

Implementing the Appreciative Advising Framework at Olney Central College

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Abstract

The Appreciative Advising framework is producing transformational changes within Student Services. New advising, registration, and scheduling tools were needed. The Appreciative Advising framework was introduced at Olney Central College (OCC) as part of a Title III grant initiative to meet these needs. Subsequently, OCC advisors are connecting with students on deeper levels through several new tools, including our new advising checklists. Each checklist offers key tips allowing advisors to export new methods of assisting students in achieving their dreams, goals, and potentials. Advisors reflect on their own experiences and goals, promoting understanding of their strengths and potential to positively impact students' lives. The use of a texting platform was also implemented to enhance the student experience. Since Appreciative Advising was implemented, 84 percent of students reported positive satisfaction with advising. Valuable lessons were learned through the implementation of the Appreciative Advising framework including the importance of communication, acting on what is learned, and the need for training and reflection.

As part of a Title III Strengthening Institutions federal grant, in 2019 Olney Central College (OCC) tasked a Student Service Specialist with redesigning advising services at the institution. Realizing that advisors needed to be more proactive in reaching out to students, part of the redesign of academic advising at Olney Central College included an emphasis on intrusive advising. The intrusive model is based on the philosophy that the advisor and the student share responsibility for each student's academic success or failure (Earl, 1988; Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Intrusive advising is action-oriented and involves motivating students to seek help when needed (Earl, 1988; Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Once students arrived for their advising appointments, the Appreciative Advising theory-to-practice framework was selected to undergird how advisors facilitated the advising appointments. The purpose of this article is to explain how the advising process was redesigned using the Appreciative Advising theory-to-practice framework and the lessons learned along the way.

Background Information about Olney Central College

Olney Central College is a two-year public community college located in Olney, Illinois. OCC has been ranked as the number one community college in Illinois due to its high completion and graduation rates. OCC's student body consists of approximately 2,000 students. There are three advisors housed within the Student Service area. Each advisor has a caseload of around 250-300 transfer and career and technical students each semester.

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Implementing the Six Phases of Appreciative Advising

There are six phases to Appreciative Advising: Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't Settle (Bloom et al., 2008). During the student's initial appointment, academic advisors focused mainly on the first four phases (Disarm, Discover, Dream and Design) of Appreciative Advising. Follow-up meetings are scheduled during the initial appointment to ensure students Deliver on their plans and are living out the Don't Settle phase to assess their progress and plans for the future. The following section highlights how each phase is carried out during advising appointments at OCC.

Disarm

The receptionists and secretaries are crucial members of our team and play an important role in disarming students, even before they arrive for their appointment. For example, Signal Vine is a two-way text platform the secretarial staff use to remind students about their upcoming appointments. An example of an appreciative appointment reminder is,

“Hi Alex, your appointment with Vicki is tomorrow at 2:00 pm. Please come 10 minutes early and I will ensure your Entrata information is ready to go. We can't wait to see you. I know there is a lot going on right now, is there anything I can help you with before your appointment?”

The Student Services area was reconfigured to include welcome signs, registration kiosks, and a variety of interactive activities. The receptionists and secretarial staff are often the first staff members the students encounter upon arrival in the office for their advising appointment and thus play an important role in making students feel welcome. These valued staff members are trained to warmly welcome students and to engage in small talk with students to build rapport while they wait for their advisor. Puzzles are also available for students to work on while they wait and, as part of the Title III grant, registration kiosks are available for students to use. During the fall 2020 Student Services satisfaction survey, 84% of students reported overall satisfaction with the advising process to be positive or very positive (see Appendix A). When asked how likely they would be to reach out to their advisor if experiencing a problem, 78% stated that they were likely or very likely to reach out (see Appendix B).

Advising staff members carefully reconsidered their office spaces and what messages were being sent to students simply through the way the offices were decorated. For example, Assistant Dean of Student Services, Andi Pampe, rearranged her office furniture and incorporated more personal items that reflected her own personality. Another advisor stated, “I have posted a new Quote of the Day on my door. I want to add a more positive feel to my office and setting for conversations.” Each advisor redesigned their office to be more personalized and student friendly.

