

# Classroom Connections

*Volume 5, Number 5, October 2002*



## SOME BASIC THOUGHTS ON ADVISORY

Some of the best advisory programs are created by teachers and students. For example, a team of sixth grade teachers may want to spend the first semester focusing on organizational skills and transition issues. Advisory time could be spent on getting-to-know-you activities. Teachable lessons, such as how to use their homework notebook and how to deal with class schedules, would be great activities for the first weeks of school. Seventh grade teachers and students could focus on listening skills for the first semester. As we all know, getting seventh graders to listen to others is critical. Eighth graders could use their advisory time to create projects that connect them with their community. No matter what kind of program you may use for your advisory program, the key to success is the ability to adapt and modify to meet the situation.

Lessons and activities should not be prepared ten minutes before the advisory period. Spend time getting to know the activities. Many quality advisory initiatives require tools, props, or prep work. Adolescents know if you are ready or if you are just winging it.

Educators always want to know which type of advisory is the best. For example, should the advisory groups be single grade level or mixed grade level? Everyone has an opinion on this subject. Just remember, when grades are mixed, students at various grade levels will respond differently to scenarios and issues. Motivation also varies by grade level. Some activities might work for sixth graders but fail for eighth graders.

Another worry for some schools that have mixed grade levels in their advisory is how to deal with new students and how to place them in an advisory group. This is also a concern for advisories that keep the same students for three years. Adolescents need to discuss how they can handle welcoming a new student to their advisory.

No matter what the grade configuration or structure, the goal should be to keep the numbers of students in the advisory to fewer than fifteen. This can be a difficult task for some schools. However, smaller groups allow for more interaction and dialogue.

Successful advisories are student driven. Give adolescents the opportunity to set guidelines and expectations for the group. Have students lead some of the activities. Students can learn leadership skills and communication skills by facilitating an activity or event.

Make the activities relate to the real world. Current events can affect the lives of adolescents. Do not be afraid to discuss current topics, trends, and experiences. Keep in mind, when dealing with tough issues adolescents might not be able to express all of their feelings and emotions.



### Ten Objectives of an Advisory Program

- Provide an environment and activities that will foster bonding within an advisory group so that students feel accepted and valued by teachers and peers.
- Help students cope with academic concerns and set goals to facilitate positive school experiences.
- Give students avenues to discover their uniqueness so that they can come to appreciate the many differences among people.
- Help students develop positive relationships through experiences that explore group dynamics.
- Promote critical thinking skills through discussion and problem solving activities so that students can learn to make responsible choices.
- Develop listening skills and an understanding of the road blocks that hinder effective communication.
- Build self esteem in students so that they can become confident, capable, young people who accept responsibility for their actions.
- Heighten student awareness of good citizenship through providing opportunities for meaningful contributions to their school community.
- Provide opportunities for extensive student involvement through shared decision making.
- Improve home/school communication and relationships.

### GREAT ACTIVITIES

During the first month of school have every student take a piece of string and place one end under their shoe then stretch the string so it reaches the top of their head. Cut the string and fold it up. Place a piece of masking tape with the student's name around the folded piece of string. Put all of the strings into a bag and do not open it until the last week of school. Then have them take their string and see how much they have grown over the last year. Many of your students will be amazed at how much they have grown.

Another way to show how adolescents change throughout the year is to take a photo of them by a poster that is mounted to the wall. Then take the photo again at the end of the year. This is a great visual for them and they get to keep the photos.

A way to show what adolescents stand for is to have them outline their foot and then list all of the things they believe in inside the outline.

Many adolescents find it difficult to express their own feelings. However, it might be a little easier to have them role-play a character or pretend to be someone else. Activities that allow middle school students to walk in someone else's shoes are a great way to learn about and appreciate others. Peers play a huge role in the lives of adolescents. However, at times, adolescents can make unwise decisions about friends. Spend time talking about the importance of friends and how to make good choices concerning friendships. Keep the lists students generate concerning what attributes they look for in friend. Then, when they are making good choices, you can have them reference that list to see if their expectations match the qualities of their current friend(s).

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#### Original publication information:

Classroom Connections, *Some Basic Thoughts on Advisory*. Volume 5, Number 2, October 2002