

## Breakout Session B - 11/3 2:45-3:45 PM

**B9. What it is like to be a school mental health therapist - how it is similar and different from being an outpatient therapist? School based mental health practitioners? Skill sets and differences? (Paul Bunyan 3)**

### Presenters:

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# Lighthouse Child and Family Services, Inc.

- ▶ East Central Minnesota
- ▶ School Linked Mental Health Grant since 2013
- ▶ 8 School Districts
- ▶ 10 School Based Staff

# School Mental Health Services can:

- ▶ Improve access to children's mental-health services, particularly for families with transportation, financial or cultural barriers
- ▶ Improve symptoms, functioning, and school outcomes for children experiencing mental health difficulties
- ▶ Integrate broad continuum of mental health services and supports (Psychotherapy, Skills Training, MHBA) into school and build capacity of school staff

- ▶ Provide initial diagnostic assessments-do they meet criteria for an emotional disturbance or a severe emotional disturbance
- ▶ Provide Individual, family, and group psychotherapy and skills training
- ▶ Care Coordination (School, County, Primary Care Physician, Psychiatrists, Courts, Law Enforcement, Other Care Providers)

# Getting Started/ Opening the Door

- ▶ Type of service? Embedded vs Outpatient Model
  - ▶ It can be more than just putting an office in the school
- ▶ Who's in charge? Who will connect with the school and who has time to continue to connect with the schools?
- ▶ What services will you provide?

- ▶ Where is your funding stream?
- ▶ How will you pay staff (billable vs salary model?)
- ▶ Identify a School
  - ▶ Space, staff composition, referrals, requirements of pulling students out of class

- ▶ Agreement/ Memorandum/ Contract
  - ▶ Issues with confidentiality?
- ▶ Specify how communication between school and agency will be handled to review the agreement and address problems or differences
- ▶ Procedure for resolving disputes
- ▶ Referral Process

## ▶ Select Providers

- ▶ Different personality characteristics that are helpful for school based staff
- ▶ Different responsibilities school based staff have
- ▶ Know the role and responsibilities and be clear with staff



# Characteristics to look for in a School-Based Clinician

## ▶ Knowledgeable:

- ▶ You become the “go to” person for all mental health (possibly chemical dependency also)
- ▶ Resources in the area
- ▶ Informed about confidentiality, releases, and mandated reporting
- ▶ Public speaking

## ▶ **Well Organized:**

- ▶ Time specific-bell to bell
- ▶ Make weekly schedule
- ▶ Plan ahead for school events

## ▶ **Communication:**

- ▶ School secretaries, custodial staff, special education teachers, student advisory/child study teams, teachers, administration...

## ▶ **Professional Boundaries:**

- ▶ Communication through phone and email
- ▶ Supporting your agency
- ▶ Understanding teachers perspectives

## ▶ **Flexible:**

- ▶ Increase in related service staff “popping in” to your office
- ▶ May not have a designated “therapy room”
- ▶ Confident: willing to try new strategies
- ▶ Daily schedule will change hour to hour



▶ **Independent!**

▶ Supervisor may be miles away

▶ You will most likely be the only mental health provider

# Supervising the School Mental Health Provider

- ▶ Supervision in the school- Be prepared
- ▶ Productivity~ take into account the make up of the position and the school
  - ▶ Think outside the box
- ▶ Regular check ins with school staff and administration (Fall, Spring)
- ▶ Collect, organize and present data

- ▶ Know school language (HIPAA vs FERPA)  
(Special Education's stance)
- ▶ Respect School Culture and school staff reluctance
- ▶ Be flexible~ what works one year may not the next
- ▶ Strong coordination and collaboration with a school system takes practice and teaching

# Understanding School Culture

What are your schools norms, values, beliefs, rituals, and stories

- ▶ Staff and students held to high academic expectations
- ▶ Emphasis on state and federal testing
- ▶ Building, state, and federal safety code regulations
- ▶ Dress codes for staff and students

- ▶ Monitored by policies and procedures
- ▶ Staff and Student social groups
- ▶ Is the community a part of the school
- ▶ How are extra curricular activities funded
- ▶ How are issues of bullying handled



# Benefits of School-Based Mental Health

- ▶ Significant gap between mental health needs and available services (especially in rural communities)
- ▶ Significant wait time to access services
- ▶ Kept appointment/show rate at urban community mental health centers: 50-60%

- ▶ More time out of school when accessing outpatient services
- ▶ Lack of coordination/consultation with outpatient services
- ▶ Preventative to higher level of care services such as residential or day treatment
- ▶ Provide mental health support for kids in special education
- ▶ Increased content for growth and goals being met

# From a School-Based Provider's Perspective

- ▶ Find a “like minded” staff you can connect with for support
- ▶ Avoid common areas where teachers vent: issues of confidentiality, they will ask your opinion/suggestions, remember they portray one view

- ▶ Are you going to live in the community you work in?
- ▶ How will you handle teachers/school staff voicing their opinions on mental health or a particular student?
- ▶ Practice public speaking -will be asked to present on mental health topics and provide classroom tools and strategies

# From a School-Based Providers Perspective

- ▶ Good with organized chaos
- ▶ Attend school board meetings
- ▶ Hold quarterly committee meetings so your school knows what you're doing, how to refer, caseload and program updates
- ▶ Read your school's policy handbook
- ▶ Remember your own self care

# Things to think about...

- ▶ 1 in 5 children struggle with mental health: this affects physical health, social development and learning
- ▶ Kids with mental health needs: teachers/adults need to meet them all the way, not 50/50. Otherwise they don't know how to approach adults/ask others for help
- ▶ Research also tells us that caring adults that believe in these kids and take a genuine interest in their hopes, ideas and feelings will make a positive and powerful impact on their lives
- ▶ Kids that have strong relationships, and who are engaged with their schools have higher levels of resiliency

# Question/Comments

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