

Youth  
Spirituality,  
Religiosity, and  
Mental Health:  
Implications for  
School Mental  
Health Providers  
(Abbreviated Version)

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“Of course, psychologists [or other mental health professionals] do not need to become theologians or religious scholars, but they do need to know how to best work with religious [students], for example.”

–Plante (2014, p. 289)

# Objectives

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Participants will be able to describe proposed spiritual and religious practice competencies for psychologists and school counselors.

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Participants will be able to discuss the implications of the proposed competencies for practice and future research.

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Participants will be able to list three recommendations for supporting youth spirituality and religiosity as school mental health providers.



## Key Terms

### Religiosity

- Conceptualized as an individual's adoption of an organized system of beliefs, rituals, and practices that are oriented toward the sacred

### Spirituality

- One's internal and personal experiences with a higher power or something transcendent in nature, which may or may not be associated with a specific religious institution

# Integrating Spiritual/Religious Interventions with Evidence-Based Secular Techniques: Examples

## Example 1: The HEALTHY (Boynton, 2014)

- Mindfulness program used to treat anxiety and depression among school-age youth
- Treatment
  - CBT (e.g., psychoeducation and relaxation training)
  - Includes spiritual material: prompting youth to tap into their inner self and connect with powers outside of oneself (i.e., a higher power)

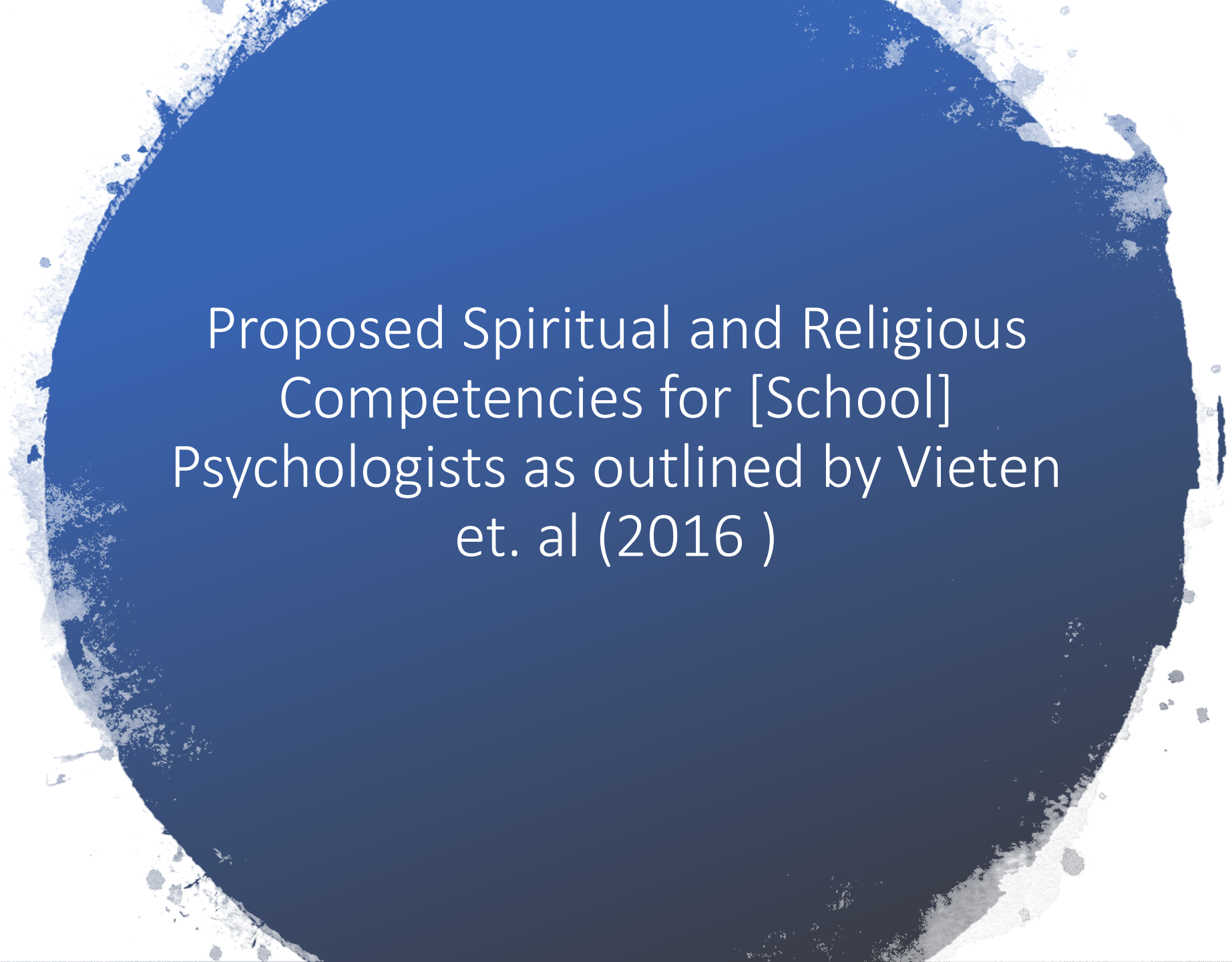
## Example 2: Walker & Hathaway's (2013), *Spiritual Interventions in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy*

