

Silberman School of Social Work

Session 14:

Working with Adolescents

Read:

<https://www.helpstartshere.org/?p=299>

<https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=X8qNmRSamSE%3D&portalid=0>

Adolescence

Adolescence marks an important time in the process of human development, the passage between childhood and adulthood. It is a time of tremendous opportunity and promise, when young people begin to explore their burgeoning individuality and independence and begin to think critically about themselves and the world around them. They begin to adjust and adapt to the profound biological, psychological, and social changes and challenges that are by-products of adolescence.

Why Would a Teenager Engage a Social Worker

Some youths may experience alienation, disenfranchisement, and discrimination from the families, communities, and social institutions charged with supporting their development.

Youths with severe health and mental health problems or disabilities, runaway and homeless youths, youths in foster care or juvenile justice systems, and LGBTQ+ adolescents often experience alienation. These social conditions leave young people more vulnerable to health-damaging behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquent activities, unprotected sexual activity, and mental health pathology.

Struggling teens usually show signs of distress.

Common warning signs include:

- Low self-esteem
- School failure and truancy
- Defiance towards authority (such as parents, teachers, police)
- Running away from home
- Choosing “undesirable” friends
- Impulsive behavior (such as speeding, taking other unsafe risks)
- Getting in trouble with the law
- Depression/Anxiety
- Abusing alcohol or drugs
- Social isolation
- Eating disorders (overeating, not eating, self-induced vomiting)
- Self injury (such as cutting)

What makes a good youth worker?

Clearly, the person **MUST** have the ability to connect to and understand youth – you have to like young people.

The connection to youth is a result of a real understanding and commitment built from years of working with them.

“Working with youth” includes being with youth in a variety of venues and understanding issues and youth sub-culture.

A connection is forged and strengthened over a long period of time – you have to prove your worth!

What makes a good youth worker?

it is critical that the worker understands the impact of substance use, addictions, treatment, detox availability and mental health concerns with youth

A knowledge of working with aggressive behaviors, conflict resolution and dealing with non-communicative behaviors

The successful youth worker possesses the ability to accept youth as they are – they must be seen as potential and not a problem

How Social Workers Help

Social workers can provide struggling teens and their families with:

Assessment of the teenager's and family's needs and strengths

Information about and referral to needed programs and services

Information about financial and legal issues and resources

Names of reputable educational advocates and educational consultants

How Social Workers Help

Social workers can provide struggling teens and their families with:

Crisis intervention counseling services

On-going psychotherapy for the teen, the parents, and the family

Case management (helping staff from multiple agencies coordinate and communicate on behalf of the teen, and advocating for the family with these providers)

Information about important “warning signs” of teens who are on a downward spiral and the steps needed to get help

Prominent program options include:

Individual counseling

Group counseling

Family therapy

Prominent program options include:

Alternative high schools provide education, including special education services to teens who have floundered academically or socially in traditional high schools. These schools may be freestanding or sponsored by a community mental health center, family service agency, school district, or a “collaborative” composed of several social service and educational programs.

Youth diversion programs typically attempt to help struggling teens who have had contact with the police avoid more formal involvement in the juvenile justice system (juvenile courts and correctional facilities). Typical youth diversion programs offer first offenders individual and family counseling, links to other needed services (such as psychiatric medication), and education.

Prominent program options include:

Independent living programs are designed to help adolescents develop the skills they need to live independently. These programs primarily serve teens who do not have stable families and are in the state's custody. Some independent living programs also serve teens whose families are able to pay for these services privately. Typical services include practice in daily living skills, money management, career and educational planning, mental health services, housing assistance, recreational, and social activities and case management.

Wilderness therapy programs offer highly structured intensive short-term (three to six weeks) therapy in remote locations that remove adolescents from the distractions available in their home communities (such as television, music, computers, cars, drugs and alcohol, movies, delinquent peer groups). The challenges of living full-time outdoors and developing wilderness survival skills help teens develop self-confidence and pro-social behaviors. Often, families are advised to send their struggling teen first to a wilderness therapy program and then to a therapeutic or emotional growth boarding school, rather than return the teen to their home community environment.

structured treatment addressing substance abuse, family, and other mental health issues. In contrast with therapeutic boarding schools, residential treatment centers are more like a psychiatric hospital than a school, although they may have an academic/educational component in their program.

Prominent program options include:

Boarding schools for teens with significant learning disabilities offer structured academic programs that focus on education and learning while addressing relevant emotional and behavioral issues.

Emotional growth boarding schools offer structured academic programs and focus on emotional development and personal growth but do not provide the intensive treatment services offered by therapeutic boarding schools.

Therapeutic boarding schools focus intensively on students' mental health, substance abuse, and behavioral needs while also providing an academic educational program.

Residential treatment centers offer highly structured treatment addressing substance abuse, family, and other mental health issues. In contrast with therapeutic boarding schools, residential treatment centers are more like a psychiatric hospital than a school, although they may have an academic/educational component in their program.

Happy Graduation!

**May You Have a Wonderful Career and an even
more Wonderful Life!**