Advisors walk out of their offices to meet the student before the appointment and call out for their student by their first name. Advisors make sure to smile, be present with a relaxed body posture, and maintain appropriate eye contact. One advisor stated,

“I'm really bad with remembering names, but I have made it a point to use the student's name in conversation. I think that has helped remember their name when I see them in the hallway. I have noticed that more students chat with me or call me by name outside of my office. I think this also comes from the advising appointments being more goal-oriented and less task-oriented.”

Discover

Academic advisors use open-ended Discover questions (see Appendix C) to get to know students' stories and interests. By asking Discover questions that allow students to share their experiences, advisors learn more about students' strengths, skills, desires, and accomplishments. While reflecting on their experiences and strengths, trust is established between the student and advisor. Sheri Gray, an advisor, stated, "During a recruiting visit this week, we spoke to an overwhelmed high school senior who was struggling with going away or staying. It was nice to help her talk through her doubts, fears and misconceptions which led to her setting up an appointment to register for classes."

Dream

For many students, their advisor is the first person to ask them what their dreams are, where they want to be in five years, or to discuss what they would like to accomplish. Advisors support students as they visualize their hopes for their future personal and professional goals as well as define what success means to them. One advisor stated, "By using open-ended questions during the appointment, the student came in undecided and left revealing his interest was in science."

Design

Once students have shared their dreams for the future, the advisor partners with students to co-create a plan for making their dream a reality. Plans include identifying options to accomplish each goal as well as clarifying smaller achievable objectives. The co-created plan includes not only relevant courses, but also extra-curricular activities, volunteer opportunities, internships, etc. An important part of the Design phase includes assisting students as they write out step-by-step plans to achieve their goals. Advisors also encourage students to think about what strengths they have that can be used to overcome obstacles they may face as they set out to achieve their goals.

Deliver

The fifth phase of Appreciative Advising is when the student "delivers" the plan co-created with the adviser (Bloom et al., 2008). Dreams change, obstacles occur, and students stumble, but advisors are there to make sure students Deliver on their plans. Advisors assist in identifying support systems, possible roadblocks, and ways to celebrate accomplishments.

Advisors use the checklist in Appendix D for examples of how to help students deliver. They will find questions such as, "What actions are you taking to achieve your perfect future?", "When will you know it may be time to reevaluate your goals?" and "How will you celebrate when you achieve your goal?" At the end of the appointment, advisors encourage students to keep them updated on their progress and mark on their calendar when to follow-up with students if they have not heard back from students by a specific date.

Don't Settle

The Don't Settle phase encourages advisors at Olney Central College to support their advisees when they change directions and push students to avoid settling for mediocrity. During follow-up appointments with students, advisors ask students about their accomplishments as well as to consider what improvements they hope to make during the upcoming semester. One advisor stated, "If I see current students, I will ask what, if anything they will do differently next semester." By pointing out the positive

achievements of students' efforts, advisors initiate a continuous cycle that motivates students to celebrate each success.

Lessons Learned

Olney Central College has learned a number of important lessons in the process of implementing Appreciative Advising as its primary advising framework. The first is the importance of communication, the second is the need to be prepared to act upon what is learned from students during advising appointments, and finally, the importance of training and reflection.

Communication

Although the focus in the previous section was on how academic advisors use Appreciative Advising to guide their in-person interactions with students, we have realized the importance of continued clear communication with students between appointments. The primary way that the advising office communicates with students outside the office is via Signal Vine, a two-way text messaging platform to enhance the advising process at Olney Central College.

The advising team in Student Services, as well as the Nursing advisors, financial aid coordinator, and records office, were a part of the initial group that launched the use of Signal Vine at Olney Central College. Each department engages students with personalized content that is carefully timed to be relevant to students. We have found that students are more likely to respond to messages that have been customized. For example, "Hi Alex! Good luck on your upcoming midterms. I wanted to check in and see how things are going? Is there anything you needed to talk about?"

All messages are coordinated using the message calendar within the platform, ensuring multiple departments do not send messages to the same group of students on the same day. In August, a two-part message is sent to students.

Part 1: Hi Alex! The fall semester starts Thursday, August 20. If you do not have classes on Thursday, you will start on Friday, August 21. If you have a lab that meets on Thursday, you will attend at that time on Thursday, August 21.

Part 2 Can I answer any questions about your classes? Respond yes or no. On the day of Orientation, the following message is sent, Hi Alex! We are looking forward to seeing you at Orientation today in the Automotive Building at 9am. There are signs on campus to direct you for parking. Can I answer any questions for you?

