

# *The Professional Counselor*™

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*Digest*  
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*the team*

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# “God Is a Keeper”

## A Phenomenological Investigation of Christian African American Women’s Experiences With Religious Coping

Janeé R. Avent Harris, Jasmine L. Garland McKinney, Jessica Fripp

Religion is a central part of many African Americans’ lives. Faith is a protective factor and a coping mechanism as individuals are confronted with many challenges. These challenges can be personal (e.g., familial) and systemic (e.g., racism). It is important that helping professionals understand the ways religion and spirituality impact African Americans’ coping patterns and their attitudes toward counseling.

In this study, we interviewed seven African American, Christian women. The findings of this current study illuminate the ways Christian African American women, in particular, consider God to be at work in their lives. The participants spoke to the ways that they felt God has sustained them through challenging times and transitions, such as grief and loss, divorce, physical sickness, and financial difficulties. The participants relied on religion through following God’s direction, use of scripture and prayer to focus, attending worship services, and viewing God as a faith companion. Although most participants more readily offered examples of positive religious coping, negative religious coping came up in each interview more implicitly. Some of the sentiments expressed in the interviews included jealousy, frustration, “the devil,” questioning God, isolation, lack of trust, “why me?,” “God is enough,” and a sense that moments of doubt or struggle may indicate a betrayal of God. Spiritual growth and development was an important part of conceptualizing and responding to life stressors. Participants emphasized the value of the Bible and the role it played in providing guidance and direction throughout their lives, particularly during challenging situations. Often, participants juxtaposed this idea of “godly counsel” with secular counseling services. In these cases, the participants emphasized the importance of advice that did not contradict the “word of God.” All of the participants highlighted the stigma that exists among many African Americans regarding mental health help-seeking and referred to the notion that “Black people do not go to counseling.”

There are many important implications for counselors from the findings of our study. First, although African Americans are confronted with many stressors both stemming from systemic oppression and universal human experiences, our participants demonstrated resilience. Counselors should be intentional in identifying strengths and highlighting ways African American communities, often led by Black churches, have persisted. Although it is important to emphasize the importance of help-seeking from secular counselors, our study acknowledges value in the church as a resource and an integral part of the support networks of many African Americans. The church has proven to be a consistent place of solace for many African Americans, whether members are participating in premarital, financial, or other counseling. Thus, counselors can create professional relationships with church leadership to connect to members.

*Janeé R. Avent Harris, NCC, is an assistant professor at East Carolina University. Jasmine L. Garland McKinney is a graduate research assistant at East Carolina University. Jessica Fripp, NCC, is an assistant professor at Austin Peay State University. Correspondence can be addressed to Janeé Harris, 225A Ragsdale Hall, Mail Stop 121, Greenville, NC 27858, [aventj16@ecu.edu](mailto:aventj16@ecu.edu).*



# Children of Incarcerated Parents

## Considerations for Professional School Counselors

Jeffrey M. Warren, Gwendolyn L. Coker, Megan L. Collins

The rate of incarceration across the United States has continued to rise over the past decades. As a result, more than 10 million children have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives. In a school of 500 students, approximately 35 children have had a parent incarcerated. A large number of school-aged children currently have an incarcerated parent, with children of color experiencing parental incarceration more frequently than their White peers. School-aged children with incarcerated parents are susceptible to social-emotional, behavioral, and academic issues and often lack access to resources and a support system needed to thrive. It is important for school counselors to be aware of theories, strategies, and resources that support their work with children of incarcerated parents.

A number of theories across the fields of criminal justice, psychology, and sociology are viable when attempting to explain the impact of parental incarceration on children. For example, general strain theory describes the stress and strain children and their caregivers experience when a parent is incarcerated. Students who experience strain are more susceptible to social-emotional and behavioral issues that typically lead to unfavorable outcomes. The strain experienced as a result of parental incarceration can have a significant effect on a child's performance at school. Relatedly, attachment theory suggests that the manner in which children attach to caregivers is disrupted when a parent is incarcerated. Children can feel insecure and experience negative emotions as a result of the detachment from their incarcerated parent. These theories have informed practitioners and researchers as they seek to better understand the effects of parental incarceration on children.

