



IMPACT

Why School Counselors Are **Essential**

Counselors are uniquely positioned to:

- Identify early indicators
- Build trusted relationships with students and families
- Coordinate school-based supports
- Connect students to community resources and alternative pathways

Often, counselors are the last consistent adult connection before a student disengages.

Preventing Youth Disconnection

A BRIEF FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Why This Matters

Students who leave school without a diploma or clear post-secondary pathway face long-term challenges:

- Significantly lower lifetime earnings
- Higher risk of experiencing unemployment
- Higher risk of experiencing poverty
- Increased involvement with the justice system
- Greater mental and physical health challenges

Youth disconnection is preventable, and school counselors play a critical role in changing life trajectories.

WHAT IS YOUTH DISCONNECTION?

“Disconnected youth” (also known as opportunity youth) refers to young people ages 16–24 who are not in school and not working. Disconnection rarely happens overnight — it is usually the result of missed warning signs and unmet needs over time.

Early intervention by school counselors is one of the most powerful ways to prevent it.

School Counselor Action Checklist

PREVENTING YOUTH DISCONNECTION



ACTION ITEMS

IDENTIFY

- ☐ Monitor attendance, behavior, and credit accumulation regularly
- ☐ Use early warning and student support data
- ☐ Flag students experiencing major life transitions

CONNECT

- ☐ Conduct strengths-based check-ins with students
- ☐ Engage families and caregivers early
- ☐ Collaborate with teachers, administrators, and support teams

SUPPORT

- ☐ Develop individualized graduation and postsecondary plans
- ☐ Connect students to:
 - Tutoring and credit recovery
 - Mental health and counseling services
 - Career exploration and work-based learning
 - Flexible and alternative education pathways

FOLLOW UP

- ☐ Track referrals and student progress
- ☐ Re-engage students who show signs of disengagement
- ☐ Maintain outreach to students who leave school

Every Student Has a Pathway

Early and consistent support changes **life outcomes**. By identifying risk early, building relationships, and connecting students to resources, counselors play a critical role in ensuring every young person stays on a path toward education, employment, and long-term success.

Community Referral Pathways

Students may benefit from connections to:

- Re-engagement and credit recovery programs
- Workforce development and youth employment programs
- GED/High School Equivalency (HSE) programs
- Alternative Education programs
- Mental health and family support services
- Housing, childcare, and basic needs resources

No student should navigate disconnection alone.

