

Preface

Cognitive and Behavioral Interventions in the Schools is the product of our collective years of training and experience in clinical and school psychology. Although we are similarly trained, we have followed varied career paths as psychologists, serving in settings that include academia, the school system, independent practice, and pediatric mental health facilities. In our work with cognitive and behavioral approaches, we have successfully applied these methods with high functioning children needing specific assistance in one or two specific areas of difficulty, children with mild but more chronic difficulties, and children with severe and persistent mental health problems that significantly compromise functioning. We have designed this book to assist clinical and school psychologists working with a similarly diverse client base.

The training competencies of school psychologists are quite varied with regard to cognitive and behavioral treatment approaches. There are a number of reasons for this variability. Most importantly, as school psychologists can be trained at either a specialist (certificate) or doctoral level, there are significant differences in the amount of clinical-training school psychologists receive and the range of practice areas for which they obtain supervised experience. While those trained at the specialist level will typically have some training in cognitive and behavioral interventions, the certificate programs tend to place more emphasis on the areas of psychoeducational assessment (including social-emotional assessment), school consultation, academic interventions, childhood disorders, learning theory, counseling, research design, and psychometrics. Those trained at the doctoral level have more room in the curriculum for training in cognitive and behavioral interventions, and also have the benefit of a second internship, which often takes place in a more “clinically” focused setting with children exhibiting more complex and severe mental health presentations.

With regard to actual practice, the work of school psychologists ranges from a primarily “test and place” role, emphasizing the matching of children’s learning and socio-emotional needs to services in the special education system, to more of a “response to intervention role,” which gives more space for the implementation of individually tailored clinical protocols. Psychologists with a high level of testing/ placement responsibilities will often have less time available to conduct clinically

based individual or group interventions. Importantly, as hospital clinic settings are increasingly being downsized, and more children with disabilities are being served locally, public schools have seen an increase in the numbers of youth with unaddressed and significant mental health and behavioral needs. Thus, the role and function of school psychologists continues to evolve, as we face ongoing changes in the health care delivery system and funding streams. As a notable case in point, school psychologists are among the providers named in the Affordable Care Act! We believe that school psychologists are in a unique position to provide much needed mental health support in this new environment. School psychologists are unique in the breadth and depth of their training, and they are well positioned to provide a wide array of services. Unfortunately, their diverse skill sets and knowledge bases are often underutilized, if not unutilized.

Indeed, school psychologists can theoretically be faced (and often are) with just about any problem facing children and families. Schools are one of the most diverse practice settings, and the school psychologist is often the first mental health professional to come in contact with a child and family in need of assistance. Being able to navigate such a broad range of presentations requires considerable knowledge and skill. This book is a resource that can provide school psychologists with specific practice guidelines and the research support for designing interventions within a cognitive and behavioral framework. Information is provided about techniques and strategies that may serve as a “tool kit” or resource to provide psychoeducation and assistance to children, parents, teachers, and other school professionals who interact with children facing mental health difficulties.

While a number of competing texts have focused on presentations of important empirically validated treatment packages, we have chosen to emphasize the component techniques and strategies that are incorporated into these packages, with the expectation that school psychologists may need to draw on these strategies in more idiosyncratic ways to meet the specific needs of their students and treatment settings. We acknowledge that it may often not be within the practice or job-description role for the school psychologist to directly deliver clinical services to children with identified mental health needs; however, in that scenario the school psychologist is often central in developing an appropriate treatment plan and in identifying adequate referral sources to provide children with the support they need. The knowledge this book provides will also be of guidance for school psychologists needing to make such referrals to community-based settings.

We are particularly excited to also have included in this text a segment on the use of technology in applying cognitive and behavioral interventions to school settings. While psychologists should not dismiss historically proven treatment modalities and treatment aids, there are a number of interesting developments in the interface between technology and mental health practice that school psychologists should start to become familiar with; it is our experience that students are also particularly interested in interventions that utilize these techniques.

Working in school systems has many differences from the settings in which many clinical trials are designed and implemented. Thus, providing school psychologists with an understanding of the underlying principles of treatment and

the key issues for treatment fidelity can position them to make adjustments to interventions in a way that fits the school environment while minimizing threats to treatment integrity. Further, as the need for research on transportability of interventions and their sustainability is imperative, school psychologists with a greater knowledge of cognitive and behavioral interventions would be natural partners with the researchers wishing to conduct clinical trials in schools.

Finally, while clinical psychologists are well trained to deliver services in typical mental health outpatient settings, they are often less well trained in the logistics and challenges of working in school settings. This volume also specifically addresses aspects of navigating and entering school systems to provide clinical interventions. This is intended to assist psychologists first venturing into the school setting, as well as those working as independent practitioners who are treating youngsters whose problems are manifest in the school setting. We hope readers will find this book engaging and useful.

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