

Using Origami in School Counseling



Angela Cleveland



bit.ly/UsingOrigamiInSchoolCounseling

About the Author

Angela Cleveland, M.S.Ed., M.Ed., MA has 15 years of experience as a school counselor and received the "2017 New Jersey School Counselor of the Year" award. She is an Executive Board Member and Webmaster for the [New Jersey School Counselor Association \(NJSCA\)](#). Angela is the Program Director for [NCWIT Counselors for Computing](#).

Angela is focused on student equity and access to technology, both in content and the design-thinking process that informs intentional and inclusive integration practices



 [50+ Tech Tools for School Counselors: How to Be More Engaging, Efficient, and Effective](#)

 [Coding Capers: Luci and the Missing Robot](#)

 [Peter's Special Concoction: How a Little Boy Learned to Manage Type 1 Diabetes](#)

 [The Fruit Files: Can You Spot the Clues to How These Fruits Feel?](#)

 [I'm No Scaredy Cat ... But I'm Afraid to Go to School!](#)



In her free time, Angela enjoys telling bad jokes and giving motivational pep talks to her cat.



Why Origami?

Are you looking for a fun, creative, and therapeutic way to make meaningful connections in your individual or group counseling sessions? Look no further!

You can use origami as an ice-breaker, in grief support groups, as a de-stressing coping skill, to practice leadership skills, and more!

No artistic skills are required, and you can use free online video tutorials with your students!

Like all school counselors, I am always looking for fun, creative, and therapeutic ways to address student needs. However, I am not the craftiest of people; I struggle to make my stick figure drawings look remotely like people. When working with children, whether independently or in small groups, I seek engaging strategies that are fun yet focused on the topic at hand. My quest has led me to Origami, the traditional Japanese art of paper folding.

I love that Origami is simply paper folding. Mistakes, or “creative accidents,” are not a catastrophe, as my students with perfectionist tendencies learn. It's just paper, and making mistakes are proof you are trying. Origami also teaches kids who give up easily that if they keep at it, they can achieve their goals. Rather than rushing through their work, I find that students tend to slow down to attend to the small details, the minute folds that make their work look its best.

Why Origami?

I have used Origami as a “calm down” strategy for students who have been removed from a classroom for disruptive behaviors. The withdrawn student who refuses to talk, opens up and engages with me while I sit quietly and turn a little square piece of paper into a cute little animal. The use of Origami seems to magically tear down the walls and open a child to engage when he/she is suddenly curious rather than filled with anger.

I have also found that Origami can be an effective, inexpensive, and fun tool to address some of the most serious topics we face as school counselors. Origami baskets can be used to balance “stressor” and “coping skills.”

My students and I create two baskets and fill one with tiny slips of paper that identify the things that cause us stress and the other with effective and creative coping skills. Yes, making Origami is one of the coping skills!



Why Origami?

Origami is a great stress-reliever! I put on relaxing music, and a peaceful quiet or relaxed conversation comes over us as we work on our favorite projects. This activity is a great way for kids who are learning social skills to work together on a project.



Sometimes it can be hard for children to share about themselves or to learn the nuances of a back-and-forth conversation. It's easy to use origami to engage in conversation. For example, I have had students create Origami houses and decorate them with aspects of their lives. They include who they live with at home, pets, and even sports they enjoy. Creating these tiny works of art and sharing them is a safe and fun way for students to interact and open up.

For students who are struggling with loss, we have filled little Origami heart boxes with the names of loved ones, cherished memories, and things we want our departed loved ones to know about our lives now. You can tie a string to the origami heart to turn it into a holiday ornament or decorative reminder of a loved one. On the anniversary of a loss or the birthday of the loved one, students often have a special ceremony, such as releasing a balloon with a note attached. Sometimes children have struggled to write a note or letter, and a special origami heart can feel like an impactful gesture without writing a lengthy letter.



For students who may need some encouragement to practice leadership skills, I provide them with the opportunity to lead the group in teaching us a new Origami piece. It's so exciting to see students circle around a peer who is teaching them how to make something fun!

What "hats" do you wear?

Use:

Ice Breaker

Addressing Roles (challenges and rewards of the different roles)

Key questions:

What hats do you wear?

What are the *challenges* and *rewards* of each hat?

How do you balance the different hats you wear?



[video tutorial](#)

Supplies: one 8.5" x11" piece of paper (printer paper) - one piece of paper per hat. Markers or pens to write on hat.

Directions: [Make hats](#). Write the name of your hat (your role) on the bottom. Draw pictures &/or write words the describe your hat (role).

Extension Activity: Draw pictures or write words INSIDE the hat that represent things about you that others may not know until they get to know you more.

It Takes a Village...

Use:

Ice-breaker

Build Community



village



apartment
building

[video tutorial](#)

Key Questions:

Who is in your home/ who do you live with?

Supplies: Each home requires one piece of square origami paper and markers or pens to draw on them.

Directions: Select the house/apartment of your choice. [Create](#). Add details about who you live with, pets, and hobbies. You can do this by adding people looking outside the windows, on the lawn, or other clues (like a basketball, violin, book, etc... to indicate hobbies).

It's All About Balance!

Use:

Discuss stressors in life
Curate a list of coping skills



[video tutorial](#)

Key Questions:

We all experience stressors in our life.
We need to balance our stressors out with the right coping skills!
What are the stressors in your life? What coping skills do you use?

Supplies for two baskets: two square pieces of origami paper and two rectangular pieces of origami paper (cut one square piece in half). Several small slips of paper and pen to write stressors and coping skills.