Advisor workloads have decreased because Signal Vine schedules appointments and has automated responses to the most common student questions, freeing advisors to focus more time during appointments on building rapport and going through the phases of Appreciative Advising. In addition, sending appointment reminders has resulted in fewer "no show" appointments.

Olney Central College uses the analytic features within Signal Vine to analyze student response and engagement for each message sent. By carefully monitoring students' response rates and concerns, future messages have been created to address common concerns, such as not knowing where to park the day of freshman orientation and not knowing where to pick up books. In addition, when student anxiety levels started to increase during final exam weeks, students were sent proactive tips for handling anxiety and managing stress levels.

Acting on What Students Tell Us

Using the Appreciative Advising approach has results in advisors creating closer relationships with students and learning more about their needs. One unmet student need that arose was that our students were experiencing hunger. This need was evidenced in their stories as well as their actions. For example, advisors noticed that students were taking hands full of candy from advisors' candy bowls and many commented that this was their only meal of the day so far. Jodi Schneider, an advisor at Olney Central College stated, "I found that the resources for food pantry were limited." Knowing that Maslow's needs states that if students' basic needs are not being met, that they will not be able to focus on completing their coursework, Jodi and the rest of the Student Services enlisted the help of the campus community in addressing student hunger and found it to be quite generous (Taormina & Gao, 2013). The team created a plan and quickly put it into action. Jodi's goal was to move the food pantry to a more accessible location for students to make it easier for students to access food items. Within two weeks, the food pantry, named Food for Thought, became a reality. The food pantry was originally housed in the library, but unfortunately this meant users were visible to other library patrons. Subsequently, the food pantry was relocated from a highly visible location in the library to an office near the backdoor of the Student Services Office. This move to a more private location allowed students to get the food that they needed without everyone else knowing that food insecurity was an issue for them. Flyers were placed across campus to invite students to visit Student Services if they forgot their breakfast or lunch or simply needed a quick snack.

Advisor Training and Reflection

The ongoing training of academic advisors on the Appreciative Advising framework has been crucial to our team living out the "Don't Settle" phase. We have developed several tools to help our advisors be more intentional about incorporating the phases into their work. During the spring of 2020, the advising staff were encouraged to register for a series of webinars organized by Florida Atlantic University's Office of Appreciative Education. In addition to the list of Appreciative Advising questions (Appendix C), a second checklist (see Appendix D) was designed to map the six phases of Appreciative Advising to the innovative strategies presented within a campus-wide course requirement based on Skip Downing's "On Course to Success" work (Downing & Brennan, 2020). The "On Course to Success" is grounded in the following principles: self-responsibility, self-motivation, self-management, interdependence, self-awareness, lifelong learning, emotional intelligence and believing in oneself (Downing & Brennan, 2020). The course offers innovative strategies for empowering students to become active, responsible leaders using a hands-on approach for learning essential life and study skills. The intentional overlap between students' experiences both in the classroom and during their advising appointments has meant that students experience congruent and consistent principles both inside and outside of class.

In order to support students' mental health during the Spring 2020 semester and continue learning ways to disarm via technology, the advisors were also encouraged to register for webinars organized by Signal Vine and Active Minds (Former Active Minds student leader and co-creator of V-A-R®, 2020). A third checklist was created at this time. This version utilized Active Minds' everyday guide for everyday challenges, VAR, and included revised examples of questions for each phase of Appreciative Advising (see Appendix E).

Advisors are encouraged to submit weekly reports about how they are using both the checklists featured in Appendices A and B. The questions listed after the checklist give advisors the opportunity to reflect upon which phases and questions they are using the most and to identify their goals for the following week. For example, Sheri Grey, a new Olney Central College Advisor, stated, “I want to continue focusing on the design phase. The more I can learn about courses, the better I will be at helping the students with their needs.” In addition, during monthly staff meetings the advising team shares their experiences with the Appreciative Advising framework during their advising appointments.