Parental incarceration can lead children to experience a variety of emotions and behaviors. It is common for children of incarceration to experience anxiety and depression as well as display aggressive behaviors, engage in criminal activity, and have school-related problems. In school, children with incarcerated parents are often considered at greater risk, faced with stigmas and low expectations, and typically feel disconnected from school and unaccepted by their peers. The impact of parental incarceration in childhood can lead to negative long-term outcomes. Children often learn attitudes, behaviors, and a way of life from their parents that position them for incarceration as an adult. A variety of risk and protective factors mediate the overall impact of parental incarceration on children. School counselors are encouraged to intervene and establish support mechanisms that aim to promote protective factors and mitigate the effects of incarceration on their students.

School counselors offer services within comprehensive school counseling programs that can meet some of the needs of children with incarcerated parents. However, it is important school counselors consider the impact of parental incarceration on the students they serve and determine the level of support they need to be successful in school. School counselors are encouraged to strive to identify and determine the strengths and needs of each child with an incarcerated parent. Strategies and interventions that foster protective factors at home and school should be developed in collaboration with parents and teachers. A variety of community and web-based resources can support school counselors' work with students who have incarcerated parents. Given the number of students who have experienced the incarceration of a parent, they cannot be ignored. These students must be supported within the context of their lived experiences. School counselors are well-positioned to serve as valuable advocates for children of incarcerated parents.

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*Jeffrey M. Warren, NCC, is an associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Gwendolyn L. Coker is a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Megan L. Collins is a professional school counselor in Robeson County, NC. Correspondence can be addressed to Jeffrey Warren, 1 University Drive, Pembroke NC 28372, [jeffrey.warren@uncp.edu](mailto:jeffrey.warren@uncp.edu).*





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# School-Based Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

## Implications for Professional School Counselors

Rebecca Cowan, Rebekah F. Cole, Laurie Craigen

Professional school counselors play an important role in child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention. They are federally mandated to report suspected cases of abuse, provide counseling services to victims, and organize advocacy efforts. Furthermore, professional school counselors are in the position to address barriers and support the implementation of CSA prevention programs within their schools. These school-based prevention efforts are imperative; despite the high incidence of children who are sexually abused, research indicates that many parents do not educate their children about CSA at home. Therefore, it is vital that evidence-based CSA prevention programs are provided within the schools so that children have an opportunity to gain knowledge and personal safety skills.

In 2017, there were 57,964 reports of CSA in the United States. However, the incidence of CSA is likely higher as cases of sexual abuse often go unreported. CSA has been linked to a variety of health issues, including substance abuse, suicide attempts, high-risk sexual behavior, anxiety, depression, cognitive disturbances, post-traumatic stress disorder, gastrointestinal issues, and chronic pain. Therefore, because of the high incidence and resulting consequences of CSA, prevention is paramount.

The purpose of this collective case study research was to explore the experiences of several key internal stakeholders who are involved with a CSA prevention program in a southeastern state in the United States. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants. A total of three themes emerged from the data analysis: (1) importance of school-based CSA prevention education, (2) program impact within a school setting, and (3) barriers to implementation of CSA prevention within school systems.

Participants discussed the importance of child abuse education so children could implement good boundary setting and learn the language they need in order to express themselves if they feel they are at-risk. When outlining the importance of educating children on this issue, participants discussed how if children are not educated about boundaries and body safety starting at a young age, this could potentially leave a gap for this type of abuse to take place. Participants also identified a significant need for parents and teachers to become educated on how to talk with children about these issues. Many of the participants discussed how CSA prevention programs within the schools can provide children with the courage to speak up and learn how to protect themselves from potentially dangerous situations. However, there were four barriers identified by participants that often prevent implementation of these programs within the schools, including funding issues, negative attitudes toward CSA prevention, intervention stressed over prevention; and lack of community support.

Although research is limited to the efficacy of CSA prevention programs, outcome data indicate that effective programs promote education and awareness, decrease stigma, and increase rates of reporting sexual abuse. The data that emerged from this collective case study provide valuable perspectives on the challenges and benefits of CSA prevention programs and how professional school counselors may advocate for their implementation within the schools.

