

## Self-Acceptance of Parents of Children with Cancer through Reality Counseling

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**Abstract:** Cancer in children not only affects the child's physical condition, but also places great psychological pressure on parents. Parents often experience feelings of guilt, difficulty controlling their emotions, and neglecting their responsibilities. This study aims to describe the self-acceptance of parents who have children with cancer and analyze the implementation of reality counseling in shaping that self-acceptance. The research method used was qualitative with a case study approach. Data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation of parents and counselors at a cancer foundation in Semarang, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and verification models. The results showed that most parents still had difficulty accepting their child's condition, characterized by feelings of guilt, despair, and low self-esteem. Through regular reality counseling, parents are helped to focus more on present behavior so that they can control their emotions, build positive social interactions, and accept their child's condition as part of destiny. The conclusion of this study shows that reality counseling is effective in increasing the self-acceptance of parents of children with cancer, although the results vary according to the conditions of each individual.

**Keywords:** Self-Acceptance, Parents of Children with Cancer, Reality Counseling.

### INTRODUCTION

Children's health is one of the most important aspects that parents hope for. However, in reality, not all children can grow up healthy. One of the most serious diseases commonly found is cancer in children. According to a report by the World Health Organization (2020), every year around 400,000 children worldwide are diagnosed with cancer. In Indonesia, the prevalence of childhood cancer is also quite high, with leukemia being the most common case. Data from the Ministry of Health shows that cancer is the third leading cause of death in children aged 0–14 years, with the incidence rate tending to increase every year. This condition not only affects children physically, but also causes great psychological pressure on parents as their primary caregivers.

The initial reaction of parents upon learning of their child's cancer diagnosis is generally shock, deep sadness, feelings of guilt, and even denial of reality. In some cases, parents experience sleep disturbances, decreased concentration, and even domestic conflicts due to unmanaged emotional burdens. The danger of this condition is that it increases the burden of parenting and affects the overall well-being of the family if their mood and concerns are not managed. In psychology, the ability to accept oneself and one's situation realistically is known as self-acceptance. According to Chaplin, self-acceptance is an attitude of accepting one's strengths and weaknesses

so that individuals can function in a balanced manner (Chaplin, 2014). Self-acceptance is very important for parents of children with cancer so that they are able to accompany their children through the treatment process, maintain emotional stability, and establish healthy social relationships (Hurlock, 1980). Without self-acceptance, parents risk withdrawing from their social environment, losing motivation, and even reducing their attention to their children's needs.

One relevant counseling approach is reality counseling. Glasser explains that reality counseling is based on Choice Theory, which emphasizes individual responsibility for behavioral choices (William Glasser, 2014). The main technique is the WDEP System (*Wants, Doing, Evaluation, Planning*), which helps clients identify their desires, review their current behavior, evaluate its impact, and plan new, more constructive steps (Desi Yuscha Pertiwi, 2023). Corey (Khakim, 2017) explains that this approach makes counselees more focused on the present, rather than being stuck on past mistakes or suffering. In the context of parents of children with cancer, reality counseling is highly relevant because they often get caught up in regret over what has happened or excessive anxiety about the future. Through this counseling, they are guided to focus more on concrete steps they can take today to support their child's recovery and well-being.

Previous studies have shown that reality counseling is widely applied in the field of education, for example to reduce bullying behavior or increase motivation to learn (Rahmah, 2019). However, studies on the application of reality counseling for parents of children with cancer are still very limited, especially in the context of Islamic counseling. Therefore, there is a research gap that needs to be filled, namely how reality counseling can help shape parents' self-acceptance in dealing with children with cancer.

The objectives of this study are (1) to describe the self-acceptance of parents of children with cancer before participating in reality counseling, and (2) to analyze the role of reality counseling in shaping the self-acceptance of these parents. This study does not use quantitative hypotheses, but rather emphasizes a phenomenological understanding based on the direct experiences of parents and counselors.