Conclusion

Olney Central College’s search for a better way to advise students resulted in the implementation of the Appreciative Advising framework. The two checklists featured in this article helped advisors implement the Appreciative Advising theory-to-practice framework into their advising appointments. We also shared some of the important lessons we learned on the journey to implementing the Appreciative Advising framework, including the importance of communication, acting on student needs, and advisor training and reflection. Appreciative Advising has allowed Olney Central College to better served the needs of our student population.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

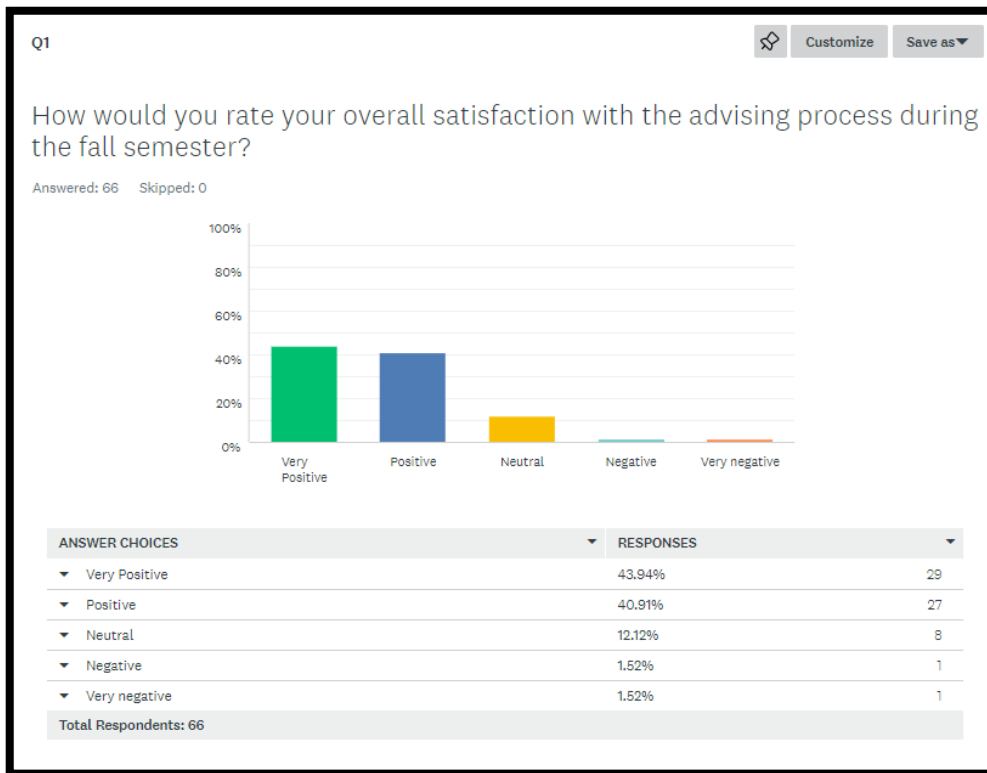
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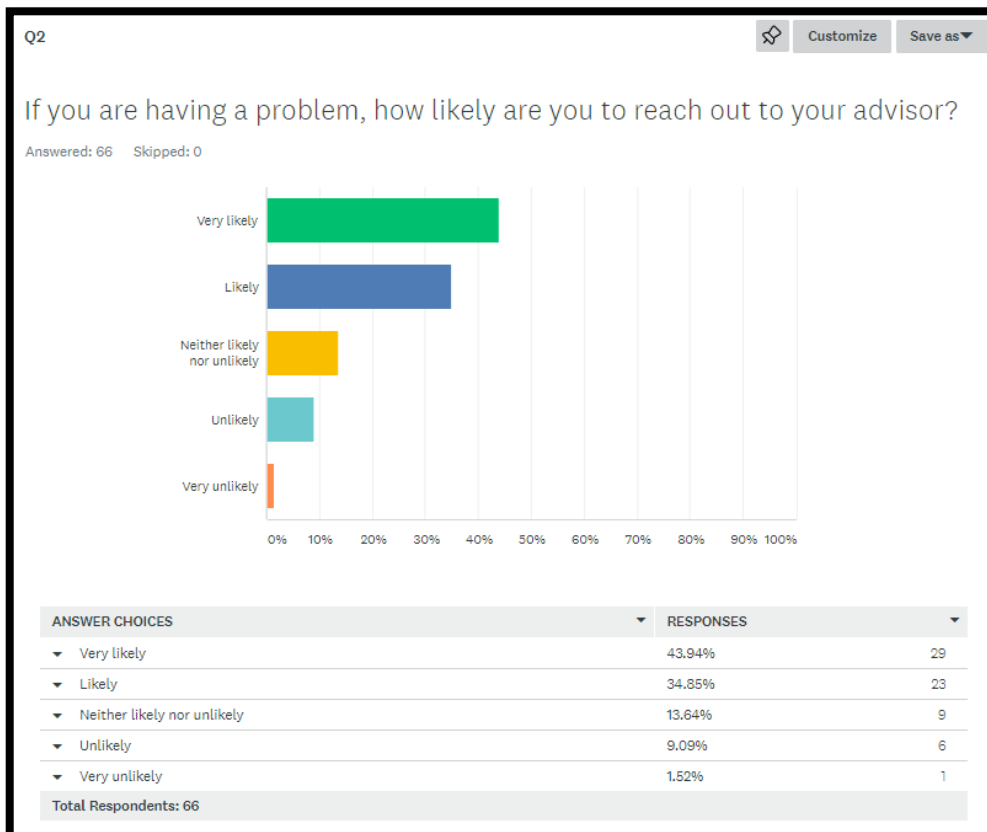
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Appendix A.