Rebecca Cowan is a professor at Walden University. Rebekah F. Cole is an assistant professor and Director of the School Counseling Program at Arkansas State University. Laurie Craigen is an associate professor at Boston University School of Medicine. Correspondence can be addressed to Rebecca Cowan, School of Counseling and Human Services, Walden University, 100 Washington Avenue South, Suite 900, Minneapolis, MN 55401, [rebecca.cowan@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:rebecca.cowan@mail.waldenu.edu).





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# Experiences of Cross-Racial Trust in Mentoring Relationships Between Black Doctoral Counseling Students and White Counselor Educators and Supervisors

Eric M. Brown, Tim Grothaus

Racial inclusivity and cultural competency are espoused by the American Counseling Association and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs as highly valued. Yet, faculty and students of color in counseling programs report racial discrimination and marginalization by White faculty and supervisors to be pervasive within the profession. Such experiences of marginalization by White people who purport to value inclusivity can be detrimental to the professional development of students of color who may be reticent to benefit from opportunities for professional growth offered by White professionals, such as mentoring.

In the early 80s, Black psychologists coined the term cultural mistrust to describe the reluctance that many persons of color have toward believing White individuals are trustworthy in relation to people of their ethnic group. Psychologists have noted that this mistrust is a protective and necessary response to both historical and present-day experiences of marginalization. Furthermore, researchers have found that cultural mistrust is not equal among all ethnic minority groups in the United States, with Black and Native American individuals scoring higher than those of Asian and Latino/a descent. Yet, despite high levels of cultural mistrust within the black community, growth-fostering Black–White relationships, such as mentoring, exist within the profession as a result of some Black people finding White professionals that they trust.

The authors of this study define cross-racial trust as the willingness of a person of color to share their racialized experiences with a White person. This study examined the experiences of 10 Black doctoral counseling students in CACREP programs who had White counseling faculty and clinical supervisors whom they trusted and considered to be mentors. The power differential between faculty and student and clinical supervisor and supervisee is substantial; therefore, cross-racial trust between Black students and White faculty and supervisors is noteworthy.

In the analysis of these Black participants' experiences, the authors found three broad themes related to their experiences of cross-racial trust. These doctoral students spoke about their reasons for being willing to trust their White mentor, negative experiences that caused them to be wary of cross-racial trust, and the unique benefits of having a White mentor. Mentoring has proven to have benefits as diverse as improved mental health, greater likelihood to meet career goals, increased student retention, self-efficacy, mental health, and work productivity. The results of this study can inform best practices in mentoring in cross-racial dyads.

*Eric M. Brown is an assistant professor at Wheaton College. Tim Grothaus is an associate professor at Old Dominion University. Correspondence can be addressed to Eric Brown, 501 College Avenue, BGC, Wheaton, IL 60187, [eric.brown@wheaton.edu](mailto:eric.brown@wheaton.edu).*





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# Further Validation of the Consultation Skills Scale (CSS)

## Relationships Between Consultation Skills, Supervisory Working Alliance, and Interprofessional Collaboration

Gulsah Kemer, Jeffry Moe, Kaprea F. Johnson, Emily Goodman-Scott, Zahide Sunal, Chi Li



Consultation is an important domain for counseling practice. Consultation is recommended by the American Counseling Association *Code of Ethics* to facilitate resolution of ethical dilemmas and ensure counselors provide effective services to clients. For counselors and other professional helpers, consultation is defined as a professional helping relationship in which a consultant seeks to foster growth and change to benefit the consultee, the consultee's clients, and/or the organizational context in which the consultee provides services.

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) identifies training in consultation as a key element of counselor preparation, and consultation is also identified as an essential component of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies. After counselors complete clinical supervision mandated by training and credentialing standards, seeking consultation can foster acquisition of new competency areas and also ensure the standard of care is being implemented in novel clinical situations.

