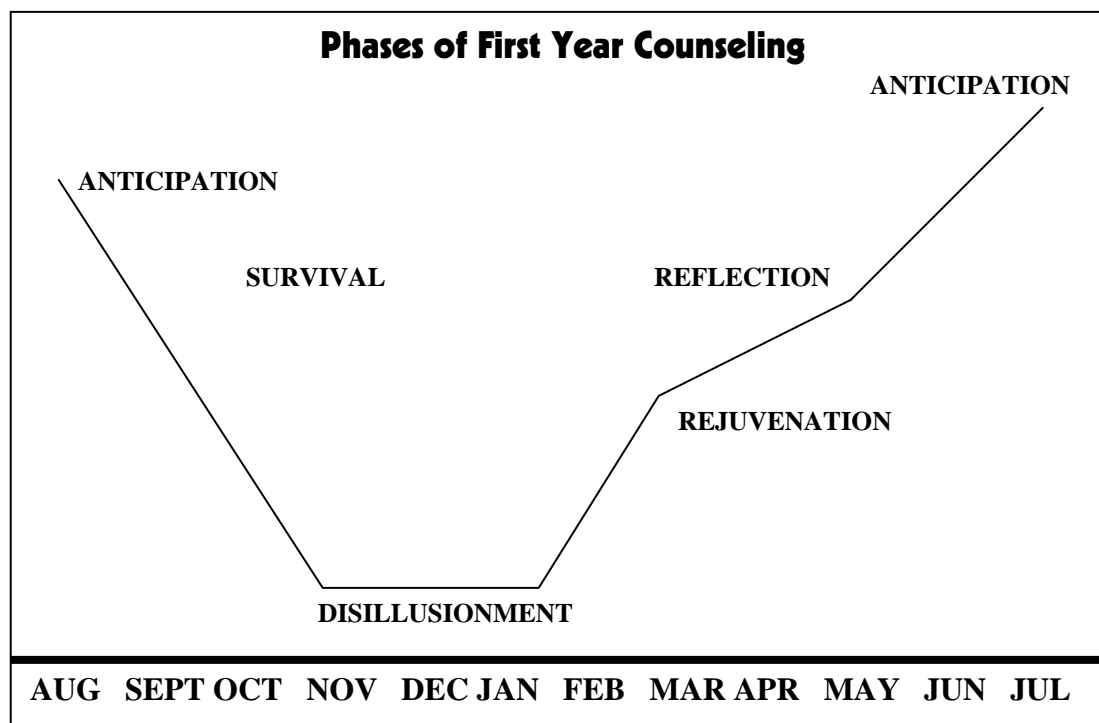


PHASES OF FIRST YEAR COUNSELING

The school year has ups and downs! In looking at the Phases of First Year, you can better understand what may be happening at various times throughout the school year. It may offer some insight as to why new counselors may be feeling the way they are. The following chart shows the phases as they occur during the year followed by a description of each phase. It is interesting to talk about these phases and how they change for a more experienced counselor (Lipton & Wellman, 2003).



Source: Lipton & Wellman (2003)

Anticipation: New counselor begins to anticipate the happenings of the first year of work. When entering a school guidance program, the counselor holds a commitment to make a difference. This is a very large goal, and counselors often are vague and rather idealistic about how they will accomplish this goal.

Survival: Around the middle of September and October, realities are setting in. New counselors are faced with many different problems for the first time and have no past experience to help solve them. Most counselors feel they are running to stay up with things and don't have time to reflect on their work and continue to prepare.

Disillusionment: This happens around the middle of October and runs into January. This is the "hit-the-wall" time after working nonstop since the beginning of school. This stage will vary in intensity and length. Novice counselors begin to second-guess their

abilities, commitment and worth in the school counseling field. Counselors may get sick during this time because of fatigue. Many events are occurring during this time such as back-to-school night, their evaluation with their administrator, and meeting parents through conferences, etc. This phase is usually the toughest challenge to overcome.

The mentor can share materials and offer tips for managing this phase. Support the protégé in examining what has been accomplished and what can be given up as unnecessary or ineffective routines. Acknowledge the protégé's feelings of inadequacy and do not diminish them by suggesting that these feelings will just go away.

Rejuvenation: A winter break will mark a transition in the pace of the school year. Being with family and friends over the break helps the counselor become grounded again. Many times, there will be a clearer understanding of the realities of the classroom and new counselors will begin to sense their accomplishments thus far. This phase will last into spring. There will be a sense of urgency as the year is coming to the end, that things must be accomplished.

Reflection: The last weeks of the first year are good for reflecting and taking stock in their work. Mentors are essential in helping new counselors remember how far they have come and what they have learned, what they would modify and what would be set aside.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: Establishing reflective practice is important to all counselors because working with students and few adults can bring a sense of isolation. Taking 15-20 minutes per week to write your thoughts about school counseling can bring practice into focus. Reflective dialogue with a partner is one way of looking at the practice of school counseling. Another way is through journal writing of happenings along with your reaction to what happened. Notes about your experiences do not have to be formal writings.

One reflective process is P+M-I* developed by Edward DeBono to provide a simple framework for reflection and self-assessment. It is as simple as having three columns to record your thoughts in: P+ would be the positives, M- would be the negatives and I* are the interesting or intriguing ideas that are neither plus nor minus. This process can be utilized by both the mentor and the protégé to reflect on something related to mentoring, school counseling practice or even parent conferences (Lipton & Wellman, 2003).

As the mentoring team discusses reflection notes, you will begin to see recurring practices and thoughts about counseling. These writings can provide a better understanding of your school counseling practices (Udelhofen & Larson, 2003).