- Describes several spiritual/religious based strategies that can be embedded in traditional psychotherapy (e.g., CBT)
  - Use of prayer
  - Forgiveness
  - God images
  - Spiritual awareness
  - Acceptance
  - Sacred texts

# Words of Caution

- Few empirical studies establishing the efficacy and effectiveness of school-based applications of spiritual and religious interventions
- School mental health providers must refrain from providing treatment that extends beyond the boundaries of their professional competence (ASCA, 2016; NASP, 2010)
- Be mindful of the work/practice setting, with specific attention given to public schools (Benson & Roehlkepartain, 2008; Walker & Hathaway, 2013)
  - Consideration of the First Amendment





Proposed Spiritual and Religious  
Competencies for [School]  
Psychologists as outlined by Vieten  
et. al (2016 )

## Attitudes and Beliefs

1. Psychologists demonstrate empathy, respect, and appreciation for clients (or students) from diverse spiritual, religious, or secular backgrounds and affiliations.
2. Psychologists view spirituality and religion as important aspects of human diversity, along with factors such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, gender, and age.
3. Psychologists are aware of how their own spiritual and/or religious background and beliefs may influence their critical practice, and their attitudes, perceptions and assumptions about the nature of psychological processes.

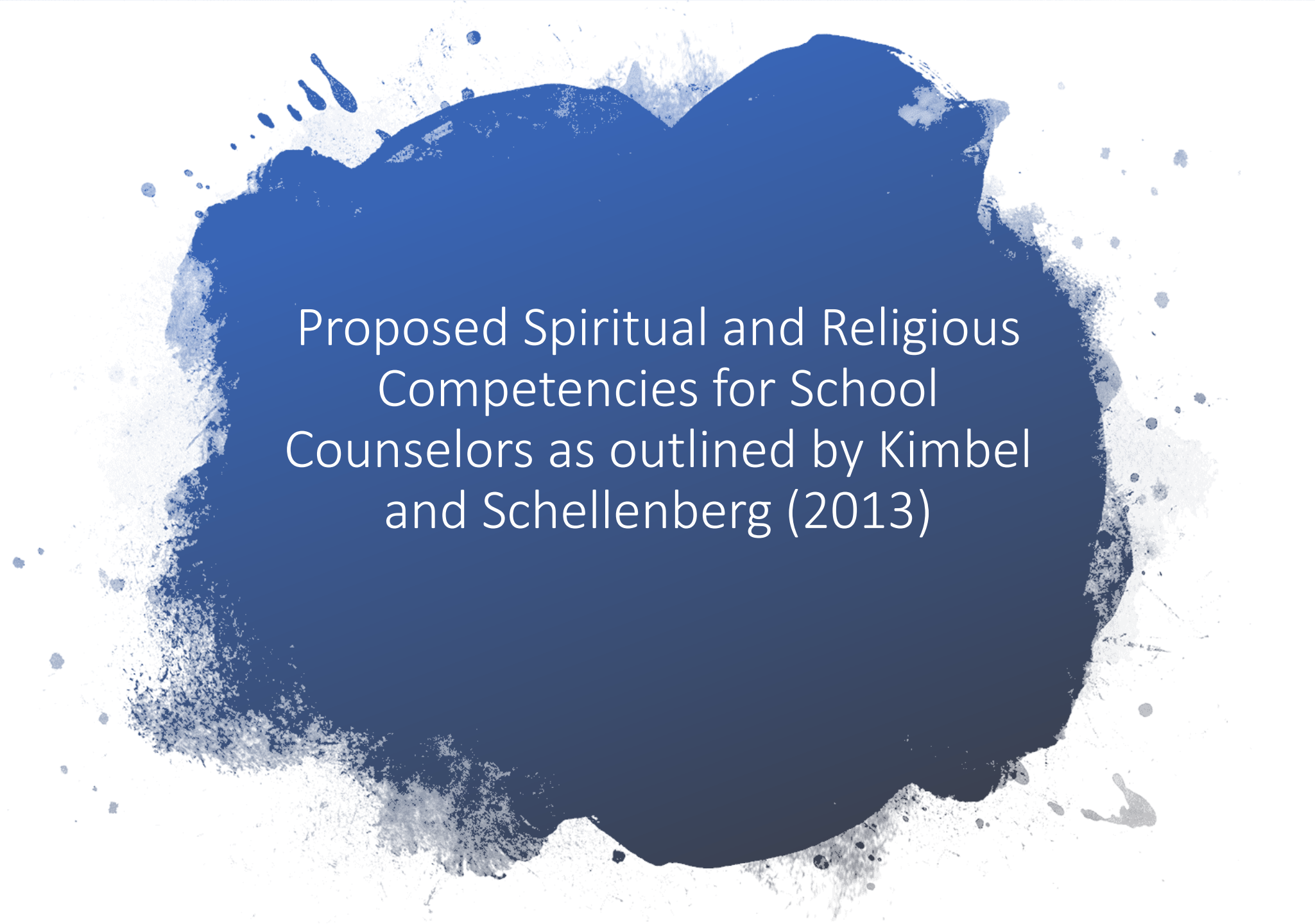


## Knowledge

4. Psychologists know that many diverse forms of spirituality and/or religion exist and explore spiritual and/or religious beliefs, communities and practices that are important to their clients (or students).
5. Psychologists can describe how spirituality and religion can be viewed as overlapping, yet distinct, constructs.
6. Psychologists understand that clients (or students) may have experiences that are consistent with their spirituality or religion, yet may be difficult to differentiate from psychopathological symptoms.
7. Psychologists recognize that spiritual and/or religious beliefs, practices and experiences develop and change over the lifespan.
8. Psychologists are aware of internal and external spiritual and/or religious resources and practices that research indicates may support psychological well-being and recovery from psychological disorders.
9. Psychologists can identify spiritual and religious experiences, practices and beliefs that may have potential to negatively impact psychological health.
