the likelihood of positive reinforcement is low (Pennebaker, 1989). Lack of positive reinforcement will lead to less expended effort, lower goal attainment, and eventually, diminished well-being. On this point, Semmer and Fresse (1985) speculated that vague standards of success may be one cause of depression.

On the other hand, because it is quite clear when the goal “to achieve a B on the upcoming earth science test” is accomplished, students will be given the opportunity to assess their progress on this goal as well as to experience the positive emotions associated with its accomplishment. Goals also can be set in a one-day-at-a-time framework, so that each day students have the opportunity to assess their progress and feel successful. For instance, if a student has the goal of practicing basketball for one hour every night, there is an opportunity to experience success every night. On the other hand, if a student has the someday goal of being an excellent basketball player, he or she might never experience success.

Students also should be encouraged to choose approach as opposed to avoidance goals. Approach goals consist of trying to get or do something. Students who are working to achieve approach goals always are moving closer to success. In contrast, students who set avoidance goals must constantly work to maintain the status quo (i.e., not experiencing the negative end). As such, students should be helped to set their goals within an approach framework whenever possible. In this regard, our laboratory research consistently shows that high-hope students embrace approach goals, whereas low-hope students adopt avoidance goals (Snyder, in press).

Agency Techniques

After a list of goals has been developed, the next step in building hope involves helping students to develop the agency to go after their goals. The first step in building agency is to re-examine students' lists of goals. The purpose of this re-examination is to make sure that the goals students have chosen are personally important to them. It seems like common sense that people would list personally important goals, but this is not always the case. Sometimes people choose goals to satisfy other people. They may wish to make

their parents and teachers happy, or they may want to please their friends. It should be emphasized that there is nothing wrong with choosing goals that make others happy, if this is what brings satisfaction into students' lives. If a goal, however, does not leave a student feeling energized and it does not add to his or her sense of well-being, then perhaps it should be discarded. If a goal is just to make others happy, it will be difficult for the student to remain motivated. Also, people do not feel good when pursuing goals dictated by others (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Although achieving goals leads to improved well-being (Brunstein, 1993; Emmons, 1996), the satisfaction of achievement is fleeting for goals set out by external forces (Sheldon & Elliot). As such, school counselors should work with students to choose goals that primarily are meaningful to them; in turn, if these goals also satisfy parents and teachers, this is a bonus.

Another issue that affects students' agency is the level of challenge offered by their goals. If a goal is not challenging, it will undermine the student's motivation to pursue it. Alternately, if a goal is too challenging, it may drain adolescents of energy and motivation. This point can be conveyed by recounting stories about three hypothetical students, each of whom has the goal of reading a 500-page book. Student A decides to read one page per night, student B decides to read the entire book in one night, and student C decides to read 25 pages per night. Student C probably will be the most motivated to do the nightly reading because it is neither too simple nor too difficult. The trick here is to obtain a balance between overly simple and overly difficult goals by making sure that one's goals are a realistic stretch. Such stretch-goals pose a challenge but are not too difficult to accomplish. Again, high-hope students choose these stretch goals, whereas low-hope students select either very easy or very hard goals (Snyder, 2001).

Positive self-statements such as "I can do this" and "I'm a capable person" energize people in their goal pursuits, whereas negative self-statements such as "I'm just not smart enough" and "I'm incompetent" sap students' vitality and inhibit the goal-pursuit process. Teenagers can be their own worst critics; moreover, eagerly wanting to fit in and be accepted, they are particularly vulnerable to self-criticism. Students should be taught to monitor and challenge their own negative goal-related thinking. For instance, when students are having difficulty pursuing a particular goal (e.g., asking someone out on a date), they can be taught to notice the negative self-statements that are preventing them from acting on this goal. They also can be taught that these statements are just thoughts, not facts, and can be replaced with more adaptive, realistic, and positive thoughts (see McDermott & Snyder, 1999).

Pathways Techniques

High agency is useless unless it can be invested in concrete pathways or plans. As such, it is important that school counselors aid students in establishing plans for accomplishing goals. In hope theory, plans consist of steps called subgoals. Thus, the process of developing plans consists of breaking large goals into smaller subgoals. Such subgoals can then be arranged into a workable sequence and pursued one at a time. When students are in the process of brainstorming such subgoals, they should be given permission to be

creative and not limit themselves to what they think is currently possible or what is the “right” way. Sometimes the best ideas represent people thinking “outside of the box.”

Low-hope people often experience intense difficulty in developing subgoals. The most common problem is that low-hope people often reject all subgoals, claiming that they are simply not capable of accomplishing them. When this occurs, counselors may wish to aid such young people in realistically assessing their personal capabilities. If important skills are lacking, subgoals should be set wherein the teens obtain those skills. Once such adolescents accomplish the first subgoal along the pathway to their larger goal, they often gain the confidence and motivation necessary to move on to the next subgoal.

In the pathway-setting process, it is important not to stop after establishing a single realistic plan. Instead, it is important to take to heart the saying, “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.” If a student has identified only one route (i.e., set of steps) to a desired goal and that route becomes blocked, the student may perceive that all is lost, experience negative emotions, and give up. For this reason, it is necessary to develop multiple routes to goals. Students should be taught to think through each of these pathways to see if it is realistically feasible. If a pathway is not workable, it should be discarded and replaced with other, more realistic strategies.

Conclusion

Empirical evidence is mounting on the positive role of hope in predicting psychological and physical well-being as well as athletic and academic success. As such, school counselors may want to consider how students' hierarchies of hope beliefs affect their most important life choices. By including instruments such as the Hope Scale for adults and children, counselors may be more able to understand how hope impacts students' lives. Likewise, hope theory should prove useful both for the school counselor and students alike. In this regard, to succeed in school and to handle the problems that may arise in the academic and social aspects of school, the notions of goals, pathways toward those goals, and the motivations for using those pathways offer a readily understandable and workable framework for drawing on the strengths of students. Likewise, hope theory principles can be used to prevent problems from arising in students' lives (Snyder, Feldman, Taylor, Schraeder, & Adams, 2000). Accordingly, school counselors may be attracted to this hope perspective as well as other new positive psychology approaches (Snyder & Lopez, 2002).

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