

Referral as an Intervention



This **Quick Training Aid** was excerpted from a Technical Aid Packet entitled: *School-Based Client Consultation, Referral, and Management of Care*, pp.18, 25-28. Center for Mental Health in Schools (1997).

It is important to remember that referral is an intervention. Because it involves decisions about how to move from what is currently happening to a better state of affairs, it can be viewed as transition intervention.

Referral: A Transition Intervention

The referral process begins when someone identifies a problem and asks for help. Sometimes assistance can be given at this point so that the student does not need referral to special services. This type of assistance is often called *prereferral intervention*. Actually, it is the first and sometimes a sufficient phase of the referral process. The assessment data generated during this process also is useful in making triage decisions.

Effective referral *intervention* strategies involve procedures that:

- S provide ready reference to information about appropriate referrals
- S maximize follow-through by helping students and families make good decisions and plan ways to deal with potential barriers.

A client oriented, user friendly referral intervention is built around recognition of the specific needs of those served and involves clients in every step of the process. That is, the intervention is designed with an appreciation of:

- S the nature and scope of student problems as perceived by students and their family
- S differences among clients in terms of background and resources
- S the ethical and motivational importance of client participation and choice.

Moreover, given that many clients are reluctant to ask for or follow-through with a referral, particular attention is paid to ways to overcome factors that produce reluctance.

Referral Intervention Guidelines

A referral intervention should minimally

- provide readily accessible basic information about all relevant sources of help
- help the student/family appreciate the need for and value of referral
- account for problems of access (e.g., cost, location, language and cultural sensitivity)
- aid students/families to review their options and make decisions in their own best interests
- provide sufficient support and direction to enable the student/family to connect with an appropriate referral resource
- follow-up with students (and with those to whom referrals are made) to determine whether referral decisions were appropriate.

These guidelines can be translated into a 9 step intervention designed to facilitate the referral process and maximize follow-through.

Steps*

Step 1

Provide ways for students and school personnel to learn about sources of help without having to contact you

This entails widespread circulation to students/families and staff of general information about available services on- and off-campus and ways students can readily access services.

Step 2

For those who contact you, establish whether referral is necessary

It is necessary if school policy or lack of resources prevent the student's problem from being handled at school.

Step 3

Identify potential referral options with the client

If the school cannot provide the service, the focus is on reviewing with the student/family the value and nature of referral options. Some form of a referral resource file is indispensable (see original document for more on the idea of a Referral Resource File).

Step 4

Analyze options with client and help client choose the most appropriate ones

This mainly involves evaluating the pros and cons of potential options (including location and fees), and if more than one option emerges as promising, rank ordering them.

Step 5

Identify and explore with the client all factors that might be potential barriers to pursuing the most appropriate option

Is there a financial problem? a transportation problem?
a parental or peer problem? too much
anxiety/fear/apathy?

(cont.)

*Before pursuing such steps, be certain to review school district policies regarding referral.

STEPS (cont.)

Step 6

Work on strategies for overcoming barriers

This often overlooked step is essential if referral is to be viable. It entails taking time to clarify specific ways the student/family can deal with factors likely to interfere with follow-through.

Step 7

*Send clients away with a written summary of what was decided**

That is, summarize

- *specific information on the chosen referral,
- *planned strategies for overcoming barriers,
- *other options identified as back-ups in case the first choice doesn't work out.

Step 8

*Provide client with follow-through status forms**

These are designed to let the school know whether the referral worked out, and if not, whether additional help is needed in connecting with a service.

Step 9

*Follow-up with students/families (and referrers) to determine status and whether referral decisions were appropriate**

This requires establishing a reminder system to initiate a follow-up interview after an appropriate time period.

Obviously, the above steps may require one or more sessions.

If follow-up indicates that the client hasn't followed-through and there remains a need, the referral intervention can be repeated, with particular attention to barriers and strategies for overcoming them. Extreme cases may require extreme measures such as helping a family overcome transportation problems or offering to go with a family to help them connect with a referral.

*See Appendices of original document for examples of tools to aid these steps.