10. Psychologists can identify legal and ethical issues related to spirituality and/or religion that may surface when working with clients (or students).

**Skill**

11.	Psychologists are able to conduct empathic and effective psychotherapy with clients (or students) from diverse spiritual and/or religious backgrounds, affiliations and levels of involvement.
12.	Psychologists inquire about spiritual and/or religious background, experience, practices, attitudes and beliefs as a standard part of understanding a client's (or student's) history.
13.	Psychologists help clients (or students) explore and access their spiritual and/or religious strengths and resources.
14.	Psychologists can identify and address spiritual and/or religious problems in their practice and make referrals when necessary.
15.	Psychologists stay abreast of research and professional developments regarding spirituality and religion specifically related to their practice and engage in ongoing assessment of their own spiritual and religious competence.
16.	Psychologists recognize the limits of their qualifications and competence in the spiritual and/or religious domains, including any responses to clients' (or students') spirituality and/or religion that may interfere with clinical practice, so that they (a) seek consultation from and collaborate with qualified clinicians or spiritual/religious source (e.g., priests, pastors, rabbis, imam, spiritual teachers, etc.), (b) seek further training and education and/or (c) refer clients (or students) to more qualified individuals and resources.



Proposed Spiritual and Religious  
Competencies for School  
Counselors as outlined by Kimbel  
and Schellenberg (2013)

### **Spirituality/Religion and Worldview**

1. Professional school counselors possess a general understanding of the similarities and differences between spirituality, religion, atheism, agnosticism, as well as how each construct may or may not be viewed by various stakeholders within a school system.
2. Professional school counselors understand that spirituality, religion, atheism, agnosticism and characteristics and experiences related to diverse belief systems impact students' personal, social, academic, and career development, as well as individual worldview and behavior.
3. Professional school counselors have a basic knowledge of established spiritual/religious denominations around the world and view student belief systems as developmental and cultural dimensions of students' lives.