Appendix B.



Appendix C. Appreciative Advising Checklist

☐	<p>Disarm <i>Recognize the importance of first impressions, create a safe, welcoming environment for students.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the highlight of your week so far? • Did you go to the game yesterday? • Do you have any plans for the weekend? • I am in search of a great book to read; do you have any suggestions?
☐	<p>Discover <i>Utilize positive, open-ended questions to draw out what they enjoy doing, their strengths and their passions.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your personal commitments outside of school? • What is something you have learned about yourself during this process? • What is one thing that makes you happy every day? • What obstacles have you overcome and how did you do so?
☐	<p>Dream <i>Help students formulate a vision of what they might see themselves doing, and then assist them in developing their life and career goals.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the next major challenge you may face in achieving your dreams? • What do you want to have accomplished in 5 years? • Be completely selfish- what would you like to do? • When you were a child, what did you say you wanted to be when you grew up? What about now?
☐	<p>Design <i>Help students devise concrete, incremental, and achievable goals. Teach students how to make decisions, give positive and encouraging feedback.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you do today to bring you one step closer to your goals? • How can you use your strengths to overcome obstacles? • How will you know you've achieved your goals? • Who is on your "Board of Directors"? • What challenges do you expect to face?
☐	<p>Deliver <i>The students follow through on their plans. The advisor is there for them when they stumble, believing in them every step of the way and helping them continue to update and refine their dreams as they go.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What actions are you taking to achieve your perfect future? • Have you (or do you need to) reevaluate your goals? • How are you celebrating your accomplishments? • What has been the most helpful in terms of keeping you going?
☐	<p>Don't Settle <i>The advisor challenges the student to proactively raise the student's internal bar of self-expectations.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have done great so far, but what is one thing you want to improve on next semester? • What does it mean TO YOU to raise your own internal bar of expectations? • Tell me about something you didn't think you could accomplish, but did... • What will your next goal be?

In order to meet grant requirements, please complete both sides of this document and submit to your supervisor every Friday.

1. What were two ways you incorporated these principles this week? Explain.

2. Explain a specific result that you experienced from using these principles.

3. What is one goal you have for next week, using these principles?

Signature_____ Date_____

Appendix D. Appreciative Advising mapped to Innovative Strategies within On Course Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, Don't Settle