Extension Activity:

You can use the baskets for discussion questions. For example if you want to use the baskets to make lists of career conversation starters ([see ASCA's free downloadable list here](#)), students can select one question to read/respond to.



Fortune-telling Fun!

Use: Icebreakers, Study Tool, [Acts of Kindness](#) and More

Key Ideas:

Do you remember making "fortune tellers" as a child? They are versatile, fun, and easy to make! I've used them as ice-breakers, study tools, picking a random act of kindness for the day, helping students remember names of teachers, and more! A parent told me she used it for chore selection!

Supplies: one square piece of origami paper and pens



video tutorial



Bravery Bracelets!

Use: Empowerment groups, Closing activity, Coping skills

Key Ideas: Students can select colors that have meaning to them. There are some guides about symbolism of color, but don't feel tied to them!

Supplies: About 50 strips of paper, 10 cm long/1 cm wide

Directions: The colors can represent goals, qualities, or strategies. For example, if a student is struggling with worried thoughts, you can align the colors to coping skills.
Blue = Take 10 deep breaths.
Green = Move your body - take a walk!



[video tutorial](#)



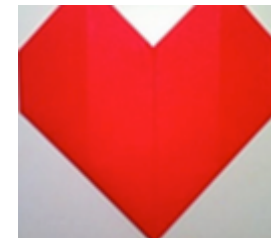
Loss/Grief Groups

Use: School Counselors facilitate grief and loss groups to support students who lost a loved one, family pet, or are grieving the loss of a change in their life.

Key questions: You can use these sentence starters. You can also do an internet search for more specific sentence starters or write your own.

Supplies: one square piece of origami paper, pen

Directions: The red heart is a little easier to make than the pink heart box. Decide which (or both) to use with your students.



[video tutorial](#)



[video tutorial](#)

Sentence Starters:

I'll never forget the time we ...

I wish I'd told you ...

I really miss the way you ...

You'll never believe this, but ...

If you were still here, I imagine
right now you'd be ...

If you were still here, I imagine I
might be ...

Fortune Cookie Fun

Use: Slip papers inside with affirmations to discuss, goals for the week, inspirational quotes, conversation starters, etc...

Key Questions: Do an internet search for some [positive affirmations](#), quotes, or other topics related to your individual, small, or large group lessons.

Supplies: three square pieces of origami paper and slips of paper with words of encouragement to put inside

Directions: If you have cards or other other pre-printed conversation starters, you might be able to fit them inside these origami fortune cookies.

Tip: You don't need to call these "fortune cookies." You can come up with a fun name related to your school name or mascot (ex: Tiger Triangles; Detroit Discussions).



[video tutorial](#)

[Positive Affirmations](#)

I am kind to all.

Whatever I do, I give my best.

I trust my abilities.

I am unique.

I am peaceful.

I embrace change.

I am courageous.

I enjoy learning.

My family & friends love me for who I am.

I forgive others for their mistakes.

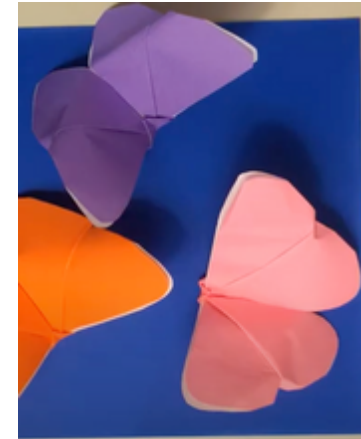
Follow your butterflies

Use: Reframing worry, being courageous

Key Questions: Taking risks feels scary sometimes. Did you ever hear the expression "butterflies in your stomach?" That refers to the worried feeling your body experiences when trying something new. It ALSO refers to the excited feeling you have when trying something new!

Supplies: 1 piece of square origami paper. If you want the wings to be pointy, don't cut off the points with scissors. If you want them rounded use scissors. YES, I know you aren't supposed to use scissors with origami, and this is optional for aesthetic purposes.

Directions: Identify times in your life when you felt the "butterflies" and overcame them. Make the origami butterfly and decorate it with drawings or words that represent that time in your life.



[video tutorial](#)

Laura Ross, 2020 ASCA School Counselor of the Year, often says "follow your butterflies." I love this quote because it reminds us that the nervous feeling in our tummies is not necessarily bad. It's beautiful quote and a wonderful way to reframe that feeling of butterflies.

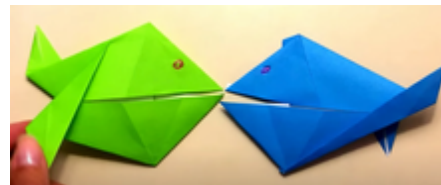
Origami Animals



[bunny](#)



[jumping frog](#)



[fish](#)



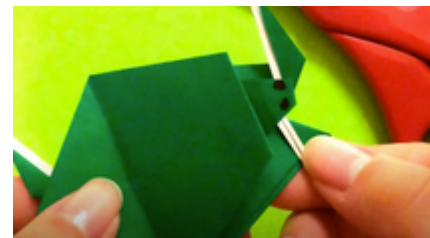
[mouse](#)



[dog](#) ([standing dog](#))



[cat \(standing\)](#)








[Turtle](#) (uses scissors)



[kitten or fox](#)



-  [50+ Tech Tools for School Counselors: How to Be More Engaging, Efficient, and Effective](#)
-  [Coding Capers: Luci and the Missing Robot](#)
-  [Peter's Special Concoction: How a Little Boy Learned to Manage Type 1 Diabetes](#)
-  [The Fruit Files: Can You Spot the Clues to How These Fruits Feel?](#)
-  [I'm No Scaredy Cat ... But I'm Afraid to Go to School!](#)