### **School Counselor Self-Awareness**

4. Professional school counselors identify and explore their own spiritual/religious belief systems and are aware of personal biases.
5. Professional school counselors recognize how their own belief system and potential biases may impact the counselor-student relationship and counseling process as well as how they might intersect with the local laws and district policies that govern the parameters of school counselors.

### **Spiritual and Religious Development**

6. Professional school counselors view spirituality/religion as a natural dimension of human development that has potential to affect students of all ages and cultural backgrounds.
7. Professional school counselors possess a basic knowledge about models of spiritual and religious/faith development.
8. Professional school counselors are knowledgeable about common belief system issues that arise in school-age populations at specific developmental levels across various cultures.

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## **Assessment**

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| 9.  | Professional school counselors are sensitive to spiritual/religious biases that may exist in formal and informal student assessment instruments or practices. |
| 10. | Professional school counselors consider students' spiritual/religious beliefs and values during formal and informal student assessments.                      |

### Delivery of Student Services

11.	Professional school counselors implement a comprehensive school counseling program that attends to the holistic needs of students by including practices that facilitate involvement of the diverse belief systems of the students.
12.	Professional school counselors integrate spirituality/religion into classroom instruction and group activities in a manner that is sensitive to the prevailing community values yet open to all students' belief systems.
13.	Professional school counselors allow opportunities for sharing of all spiritual/religious beliefs and values (e.g., spirituality, religion, atheism, agnosticism) during classroom instruction and group activities.
14.	Professional school counselors understand how spiritual/religious beliefs and values impact student goals and decision making, with regard to education and training as well as post-secondary career choice, and work within that belief system when advising and conducting student assessments.
15.	Professional school counselors encourage exploration of spiritual/religious beliefs and values which impact goal setting, education, and post-secondary planning and aid students in planning activities that align with their belief system.
16.	Professional school counselors implement responsive services and activities reflective of the understanding that spirituality/religion may be a powerful resource for building resilience and improving mental health and overall well-being in students.
17.	Professional school counselors provide individual counseling and crisis response services that allow students an avenue for expression of values and belief systems as well as opportunities to explore issues related to values and belief systems.
18.	Professional school counselors serve on committees and collaborate with stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, school/district personnel, community groups and religious leaders) to cultivate safe and welcoming school climates for diverse spiritual and religious belief systems as well as conduct parent workshops on topics that reach the developmental and cultural aspects of spirituality/religion in an impartial manner.
19.	Professional school counselors consult with stakeholders to solicit information, resources, and services that meet students' spiritual/religious development needs.
20.	Professional school counselors provide students and parents with resources that are approved by the school district and accommodate diverse belief systems (e.g., spirituality, religion, atheism, agnosticism) when referrals are warranted.

# Implications for Practice: Training

## Graduate training

- Professional development outside of the core curriculum
  - Self-directed research (e.g., peer-reviewed articles and books)
  - Elective coursework
  - Peer and field-supervisor interaction/consultation
  - Attending professional conferences

## Post-graduate professional development

- Workshops and professional conferences
- Books
- Professional journals
- Professional consultation (including attorneys, religious leaders, other mental health professionals)

(Jafari, 2016; Plante, 2014; Vogel, McMinn, Peterson, & Gathercoal, 2013)

