

Suggestions for Conducting an Interview Using the Gifted Identity Formation Model

By Andrew S. Mahoney, M.S.,L.P.C.,L.M.F.T.

These suggestions will help counselors conduct client interviews that reveal the state of identity constructs through the 12 systems of identity formation. How clients view themselves as gifted people within each of the identity systems begins the work to enact rational interventions.

- ▶ Before the interview, you can practice the process on yourself or a gifted friend to get a feel for the process and its flow.
- ▶ Use a tape recorder to do a structured interview. When tape-recording the interview, offer a copy of the tape to the interviewee. If you transcribe the interview tape, also offer a copy of the transcription.
- ▶ Begin the interview by explaining the model, including the 12 systems and the four constructs. As you conduct the interview, it will be important to reiterate throughout the interview the meaning of the constructs and systems to the interviewee to foster clarity in their responses.
- ▶ Some gifted people have no recognition that they are gifted beyond a specific talent. For instance, they might say they are artistically talented. Start the interview with that talent as your guidepost. In most cases as the interview itself progresses, the individual's broader sense of giftedness emerges.
- ▶ Because some gifted people are multi-talented, you may interview them about their giftedness as specific talent or overall general giftedness.
- ▶ It isn't necessary to follow the grid in a particular order, as long as you can track the responses to the appropriate grid "cells." Sometimes interviewees, stimulated by the memories evoked, follow their own path among the systems and constructs. Manage

the flow to a pace you can record accurately, and return later to “cells” left open.

- ▶ Be sensitive to the line of questioning that works best for each client. For example, if you find open-ended questions work better, move in that direction and use that approach in future interviews. For example, sometimes the interview will take on the form of a dialogue. Let the dialogue flow, and much of the information will appear naturally. It will be up to you to sort out where that information fits in the grid.
- ▶ When the interviewee draws a blank in one “cell,” just make a note. That missing information can speak volumes about where interventions might be most valuable.
- ▶ As you conduct the interview, you may have ideas for interventions. Keep notes, but avoid offering suggestions during the interview.
- ▶ That said, keep in mind the interview is the intervention. Do not underestimate the power of the gifted person to insight change, no matter what age.
- ▶ Have people design or suggest their own interventions to the model once the interview is completed.
- ▶ Provide the interviewee with examples of responses as you proceed through the interview. This helps the interviewee remain clearly focused on the specific grid “cells.”
- ▶ You can also ask the interviewee to fill out the grid prior to the interview. In a session with the interviewee before the interview, explain the model and provide an empty grid with the “homework” assignment for the next session. You can fill out the grid yourself, if you know the person.

© Copyright 2001. Andrew S. Mahoney. All rights reserved.

Andrew S. Mahoney, M.S., L.P.C., L.M.F.T., is director of *The Counseling Practice of Andrew S. Mahoney & Associates*, a counseling center for the gifted and talented in Herndon, Virginia. In addition, he is an executive board member of the *Counseling and Guidance Division of the National Association of Gifted Children*, and a trainer and supervisor of counselors. For more than a decade, Mr. Mahoney has explored and developed frameworks for the counseling and psychotherapy of Gifted and Talented individuals. His work offers a new and original perspective for those interested in better serving this unique population.

e-mail: mahoney@counselingthegifted.com

Telephone: 703-318-6621

U.S. Mail: Andrew S. Mahoney and Associates

441-B Carlisle Drive

Herndon, VA 20170