The findings show that reality counseling can help parents move from denial and guilt to a more accepting, open-minded, and optimistic approach in supporting their children. However, this study also raises new questions: how effective reality counseling can be sustained in the long term and how family background factors influence the success of self-acceptance.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the experiences of parents of children with cancer in the process of self-acceptance through reality counseling. The research subjects were parents of children with cancer and a counselor at a cancer foundation in Semarang who were selected purposively because of their active involvement in the foundation's counseling program. Data were collected over four months (March–June 2023) through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation (D. Sugiyono, 2013). The main research instruments included semi-structured interview guidelines, field observation notes, and counseling activity archives. The interview procedure was conducted repeatedly to explore the parents' in-depth experiences, while observations were made directly during counseling sessions to observe the dynamics of the interactions that emerged.

The data obtained were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and simultaneous conclusion drawing from the collection process to the preparation of reports (Saldana., n.d.). The validity of the data is ensured

through triangulation of sources and techniques, namely by comparing interview data, observations, and documentation, as well as verifying information between parents and counselors. This study assumes that the experiences expressed in interviews and the behaviors observed during counseling reflect the parents' self-acceptance, and that reality counseling is carried out in accordance with the foundation's guidelines. However, the limitations of this study are the relatively small number of subjects and the fact that it was conducted at only one foundation, so the results cannot be generalized to all parents of children with cancer. Nevertheless, the findings of this study provide an in-depth description that can be used as a basis for further research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Parents' Self-Acceptance Before Counselling

Based on interviews, it was revealed that most parents of children with cancer experience emotional turmoil after learning of their child's diagnosis. The most common emotions are sadness, confusion, and disbelief. Some parents blame themselves, for example, linking their child's symptoms to their parenting style or mistakes they made during pregnancy. Parents of children with cancer are more prone to feelings of guilt and emotional distress (Mushyama, 2015)

In addition, many parents showed difficulty controlling their emotions. Some were quick to anger toward their partners, medical personnel, and even their own children. This condition is consistent with Hurlock's opinion that low self-acceptance implies low emotional control (Hurlock, 2012). Hurlock (2013) states that self-acceptance is the ability to accept everything about oneself, both strengths and weaknesses, so that when unpleasant events occur, individuals will be able to think logically about the pros and cons of the problem without causing feelings of hostility, low self-esteem, shame, and insecurity (Hurlock, 2013) However, in social settings, some parents choose to isolate themselves from those around them for fear of embarrassment or stigma. As a result, much-needed social support is neglected or hindered.

This condition shows that before counseling is conducted, parents tend to be in a phase of denial and emotional crisis. This phase is often characterized by shock, disbelief, and confusion about reality, which can disrupt their emotional stability and important role as the child's primary caregiver during treatment.

### Reality Counseling Process

Reality counseling at the cancer foundation in Semarang is conducted in individual and group sessions. This approach uses the WDEP System framework, which consists of four main stages (William Glasser, 2014):

1. Wants: Counselors explore parents' expectations. For example, most parents say they just want their children to recover and grow up normally. However, counselors emphasize that parents need psychological health as well as physical health to support and accompany their children. During this phase, counselors encourage parents to be more specific in expressing their personal needs, such as emotional support, peace of mind, or spiritual assurance, so that the goals of counseling become clearer.
2. Doing: The counselor asks parents how they feel when dealing with their children's condition. Many express stress by blaming themselves or avoiding social interaction. This process helps counselors understand spontaneous response patterns that arise, both in daily actions and in the way parents communicate with other family members.

3. Evaluation: Parents are invited to assess whether these behaviors are helpful or counterproductive. Some realize that being easily angered or withdrawn does not improve their child's condition, but rather worsens the family atmosphere. Through this reflection, parents begin to recognize the difference between productive and harmful behaviors, encouraging them to maintain positive behaviors and abandon destructive patterns.
4. Planning: The counselor helps develop new steps, such as creating a prayer schedule, seeking emotional support from other parents in the community, and practicing emotion management techniques. These plans are realistic and gradual so that they are easy to implement, giving parents a clear direction in facing challenges while improving their ability to adapt.