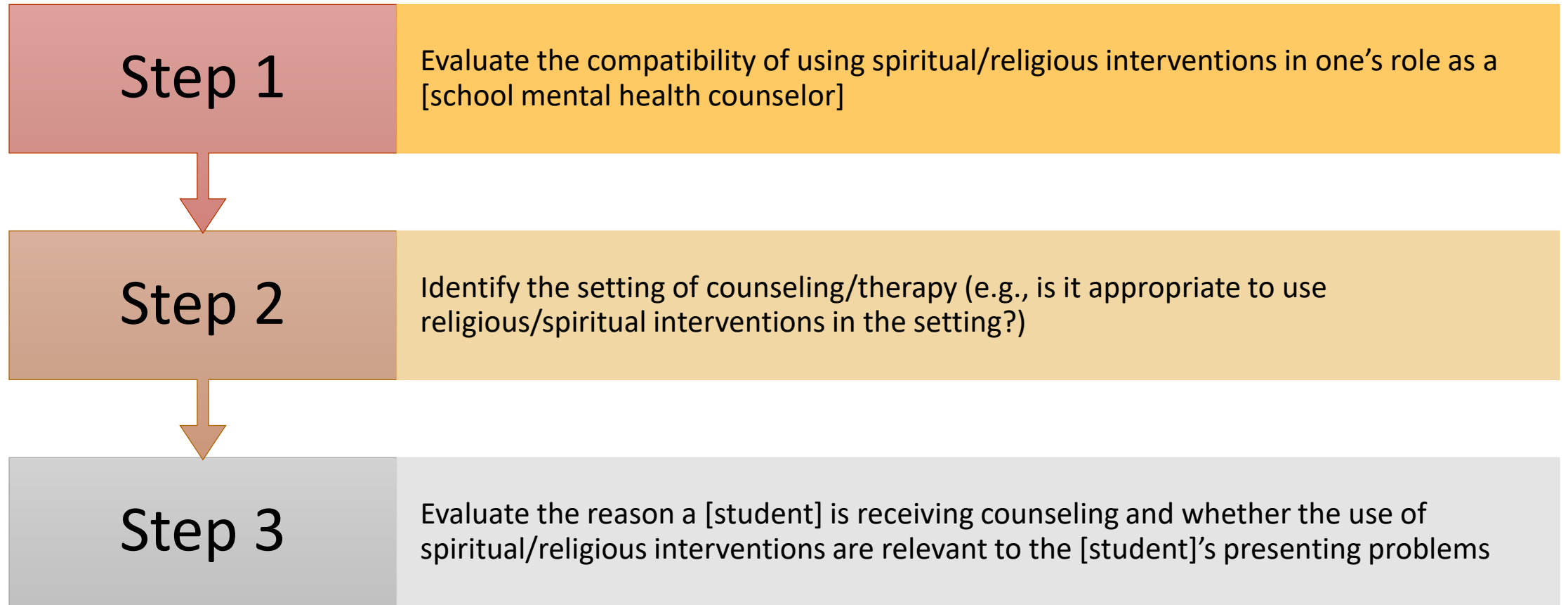
# Implications for Practice

Consider consulting with supervisors, administrators, attorneys, etc. about the boundaries of your professional practice relative to addressing youth spirituality and religion in the school setting (Plante, 2014; Vogel, McMinn, Peterson, & Gathercoal, 2013)

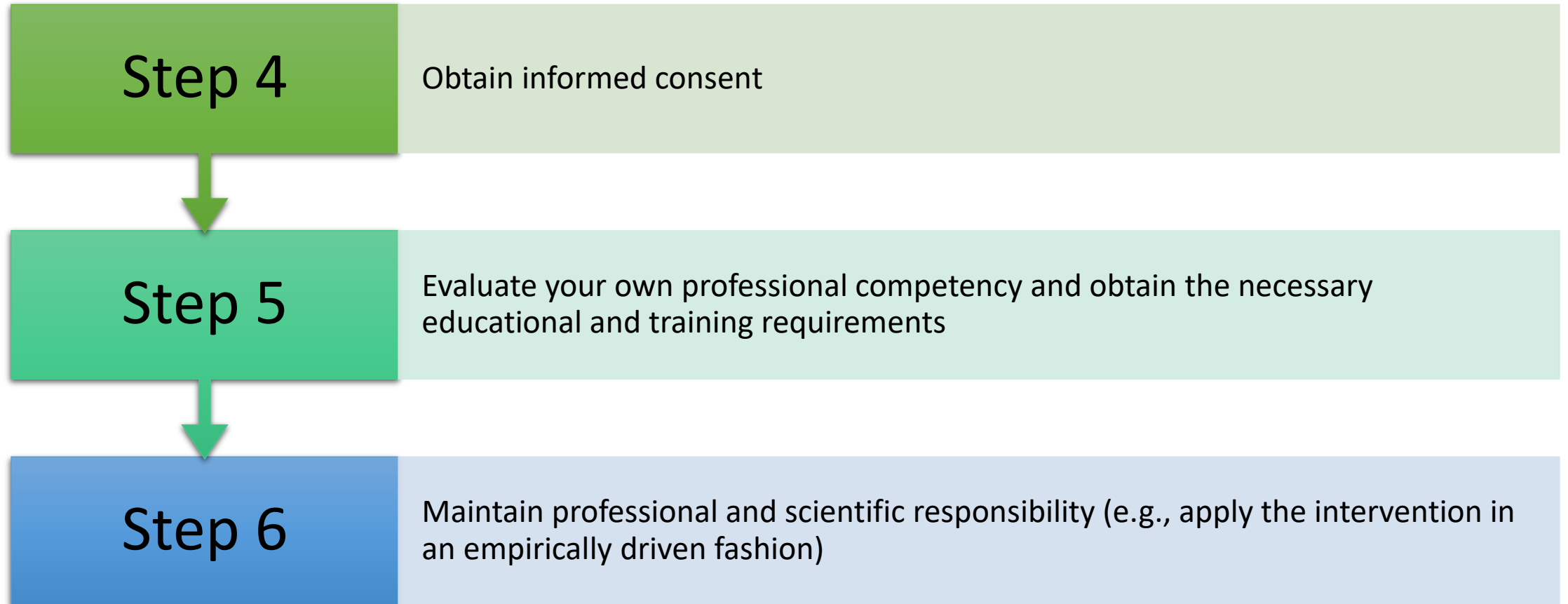
Work within the boundaries of your professional competence and refer out when needed (e.g., use practice competencies as a guide)

