

CONFERENCE TO REVIEW GRADES

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Child: Sam

Sam is in the third grade and has had a continuing history of borderline performance in his school work. He has never really gotten "turned on" to anything academic. His school work can be characterized as sloppy, incomplete, and inaccurate. He has particular problems copying anything from the chalkboard. The way it comes out on his paper barely resembles what is written on the board.

His behavior largely contributes to his school problems. He has an extremely short attention span and can hardly stay in his seat for more than 10 to 15 minutes. He's thought of as the class "fidget." Constantly he's on the go and usually interrupting the work of his peers. Most of his classmates consider him to be a big annoyance.

Sam knows his problems all too well. When he saw the N's (needs improvement) on his last report card, he asked his mother if "N" stands for "none" or "nobody." (See attached report card.) His older sister and younger brother are both in the gifted program. He knows that they get practically all "H's" (high) on their report cards. Sam is about at the point of giving up on success in school. He's becoming increasingly convinced that he's a failure.

Sam has been identified as having a learning disability and attends the resource program for language arts.

Parents: Mr. and Mrs. Dawson

Mr. and Mrs. Dawson are sorely concerned over Sam's problems at school. Mr. Dawson is a secondary science teacher, and Mrs. Dawson is a graduate student in elementary education. Both of them place high value on academic achievement; but they also strongly value the emotional well-being of their children. They are very worried about Sam's negative feelings about himself.

They spend a lot of time "pumping up" Sam at home. They go out of their way to involve him in leisure activities that he enjoys--swimming, scouts, soccer, and nature classes at the museum. Sam is very mechanically inclined. Although it would create quite a financial hardship for them, they are considering purchasing a home computer so that Sam can use it. They want to do anything they possibly can to help him.

Both parents believe that Sam's teachers have not really attempted to individualize his instruction. They think that a large part of the problem is a "teacher failure" rather than a "child failure."

They are approaching this conference with strong feelings that the school program is "at fault." They want to know what the teacher is planning to do to reverse Sam's failure trend. Also, both parents are eager to help Sam at home and want direction on where they should place their priorities.

Teacher: You

As Sam's resource teacher, you are at a loss in knowing how to help him. He constantly disrupts his third grade class and invariably hands in poor work in his general education classroom, as well as in the resource room. You have tried everything you know to do with almost no success. You are dreading the parent-teacher conference to review Sam's report card with his parents. You are going to take this opportunity to alert his parents that you would like to develop a portfolio assessment system to do a better job of focusing on Sam's strengths. The portfolio assessment will help them to have a better idea of how he is performing in school. You also think the portfolio system will provide a boost to Sam's self-esteem as a student. You recognize that he seems to be at risk for developing some serious

emotional problems concerning his school achievement, and you want to do everything you can to accentuate his strengths.

SMALL GROUP ASSIGNMENT

Phase 1

Following the pre-meeting information in the chapter, you should work in small groups to develop a plan to (a) notify Mr. and Mrs. Dawson, (b) plan an agenda for the conference, and (c) specify how to arrange the environment to enhance positive communication. What will you try to learn in advance about their family system?

Phase 2

Next, in small groups you should address the four major components of family-professional meetings including (a) building rapport, (b) obtaining information, (c) providing information, and (d) summarizing and following-up activities. For each step, specify what you would do and say; and plan a role-play for the class. What information will you try to obtain about their family system?

Phase 3

Carry out your role play for the class.