

Starting from Strength: A Guide for School Counseling Graduate Students

As a graduate student in school counseling, you're already taking steps toward making a profound impact on students' lives. But starting from strength means recognizing the skills, values, and experiences you already bring to the table and building on them to develop your counseling practice. Here's how you can approach this mindset:

1. Identify Your Strengths

Reflect on what makes you uniquely equipped to succeed in this field. Are you an empathetic listener? Do you excel at problem-solving or fostering collaboration? Perhaps your life experiences have given you unique insights into the challenges students face. Identifying these strengths will not only boost your confidence but also guide your development as a school counselor.

Activity: Write down three strengths you believe will serve you well as a counselor. Share these with your peers or mentors and ask them to add their observations about your potential.

2. Build on What You Know

Graduate programs often attract students from diverse professional and educational backgrounds. Whatever your educational background, your prior experience is a powerful asset. Even personal experiences—overcoming challenges, mentoring others, or being part of a team—can inform your approach to school counseling.

Tip: Reflect on how your background aligns with the competencies needed for school counseling, such as advocacy, leadership, and cultural responsiveness.

3. Cultivate a Growth Mindset

Starting from strength doesn't mean you have to be perfect—it means embracing the learning process. Acknowledge areas where you want to grow and approach them with curiosity and determination. Use the strengths you already possess as a foundation to develop new skills.

Mantra: "I am equipped to begin, and I am ready to grow."

4. Leverage Support Networks

No one succeeds alone. Your professors, peers, mentors, and field supervisors are invaluable resources. Don't hesitate to reach out for guidance or feedback. Collaboration is a key component of counseling, and learning to lean on others strengthens your ability to support your future students.

Action Step: Join professional organizations like the Kentucky School Counselor Association (KSCA) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) to connect with a wider community of counselors and access resources to further your growth.

5. Stay Student-Centered

Finally, remember why you chose this path—to support students. Ground your work in their strengths, needs, and aspirations. By starting from strength in your own journey, you'll model resilience and self-empowerment for the students you serve.

Starting from strength is about recognizing your potential while staying open to growth. Celebrate how far you've already come, and trust in your ability to continue evolving into the impactful counselor you're meant to be.

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