If spiritual and religious-based interventions are permitted and embedded in counseling sessions, also consider utilizing guidelines listed by Chappelle (2000)

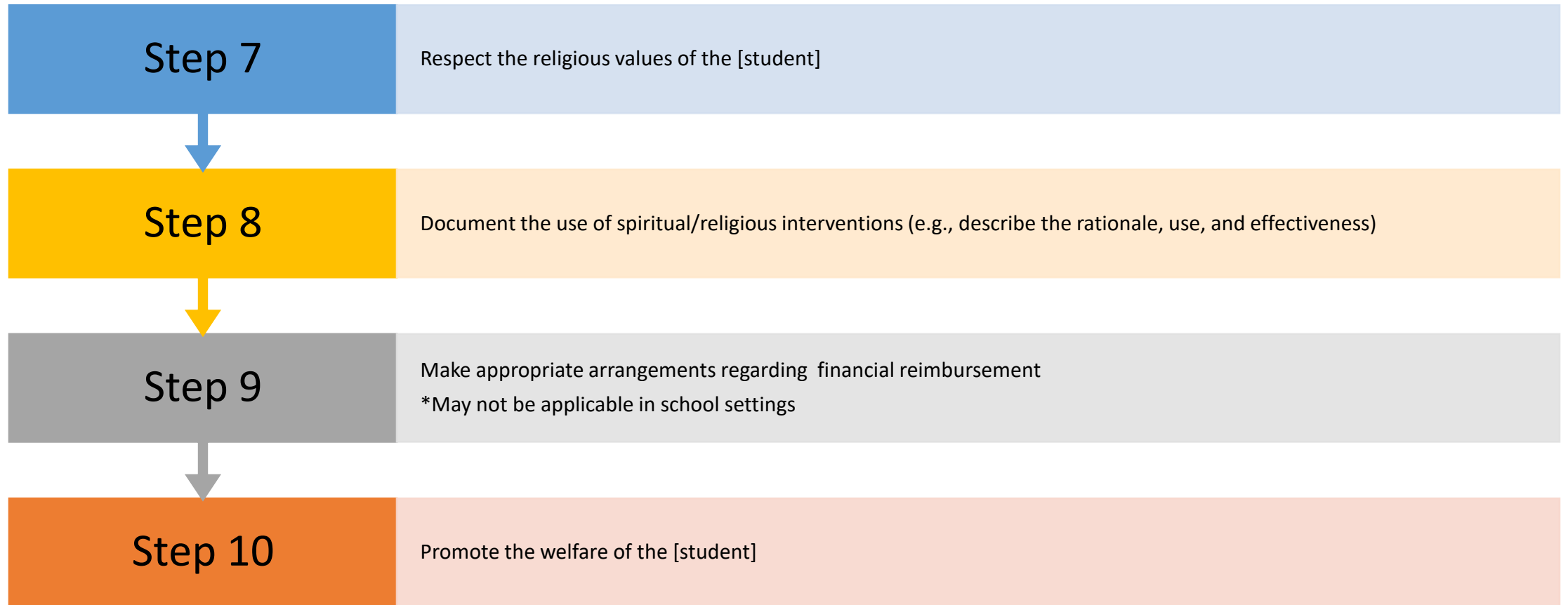




Ethical Decision-making Template for the Use of Spiritual Interventions in Psychotherapy  
Chappelle (2000)



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