□	<p style="text-align: center;">Personal Responsibility (Disarm) <i>Recognize the importance of first impressions, create a safe, welcoming environment for students.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Wise Choice Process when students ask for advice about a problem. • Have students make a list of inner qualities of successful students. • Use CREATOR LANGUAGE when speaking to students (avoid blaming, excusing, complaining, judging self or others). Acknowledge your own personal responsibility for problems you've helped create. • Assign students to read and write about a situation concerning personal responsibility.
□	<p style="text-align: center;">Self-Motivation (Discover) Utilize positive open-ended questions to draw out what they enjoy doing, their strengths, and their passions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students create an AFFIRMATION to help support them in their weakest academic subjects. Print them on pre-printed paper frames and give them to post in a special place. • Talk to your students about your own personal goals and dreams. Let them see what motivates you.
□	<p style="text-align: center;">Self-Management (Dream) <i>Help students formulate a vision of what they might become, and then assist them in developing their life and career goals.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play the GRADUATION GAME then ask students to identify specific 3-foot tosses. • When students tell you about a goal or a problem use the Wise Choice Process to help them. • Review the Responsibility Model with students, Victim Mindset compared to the Creator Mindset. • Have students complete the Two-Column Activity about choices (I have to vs. I Choose to). • Use the Self-Management Quadrants to discuss the importance of time management.
□	<p style="text-align: center;">Interdependence (Design) <i>Help students devise concrete, incremental and achievable goals. Teach students how to make decisions; give positive and encouraging feedback.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give collaborative assignments to be done by pairs or groups. • Do the CHAIR LIFT demonstration; then organize students into study groups. • Use collaborative learning activities such as JIGSAW, PAIR/SHARE, or EAGLES & HAWKS. • Facilitate the MATERING and MARGINALIZING activity.
□	<p style="text-align: center;">Self-Awareness (Deliver) <i>The students follow through on their plans. The advisor is there for them when they stumble, believing in them every step of the way and helping them continue to update and refine their dreams as they go.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students write about their good (empowering) and bad (sabotaging) habits. As an extension of this assignment, students could explore what they think are the causes of these habits. • Ask students what their parents and/or former teachers have told them about their academic abilities. Look for negative messages; then ask, "Is this assessment true?" Offer specific evidence from your experiences with them that contradicts their limiting view of their abilities. • Caringly identify student patterns that you observe (e.g. "I notice that you're missing a lot of classes. Does that behavior support getting what you want in life?")
□	<p style="text-align: center;">Lifelong Learning/Emotional Intelligence/Believing in Yourself (Don't Settle) <i>The advisor challenges the student to proactively raise the student's internal bar of self-expectations.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach with a variety of instructional methods to address the spectrum of students' preferred ways of learning. • When students share an obstacle, failure, or adversity in their lives, ask, "What's the life lesson here for you?" • Offer your non-judgmental observation of a student's emotional state (e.g. "You seem really upset. Am I right?") Encourage and acknowledge the expression of healthy emotions.) • Create HUMOR with YouTube video clips to generate positive emotions that enhance learning. • Have students interview a partner and write one or more paragraphs about their partner's greatest strengths.

In order to meet grant requirements, please complete both sides of this document and submit to your supervisor every Friday.

1. What were two ways you incorporated these principles this week? Explain

2. Explain a specific result that you experienced from using these principles.

3. What is one goal you have for next week, using these principles?

Signature_____ Date_____

Appendix D. Appreciative Advising Mapped to Active Minds' Everyday Guide for Everyday Challenges – VAR

<input type="checkbox"/> Disarm - Recognizing the importance of first impressions, create a safe, welcoming environment for students. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is your day going so far? • What's been the best thing about OCC so far? 	<p>Validate – Let them know what they're feeling is okay and that you believe them.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Discover - Utilize positive open-ended questions to draw out what they enjoy doing, their strengths, and their passions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your strengths? • What is something you have learned about yourself during the past 6 months. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That sounds difficult • That makes sense • I'm sorry you're going through that • That sounds overwhelming • It's ok to be confused or frustrated or disappointed
<input type="checkbox"/> Dream - Help students formulate a vision of what they might become, and then assist them in developing their life and career goals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the best version of yourself look like? • What is your dream job? 	<p>Appreciate- Speaking up can be a challenging step. Let them know it's a good one. Also show you're there to support them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be hard to find the words with everything going on these days.
<input type="checkbox"/> Design - Help students devise concrete, incremental, and achievable goals. Teach students how to make decisions, give positive and encouraging feedback. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want to accomplish this year? • What is the next major challenge you may face? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks for sharing, it helps to know what you're going through • Appreciate that you shared.
<input type="checkbox"/> Deliver - The students follow through on their plans. The advisor is there for them when they stumble, believing in them every step of the way and helping them continue to update and refine their dreams as they go. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you celebrate your accomplishments? • What actions can you take to achieve your ideal future? 	<p>Refer – Let them know help is available and refer them to appropriate resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you do for self-care? • How does your balance between work and home feel right now? • How does some fresh air sound?
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Settle - The advisor challenges the student to proactively raise the student's internal bar of self-expectations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will your next goal be? • What is the next thing you can improve on? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would be most helpful for you in this moment?