In reality, this process does not always run smoothly or linearly. During the adjustment period, some parents often revert to negative thinking, face feelings of despair, blame circumstances, or lose hope. However, regular counseling gives parents space to express their feelings and gain new perspectives, gradually changing their outlook towards a more positive and constructive view.

### Changes in Self-Acceptance After Counselling

After attending several reality counseling sessions, parents showed significant changes in emotional, cognitive, and social aspects.

1. Emotional: Parents were better able to control feelings of anger, sadness, and anxiety. They began to realize that their child's condition was not entirely their fault, but rather part of destiny. In addition, they also demonstrate a greater ability to calm themselves when facing difficult situations, such as when a child experiences a relapse or undergoes a medical procedure, thereby maintaining greater emotional stability.
2. Cognitive: There was a change in mindset, from self-blame to a more realistic perspective. Parents stated that they were beginning to accept the fact that cancer is a disease that can be treated with medical treatment and psychological support. These cognitive changes make parents more rational in making decisions related to treatment, able to sort through medical information more critically, and begin to build confidence that an optimistic attitude can have a positive impact on their child's condition.
3. Social: Parents became more open to receiving help, whether from family, the community, or medical personnel. Some even actively shared their experiences with other parents. This social openness not only strengthens emotional support networks, but also creates a sense of community among parents facing similar situations, so that they do not feel alone in the struggle of caring for their children.

These findings are reinforced by Corey's (2013) theory, which states that reality counseling effectively helps individuals take responsibility for their lives and change maladaptive behaviors. (Corey, n.d.).

### Academic Discussion

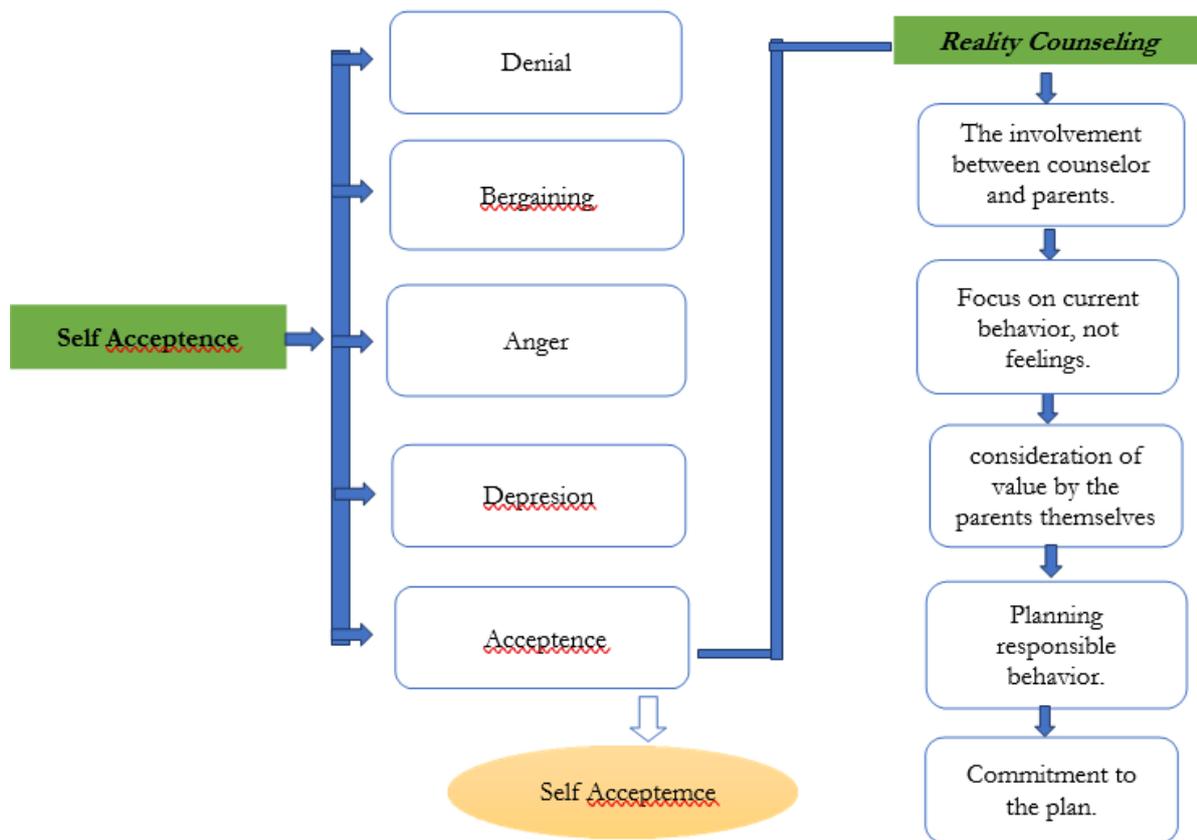
The results of this study support Vera's (2016) research, which found that the self-acceptance of parents of children with cancer is influenced by social support and the right psychological approach. (Vera Permatasari, 2016). Reality counseling is an effective alternative because it emphasizes responsibility and present choices, rather than dwelling on the past.