The main, evidence-based outcome of consultation provided as a service is to improve treatment fidelity, where interventions are applied consistently in accordance with their intended design and purpose for best practice. Scholars have articulated multiple consultation models and theories, including mental health consultation designed to enhance treatment with specific populations or presenting issues, systemic consultation focused on organizational development, and behavioral consultation based on behavior theory. Steps or phases common to all consultation models include establishing collaborative rapport with consultees, formulating and defining the problem or focus of the consultation effort, implementing and evaluating the effect of interventions, and terminating the consultation relationship in an intentional, organized manner.

Although similar to other triadic helping relationships such as supervision and interprofessional collaboration, consultation is best conceptualized as a distinct mode of practice that requires training in specific consultation skills and models. Clinical supervisors retain gatekeeping authority for their supervisees' practice, whereas consultants are peers with no gatekeeping role. In the paradigm of interprofessional collaboration, providers from different professions may work closely with each other but each has a duty of care to provide service to identified clients or patients. Consultants may or may not interact directly with identified clients, and the duty of care typically remains with the consultee provider. In modern education and health care systems, where collaboration between professionals is encouraged to improve services, assessing counselors' ability to provide consultation as a distinct mode of service is an important aspect of ensuring the quality and efficacy of counseling. Counselors as consultants can be vital in diffusing innovations in standards of care, such as LGBT counseling competence or mindfulness-based interventions.

The present study was based on development of a consultation skills measure geared to counselors' professional identity and practice, as opposed to the consultation practice of other professions like school psychology. Building off of previous research, the present study incorporates confirmatory factor analysis, and reliability and validity analyses, resulting in a psychometrically stable 8-item measure termed the Consultation Skills Scale – Short Form. This brief, theoretically derived measure can facilitate further research on counselors' consultation skills and help identify how consultation as practiced by professional counselors influences effective training and practice.

*Gulsah Kemer is an assistant professor and graduate program director at Old Dominion University. Jeffry Moe is an associate professor at Old Dominion University. Kaprea F. Johnson is an associate professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. Emily Goodman-Scott is an associate professor and graduate program director at Old Dominion University. Zahide Sunal is a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. Chi Li is an assistant professor at the University of Memphis. Correspondence can be addressed to Gulsah Kemer, ODU Counseling and Human Services, 2106 New Education Building, Norfolk, VA 23529, [gkemer@odu.edu](mailto:gkemer@odu.edu).*



# A Child Abuse Reporting Framework for Early Career School Counselors

Malti Tuttle, Lacey Ricks, Margie Taylor

Early career school counselors are often navigating their role in the school while learning new responsibilities. As mandated reporters, one of these responsibilities is reporting child abuse, which can be an unnerving experience for early career school counselors. It is essential that school counselors become familiar with federal guidelines, state laws, and school policies regarding child abuse and mandated reporting laws and procedures. Failure by the school counselor to adhere to these policies can result in ethical and legal violations for the school counselor. Additionally, failure by the school counselor to report suspected child abuse cases can have negative implications for students' welfare and well-being.

Although school counselors are ethically and legally responsible for reporting suspected child abuse cases, some school counselors may not have received adequate training in recognizing and reporting suspected child abuse. Often times the experience of reporting child abuse may cause feelings of anxiousness and fear for these early career professionals. These feelings might be attributed to concerns about collaborating with reporting agencies, lack of knowledge about identifying types of abuse, or fear of repercussions.

Therefore, a child abuse reporting framework for early career school counselors is provided as a support to guide the mandated reporting process. The authors recognized that previous literature addressed school counselors as mandated reporters and provided frameworks for reporting child abuse; however, this article in particular focuses on early career school counselors based on what the literature states about their experiences, concerns, and recommendations. New school counselors can be especially vulnerable to challenges because of the difficulty of learning a new role and learning the expectations of their specific school site. Additional training can help alleviate some of the concerns of early career school counselors and increase their self-efficacy toward child abuse reporting.

The framework provide in this manuscript is based on the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, previous literature reviews, and research studies. The framework provides eight steps for early career school counselors to follow for best practices in mandated reporting. The steps include (1) familiarize and follow state laws and district/ school child abuse reporting policies, (2) familiarize and follow the 2016 ASCA ethical standards, (3) obtain training to identify and recognize signs of child abuse, (4) identify stakeholders, (5) build collaborative partnerships, (6) provide school-based training, (7) report child abuse, and (8) post-reporting procedures. The steps include recommendations and considerations for child abuse reporting.

