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**Identifying and Advising Multiple Subtypes
of Undecided Students**

- Advising Strategies

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MULTIPLE SUBTYPES OF UNDECIDED STUDENTS

UNCOMMITTED DECIDED

Identifying Characteristics:

Overly concerned about making a "right" choice
Has personally identified vocationally with choice
Usually a high level of anxiety
Lower levels of self-clarity, decisiveness and self-esteem
may be present
May be controlled by powerful others and/or chance factors

Level of Motivation:

Usually feels pressure to move toward a decision
May be resisting parental/societal pressures to commit

Information Deficits:

May need more in-depth information about choice
Help confirm accuracy of information upon which initial choice is based
Help make contact with workers in occupational choice so more realistic information
may be gathered
Help acquire more information about employment prospects
Help get work-related experiences

Decision Making Deficits:

Take element of "chance" out of decision
Emphasize value considerations inherent in the consequences of their action and inaction
Help clarify own values vs. those of significant others
Help integrate information they have about themselves and choice
May need help negotiating last steps of decision making process (i.e., making a
commitment; taking action steps)
Review other successful and unsuccessful past decisions to help analyze their own
decision making style

Personal/Social Concerns:

Help them recognize source of anxiety
Reassure choice is not forever
Help resolve conflict with significant others if present
Help gain confidence by encouraging work/volunteer experiences in chosen area
Alleviate fear of failure if present

MULTIPLE SUBTYPES OF UNDECIDED STUDENTS

TENTATIVELY DECIDED

Identifying Characteristics:

In process of crystallizing a preference
Some doubts about choice
Anxious about making the **right** choice
Usually an internal locus of control
Needs more information about choice and how self will fit
Usually willing to look at related alternatives

Levels of Motivation:

May not be developmentally ready to decide
May lack problem solving skills

Information Deficits:

Needs help acquiring and organizing personal information (e.g., about personal interests, values, abilities)
Needs help in acquiring more information about choice (e.g., tasks involved, market projections, profile of satisfied worker)
May need help in confirming accuracy of educational and occupational information upon which tentative choice is based

Decision Making Deficits:

Needs to learn decision making process
Needs help in clarifying personal and work values
Help organize information about self and occupations so that integration may take place
Help set goals for making a decision (e.g., timetable)

Personal/Social Concerns:

Reassure that some anxiety about choice is normal
May need help in learning to compromise negatives about choice
May feel frustrated with inability to reach closure
Provide support while decision is being made

MULTIPLE SUBTYPES OF UNDECIDED STUDENTS

UNDECIDED COMFORTABLE

Identifying Characteristics:

Often actively exploring options
Needs self, academic, and occupational information
Varying degrees of anxiety because has not made a decision
External locus of control - relies on others' opinions
Has no vocational identity
May be multipotential
Average problem solving skills

Level of Motivation:

Developmentally not ready to decide
Vocationally immature
Lacks problem solving skills
Might be influenced by parental/societal pressures

Information Deficits:

Help crystallize educational and occupational interests
Help clarify personal and work values
Help acquire and organize other information about self
Help identify and acquire information about several realistic educational and occupational alternatives
Help confirm accuracy of educational and occupational information

Decision Making Deficits:

Teach decision making process overtly and by modeling
Help understand how values have an impact on decisions
Help integrate information about self and occupations
Help set educational and occupational goals
Help learn to compromise among several alternatives

Personal/Social Concerns:

Reassure that some anxiety is normal in decision making
Help shift to internal locus of control
Provide support while making decisions

MULTIPLE SUBTYPES OF UNDECIDED STUDENTS

SERIOUS INDECISION

Identifying Characteristics:

High level of anxiety
Poor vocational identity formation
External locus of control
Unclear personal, educational and/or occupational goals
Lacks problem solving skills
Cannot connect present behavior to future outcomes
Lacks confidence in self
Negative self-appraisal, self-concept

Level of Motivation:

Varying levels of motivation to make decisions
May not know how to make decisions
Discrepancy between self-concept and how others view them
Needs to develop "readiness" for educational and career planning

Information Deficits:

May or may not need certain types of information, although this is not a primary concern

Decision Making Deficits:

May be somewhat indecisive
May have difficulty taking risks
Probably needs high structure for decision making process

Personal/Social Concerns:

May need counseling to overcome fear of making decisions
May have low self-concept
May be avoiding or not acknowledging important personal concerns
May need longer-term counseling for personal concerns

MULTIPLE SUBTYPES OF UNDECIDED STUDENTS

CHRONIC INDECISIVE

Identifying Characteristics:

Psychologically dysfunctional
Paralyzed about decision making
Dependent
Often feelings of helplessness
Manipulative
Debilitating anxiety

Level of Motivation:

Varying levels of motivation although is not a primary concern
Procrastination is common
Overwhelmed with idea of making an educational or occupational commitment

Information Deficits:

May or may not need information but this is not **primary** concern

Decision Making Deficits:

Immobile; unable to make a decision about many aspects of their lives

Personal/Social Concerns:

Help acknowledge excessive anxiety
Help alleviate confusion about vocational identity
Difficulty in making decisions in general
Help explore influences of significant others
Help build confidence in ability to negotiate the decision making process
Need long-term interventions focusing on personal/emotional issues

EXAMPLES OF EXPLORATORY ACTIVITIES IN WHICH UNDECIDED STUDENTS MIGHT ENGAGE

Browse through the Occupational Outlook Handbook, printed by the U.S. Department of Labor, and available in all libraries. Notice how the occupations are grouped. Identify five occupations that interest you. List what appeals to you the most about each. Select two to research in more depth.

Ask your academic adviser for a list of campus resources that can help you with career exploration.

Use **DISCOVER** or **SIGI-PLUS** (computerized career exploration systems) to learn how your interests, abilities, and values relate to specific academic majors and occupations.

Take an inventory such as the Self-Directed Search (SDS) or the Career Decision-Making System (CDS) to identify some possible occupational interests.

List five skills you have used and enjoyed doing in past work related experiences; compare these with five skills you have used but have found difficult or not enjoyable. How are these skills used in the occupations you are considering?

Complete a life-style inventory. What values are reflected in your desired life-style? What are some steps you can take now to insure your desired life-style?

Talk to alumni who are working in the occupations you are considering; prepare a list of questions in advance.

Enroll in a career planning course that will help you identify, organize, and explore your academic and occupational interests and abilities.

Visit with a career counselor to discuss your ideas and ask for suggestions about testing, information resources, and decision making strategies.

Review a listing of college majors and some of the course work necessary to begin specific degree programs. Select three to explore in more depth.

Identify how majors you are considering relate to occupational fields, e.g., through computer searches, talking to faculty, through library research.

Identify common introductory course work for the majors you are considering. What grades are necessary for entry into these majors, if any?

Examine the junior and senior level coursework required in the majors you are considering. Does the content of these higher level courses appeal to you?

Plot the required course work for one major from now until graduation.

Review decision making models and compare your way of making decisions with them. What are the implications of this comparison?

With the help of your academic adviser or a career counselor, make a list of action steps you will need to take in order to implement a decision about a major and/or career and set a time frame for each step.

Identify possible internships, co-op programs, or other work or volunteer experiences for gaining first-hand exposure to an occupation you are considering.

Register with your career planning and placement office on campus. Take advantage of the services this office offers, such as resume writing and employer interviewing.

Complete a resume and ask a career counselor to critique it.

Enroll in a job-search workshop and practice your job interviewing skills with a counselor.

Learn to periodically review the decisions you have made and make adjustments or changes based on new information or events.