However, this study also shows that change does not occur uniformly. Factors such as educational background, economic status, and spiritual experience influence the extent to which

parents are able to achieve self-acceptance. This means that reality counseling needs to be combined with a spiritual approach and community support in order to achieve optimal results.

In the digital age, the application of reality counseling also has the potential to be expanded through the use of communication technology. Parents of children with cancer who are limited by distance or time can participate in online counseling sessions using digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups, Zoom, or Islamic counseling-based health applications. This approach not only facilitates access but also enables the development of a broader emotional support community. Therefore, integrating reality counseling into the digital realm is a potential strategy to strengthen family resilience while achieving sustainable and holistic well-being.

**Research Results Scheme**



**Figure 1.** Self-Acceptance Scheme Through Reality Counseling

Based on the above scheme, it can be concluded that parents of children with cancer do not immediately achieve full acceptance during the self-acceptance process, but must go through several dynamic stages, starting with denial, anger, depression, emotional crisis, and adaptation efforts. At each stage, parents face psychological challenges that can affect their emotional stability, parenting quality, and ability to provide optimal support for their children. Therefore, reality counseling is needed to improve self-acceptance for parents of children with cancer during these stages. Therefore, reality counseling is needed to help parents become more aware of their behavioral choices, evaluate their reactions, and plan more constructive strategies. Thus, self-acceptance can develop gradually and have a positive impact on the well-being of parents and the process of caring for their children.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the self-acceptance of parents of children with cancer is initially low, characterized by shock, feelings of guilt, difficulty controlling emotions, and denial of reality. These conditions make parents vulnerable to stress, depression, and social interaction disorders. Through the application of reality counseling using the WDEP System (Wants, Doing, Evaluation, Planning) stages, parents are helped to focus more on the present, evaluate their behavior, and design new, more constructive steps. As a result, positive changes occur in emotional, cognitive, and social aspects: parents are better able to control their emotions, accept their child's condition as fate, be optimistic in accompanying their child, and be open to social support. Thus, it can be concluded that reality counseling is effective in helping parents of children with cancer build self-acceptance, although its success rate is influenced by individual factors, background, and environmental support.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Anggita Hikmatul Hinayah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Analysis, Data Curation, Initial Manuscript Writing, as well as Editing and Revision. The entire research and writing process was carried out independently by the author.

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## DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest, either personal or institutional, that could influence the results of the research, writing, or publication of this article.

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