

From Counseling to Classroom

A Practical Guide for Generalizing SEL and Mental Health Skills Into the Classroom

Why This Guide Exists

Counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and mental health clinicians do powerful work helping students develop coping skills, emotional regulation, and insight.

Yet many students who show progress in counseling continue to struggle in classrooms, hallways, or other school settings.

This guide is designed to close that gap.

Its purpose is simple: **to help clinicians translate what's working in counseling into clear, practical strategies that can be implemented consistently across the school day.**

You do not need to be a behavior specialist to use this tool. You already have the insight. This guide helps you structure it so it sticks.

How to Use This Guide

Use this resource when:

- A student is receiving counseling or mental health support
- The student continues to struggle with behavior outside the counseling setting
- The team wants clearer alignment between therapy and classroom practice

You can complete this independently or during a team meeting with teachers and support staff.

Start with one student.

Part 1:

The Counseling-to-Classroom Generalization Map

A simple framework for turning therapy insights into classroom action

Complete one section at a time.

Student & Context

Student initials or pseudonym	Grade / setting(s)	Primary concern across the school day

Step 1: Skill Being Taught in Counseling or Therapy

What skill is the student actively learning or practicing?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coping strategy | <input type="checkbox"/> Social skill |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional regulation | <input type="checkbox"/> Persistence or work stamina |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-management | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Skill description (in simple, observable terms):

Step 2: Why This Skill Matters (Function Alignment)

What challenge is this skill meant to address?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding or escaping difficult tasks or situations | <input type="checkbox"/> Accessing preferred activities or outcomes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining attention or connection | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing frustration, anxiety, or overwhelm | |

When the skill is not used, what typically happens?

Step 3: Target Routine(s) for Practice

Where does the student most need to use this skill during the school day?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academic instruction | <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured time (recess, lunch) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transitions | <input type="checkbox"/> Arrival or dismissal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Group work | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Describe one specific routine to start generalization:

Step 4: How Adults Should Prompt or Cue the Skill

What helps the student remember to use the skill?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visual reminder | <input type="checkbox"/> Modeling or rehearsal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Verbal cue or phrase | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Check-in before the routine | |

Exact language or strategy adults should use:

Step 5: How Adults Should Respond When the Skill Is Used

What response will reinforce use of the skill?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Specific verbal feedback | <input type="checkbox"/> Check-In/Check-Out Intervention |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet acknowledgment | <input type="checkbox"/> Progress monitoring or tracking tool |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Access to a preferred activity or break | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Response details:

Step 6: What to Avoid (Trauma-Informed Considerations)

Are there approaches that increase stress or escalation?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tone of voice to avoid | <input type="checkbox"/> Power struggles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proximity issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Language or phrasing | |

Notes:

Part 2: Counseling-to-Classroom Checklist

Use this checklist before implementation.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The skill is clearly defined and observable | <input type="checkbox"/> Adult responses are consistent and trauma-informed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom staff understand what the skill looks like | <input type="checkbox"/> The skill is practiced during calm moments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prompts are realistic and easy to use | <input type="checkbox"/> The plan focuses on prevention, not just crisis response |

If multiple boxes are unchecked, revisit the Generalization Map.

Part 3: Brief Case Example

Student: Upper elementary student receiving counseling for emotional regulation

Skill taught in counseling: Asking for a break using a visual card

Function addressed: Escape from overwhelming academic tasks

How this showed up in a behavior plan:

- **Prevention:** Teacher checks in before independent work and reminds the student of the break option
- **Teaching:** Counselor and teacher practice using the card during calm moments
- **Adult response:** When the card is used, the student receives a brief break without discussion
- **What to avoid:** Verbal questioning during dysregulation

Outcome: Increased use of the skill and fewer escalations during instruction.

Part 4: Coaching Prompts for Clinicians

Supporting teachers without taking over

Use these prompts when collaborating with staff:

- **“When you see the student start to struggle, try saying...”**
- **“If the student uses the skill, respond by...”**
- **“If the skill isn’t used yet, avoid...”**
- **“Let’s practice what this looks like before the next transition.”**

Your role is not to manage the classroom.

Your role is to **equip others with what you already know works.**

Part 5: Start Small and Build

Generalization does not happen all at once.

It happens through:

- **Clear expectations**
- **Repeated practice**
- **Consistent adult responses**

One student.

One skill.

One routine.

That is often enough to start meaningful change.