



Innovations in Counseling: Working with Minority Populations- Part 6

Session 8: Adolescent Minorities and Suicide Risk: 15 Things We Often Miss

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Támara Hill

Question from Rebecca Axton

At times getting teens in this mind frame to even talk can be difficult, what is your technique to open them up?

Answer from Presenter

Hi Rebecca, thank you for this question. My technique starts with my wardrobe. When I know I am going to be meeting with a teen in my day, I dress so that I won't be intimidating and yet still hold the necessary authority needed to navigate the therapeutic encounter. Once that is accomplished, I then work on normalizing the topic of suicide by prefacing my questions. For example, I might say something like "I know people who have thought of suicide and some even within my family, is this something that you have experienced and if so, what was that like for you?" The goal is to normalize and be authentic.

Question from Monique Barber

I have some young, minority clients in an early recovery group with dominant majority members. What intervention would you recommend to explore external focus/locus of control issues in a group setting?

Answer from Presenter

I highly recommend reading Robert Diangelo's book White Fragility. You can get it from Amazon as I did! She talks a lot about topics similar to group think, learned helplessness, locus of control, etc. She even gives an example of navigating a group setting of individuals from differing backgrounds. From a therapeutic view, however, you might be able to engage a group like this in a brief activity focused on bringing external locus of control issues to the forefront to help them build personal insight.

Question from Chelsea Fowler

Can you give some examples of some good existential questions you would add to an assessment?

Answer from Presenter

Thank you Chelsea! Yes.

I would strive to add questions such as: "Have you ever questioned why you are alive?" "What might be some examples of negative thoughts you have had about your life?" "Do you experience moments of helplessness and hopelessness that cause you to not want to live?"



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Question from Rebecca Houser

How do you reach the teenager at that point? Also, the availability of thirteen reasons why on popular streaming episodes may also increase the thoughts/feelings/actions.

Answer from Presenter

When I talk with my teens about 13 Reasons Why I try to step back and remove my own thoughts and feelings about the series and really hear the teen's perspective. I let the teen tell me all they know about it without me being judgmental. Once the teen explains it, I ask open ended questions such as "do you see pros and cons to the show?" "What do you think your mom or dad might say about it?" "Are your friend's talking more about suicide to you and why do you think so?" After asking these kinds of questions I was able to express my concerns and make them aware of the dangers of the series without being too strongly opinionated.

Question from Leslie Langan

I am a school counselor. How do you suggest I best work with parents who are reluctant or against seeking outside counseling resources?

Answer from Presenter

Thanks for this question. I typically sell therapy in an attractive fashion by offering online sessions or tele-health sessions (if insurance accepts that) or even phone and "text" sessions. Although phone and text sessions are typically more difficult to get covered by insurance, private pay clients can do this and may appreciate this in between in-person sessions or tele-health sessions. Most of my families, who are lower SES and have chaotic lives, really like that I'm accommodating with what type of sessions they are able to have. But, of course, I have to make sure insurance is okay with what I'm asking to do. I think families feel overwhelmed when they think of therapy in the first place, and get even more overwhelmed when they have a 9:00am in person psychotherapy session every Monday morning. I haven't seen too much commitment with offering "traditional" sessions to these type of families. So perhaps, as a school counselor, helping the family locate a therapist who can do tele-health or phone sessions may be a nice way to motivate a reluctant family.

Question from Arona Roshal

Those are good questions - we are going to die one day; why do we have to suffer.. - What are the answers?

Answer from Presenter

I don't have them! I often tell my kids that I too have these questions and I too was once unable to figure out why no one could give me the answers. When I offer this kind of shared experience many of my kids look relieved. I'm not sure teens always want a black and white answer, but rather some validation that they are not alone or "weird" for asking these questions.



Question from Arona Roshal

What is unschooling?

Answer from Presenter

Unschooling is a concept I do not like but one that many of my families have asked whether I support or not. It's considered a "sub" group of homeschooling and is a form of unstructured learning. This kind of learning is VERY controversial within the homeschool community because it gives structured, dedicated, educated, and well-rounded homeschool environments a bad name.

Question from Tonja Simmons Lee

Give an example of non-intrusive attire.

Answer from Presenter

I'm not sure I am clear on this question. But I suggest you be mindful of common concerns workplaces have such as showing too much skin. You may want to consider not wearing clothing that seems too young (or even too old). It really is a matter of balancing your own style with what's appropriate for those you meet.

Question from Nisha Talwar

Do you think there is a downside such as not being able to mingle with other peers when we are home schooled???

Answer from Presenter

There can be a downside to homeschooling especially for a teen who is being "unschooled" or lacks educational structure. Permissive parents who aren't involved can "create" a platform for kids to slip deeper into depression and as a result, struggle with suicidal thoughts all alone. Because homeschool does not include guidance counselors, teachers, and other adults, it can be difficult to monitor a suicidal youth at all times throughout the day. Important things may be missed or not noticed at all. Even more, permissive parenting and unschooling environments can leave kids to their own devices which may lead the teen to feel isolated, alone, and unmotivated. Social activities such as soccer, dance, etc. should continue to provide structure, an outlet, and support.

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