*Malti Tuttle is an assistant professor and School Counseling Program Coordinator at Auburn University. Lacey Ricks is an assistant professor at Liberty University. Margie Taylor is a visiting assistant professor at Auburn University. Correspondence can be addressed to Malti Tuttle, 2084 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 36849, [mst0022@auburn.edu](mailto:mst0022@auburn.edu).*





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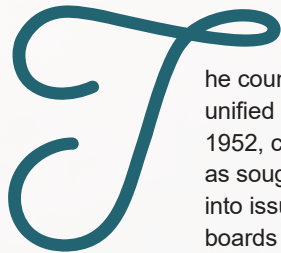
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# Interstate Licensure Portability

## Logistics and Barriers for Professional Counselors

Anna Elliott, Lynn Bohecker, Gregory M. Elliott, Bethany Jean Townsend,  
Veronica Johnson, Anna Lopez, Elizabeth D. Horn, Ken Roach



he counseling profession has put considerable effort toward establishing itself as a clearly defined and unified mental health field. Since the American Counseling Association's (ACA) original formation in 1952, counselors have sought consensus regarding the definition and scope of counseling, as well as sought to delineate themselves from other mental health professionals. This conflict translates into issues licensed counselors experience when obtaining a license in a new state. State licensing boards are not required to align standards with other states; therefore, licensed counselors experience a wide spectrum of barriers when attempting to acquire an additional counseling license. Key leadership groups related to counseling licensure have developed the *Joint Statement on a National Licensure Endorsement Process* to stress the importance of consistent licensure guidelines across states, as well as to outline specific protocols that state boards could adopt to achieve greater licensure requirement consistency.

State boards are not obligated to adapt their requirements to align with other states, and most have not, so significant conflicts persist as licensed counselors attempt to obtain additional licenses when relocating to a new state. While there have been calls within the counseling literature for greater licensure consistency, little research has explicitly examined the experiences counselors undergo when seeking a license in a new state. This study aimed to describe the experience of counselors who obtained a counseling license within the Rocky Mountain region of the country. The call for participants asked for licensed counselors who possessed a counseling license before attempting to obtain an additional license in the Rocky Mountain states (Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, New Mexico, and Colorado). Researchers conducted a qualitative content analysis, interviewing 12 participants and two licensed counselors from each state, seeking to understand the logistics associated with interstate licensure portability.

Results describe participants' experiences in fulfilling licensure requirements and the barriers they encountered related to lack of clarity from the boards and discrepancies in board standards. All participants described varying degrees of frustration as they navigated obtaining a new counseling license. It is notable that the call for participants did not ask for counselors who had negative experiences with licensure; however, all participants characterized their licensure process as such. Participants described different standards across states, as well as significant struggles to identify licensure requirements when they sought instruction from state board websites and calling the boards directly. Participants also offered perspective to counselors, supervisors, and state board members on measures that could help alleviate components of this conflict.

The counseling profession is in a state of crisis with regard to counseling licensure. Future research should include qualitative examinations of other regions' challenges to licensure portability as well as larger quantitative surveys of licensure issues across the country. Beyond providing a description of the problem, it is even more imperative that we move toward a unified, tangible solution. The *Joint Statement* offers an outline for how states can move toward greater consistency in licensure requirements. Strong advocacy and changes in legislation are needed in order to address this systemic issue.

*Anna Elliott is an assistant professor at Montana State University. Lynn Bohecker is an associate professor at Liberty University. Gregory M. Elliott is an assistant professor at Colorado Christian University. Bethany Jean Townsend is an assistant professor at Northwest Nazarene University. Veronica Johnson is an associate professor at the University of Montana. Anna Lopez is an assistant professor at New Mexico State University. Elizabeth D. Horn is a professor at Idaho State University. Ken Roach is a clinic director at the University of Phoenix—Utah. Correspondence can be addressed to Anna Elliott, PO Box 173540, Bozeman, MT 59718, [anna.elliott@montana.edu](mailto:anna.elliott@montana.edu).*



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