

Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health

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“List three things or people you are grateful for each day, even if your list is the same every day.”
Sierra Lode, Page 3



What Young Adults Want YOU to Know

Young adults with developmental disabilities face the same mental health challenges as their peers, but too often their symptoms are ignored, misdiagnosed, or written off as “part of the developmental disability.”

Members of the Montana Transition Training, Information and Resource Center (MT-TIRC) Advisory Board,

themselves young adults with developmental disabilities, created this brochure to raise awareness of the mental health needs of youth with developmental disabilities and to suggest skills they think are important for mental health professionals to have when working with this population. If you are a mental health professional, you might review the list and see if there are any areas where your skills could use some honing.

If you are a young adult with a developmental disability and mental health concerns, you might use the list to help identify a mental health professional to serve you.

What Skills Should a Mental Health Therapist Have?

- Good listener who can help me share information about myself
- Talks to me, not to the staff person with me
- Rules out medical issues before assuming I have a mental illness
- With my permission, includes important people in my life in some of the counseling sessions
- Shows empathy, compassion, warmth, understanding and kindness
- Is trustworthy, but understands it might take me a while to develop trust in them
- Has patience...lots and lots of patience
- Comes up with creative ideas
- Gives out information about suicide and how to get help when needed, especially in an emergency/crisis situation
- Recognizes that most folks with disabilities have stress-related issues
- Is familiar with augmentative communication devices and how they work
- Has knowledge of my disability and how it affects me
- Knows something about my background so I don't have to repeat the same basic information over and over and over
- Can help me come up with a wellness plan for myself
- Is young him/herself or has lots of experience working with young people
- Understands that all young people (with and without disabilities) have similar challenges, and all young people can struggle with mental health issues...but sometimes the mental health issues can be harder to identify and can be more extreme in young people who have disabilities
- Recognizes that physical limitations can impact the ability to effectively communicate for various reasons (i.e., verbal, hearing, sight and cognitive abilities)
- Welcomes feedback from me on how well my



mental health treatment is working, and explores options with me if it isn't working well

- Explores alternative methods of communication (drawing, painting, sign language, dance, facial expression books, music, videotaping, etc.)
- Respects and treats me as an individual; shares decision making with me
- Has high expectations of recovery for me...this means believing in my recovery when I cannot believe in it myself and when I am feeling helpless and hopeless

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- Shows a willingness to be available when needed, not just when scheduled
- Possesses a good understanding of what promotes recovery: integration into society and family; work, school or useful activity; structured time; meaningful connections with family and friends; hobbies and social activities such as church, sports or clubs; and prompt and respectful medical supports for medications and other health problems, which includes shared decision making

with the doctors.

- Understands that people with disabilities are capable of doing things...doesn't assume I can't do things just because I have a disability
- Understands that people with disabilities may need more time to think, answer, walk, talk, etc.
- Gives people hope; speaks to their gifts; celebrates strengths

Resources

Handbook of Mental Health Care for Persons with Developmental Disabilities, By Ruth Ryan, MD

Psychotherapy for Individuals with Intellectual Disability, Edited by: Robert J. Fletcher, DSW, ACSW

Tips to Help You Feel Better While Experiencing Depression

By Sierra Lode

1. Make opportunities to meet successful people with disabilities that are similar to yours. You will be amazed at what they have done.
2. Practice a positive mindset.
3. Believe that your behavior matters.
4. Try new things – take a challenge.
5. Exercise – take a walk or dance to your favorite tunes.
6. Take control of the things you can control.
7. Write in a journal (even one sentence!) about one positive thing that has happened each day.
8. Volunteer – this is truly rewarding and it feels so good!
9. Do an act of kindness each day.
10. Quickly flash a smile at yourself in the mirror.
11. List three things or people you are grateful for each day, even if your list is the same every day



Track Your Healthy Lifestyle Choices

By Mathalia Stroethoff

Start a Feeling Book for yourself. In the book, keep track of your physical health (how much water you drink, what exercises you do, what food choices you make, etc.). Each day, also write down your feelings. For example: "Last weekend I was very disappointed. The snowstorm was so bad that lots of my favorite things were cancelled." Writing down how you feel and why can actually help you feel better!

Youth Mental Health Bill of Rights

(from the 2009 National Youth Summit)

Youth have the right to be leaders of their psychiatric treatment plans.

Youth should be informed of the possible side effects of medications, how long recommended medications take to go into effect, and the possible long-term effects of recommended medication. Service providers should work with youth to explore possible alternatives to using psychiatric medication before medication is given. Communication between youth and all medical providers should be collaborative, clear, and with limited use of medical terminology.

Youth have the right to evaluate their mental health services.

Mental health counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other service providers should provide opportunities for youth to evaluate the satisfaction of their services throughout the duration of care in a respectful and non-threatening manner. This includes evaluation of the relationship with the provider, counseling plans, and implemented treatment models.

Youth have the right to the most non invasive service transitions possible.

When youth are transitioning into new services, mental health programs should strive to make the transition as accommodating as possible for the youth. Youth should be consulted on the ways they would like to end their relationship with the current provider and whether they would like the current provider to share their file with their new provider. Providers should share if there will be any changes in the costs of services and/or insurance coverage.

Youth have the right to trained, sensitive treatment providers.

Youth should have access to mental health professionals that are familiar with the unique needs and challenges of youth with mental health needs. All mental health professionals should have specialized training that fosters positive youth development and support. Youth mental health service consumers should be included in the creation and implementation of these trainings.

Source

Strachan, R., Gowen, L. K., & Walker, J. S. (2009). The 2009 Portland National Youth Summit Report.

Portland, OR: Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health, Portland State University.

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The 2009 Portland National Youth Summit Report is a publication of the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health. This publication was developed with funding from the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, United States Department of Education (NIDRR grant H133B040038). The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agencies.

This publication was produced by the University of Montana's Rural Institute Transition and Employment Projects, which was funded in part under a contract with the Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities. The representations, if any, contained herein do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Council.

The publication was updated and reprinted in 2015 through funding, in whole or in part, under a contract with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. The statements herein do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Department.