



Innovations in Counseling (Part 13 Session 5)

Changing the Course: Pathways to Addiction Stabilization and Recovery for Families and Youth

Webinar Follow-Up Question and Answer Session with Katie G. Streeter, DHA, NCC, LPC (VA), LMHC (NY)

Question from Anonymous:

What are the most significant developmental or psychological differences between youth and adult substance use that professionals often overlook?

Answer from Presenter:

When we are working with children/youth, it can often be harder to see some red flags of substance use or how to talk to youth about it. I think that providers are often under the impression that youth do not have the challenge of substance use; but I believe that it is something that needs to be discussed. Open conversations about addiction in general (things other than substances or drugs) is important, as youth often are challenged with impulse control and lack of ability to manage their emotions as they mature. Youth often do not have the words or understand their emotions, so they may present differently than adults. Adults tend to have more outward symptoms or have more insight into their use/abuse. Youth are not developmentally mature enough to understand their challenges, so they may not understand the emotions or challenges they are having. I am sure we have seen many adults and their challenges, but youth are a whole different ball game!

Question from Anonymous:

Do youth typically view vaping as a form of substance use? With the rise in vaping among young people, what strategies do you recommend for addressing it in both prevention and recovery efforts?

Answer from Presenter:

In my experience, youth do not see vaping as substance use. They believe that it is much less harmful than even nicotine, so there is really no harm in it. In my experience, many people (both youth and adults) do not view marijuana as a drug, as it is becoming more widely decriminalized. I think that education is key for these substances. We can view other substances that may be legal, such as nicotine and alcohol, and how we can have addictions to those as well. Youth have to have some psychoeducation on the dangers of vaping and other substances; if we can attempt to show them some facts about the dangers to their health, that can often assist them to see how it will affect them in the future. I believe that teaching recovery skills

that mimic the deep breathing that would come from vaping, and other ways to relieve the stress that youth are often attempting to deal with, will assist them in not utilizing the vape as much. Coming up with other skills that work for them and a plan to decrease and cease any use is key. Getting youth involved in their own recovery is much more impactful and person-centered.

Question from Anonymous:

Often times with recovery, it's important to change living situations, social groups, jobs, etc., which may not be possible for a teenager. How can counselors support teens in treatment who have less control over those aspects of recovery?

Answer from Presenter:

This is a really hard part of working with youth in recovery! We know that people, places, and things are keys in being successful in recovery. But youth cannot change some of those things. This is when open and honest discussions with clients, their families, and other stakeholders in their recovery (school, etc.) are so important. Reviewing small changes that the youth can make (finding new places to be after school or how to communicate with old friends that may not have been positive peers) will assist them in working towards success. This is also where family sessions are important, as we have seen that it is often a family systems issue; we have to work with the families of our youth to again find small changes at home that can be implemented to assist in their recovery world. This aspect of recovery in youth is the hardest; we cannot remove them from every environment, so we have to be more intensive and intentional about working within their environment and the things we can control and make changes to.

Question from Anonymous:

What strategies have you found effective in helping youth navigate recovery in environments where substances are still easily accessible or normalized?

Answer from Presenter:

School is a huge place where our youth are still finding accessibility to substances even after some time in recovery. Having these discussions with our youth in recovery prior to them returning to these environments and working with them on communication to use with their peers and other influences is helpful. For example, one of my teen clients returned to school after some time in recovery and we worked together to make a plan, and he vowed to get his friends to get sober too. We utilized his strengths in his communication and personality to work within his school system to be successful and get his friends to work towards being sober too. If we find our client's strengths and work on those, as well as having continued assessment and conversations with them on their progress and continued treatment or changes that need to be made, this will help them adapt and overcome. This is a huge time of growth for our youth clients, and we have to continue to work on their strengths and encourage and cheer them on in their journey.