

Best Practices for Working with Youth with Mental Health Needs

1. Ask youth what they want to do with their mental health needs (for example, therapy, support groups, physical activities, medications, etc.)
2. Ensure that the youth trust their psychologists/therapists. If they don't trust the clinician, then explore alternatives with the youth.
3. Be aware and research the medication that the youth is using; get clear if the medication is appropriate and helpful.
4. Be aware of biases you might have regarding youth and mental health issues (and deal with them).
5. Listen to a youth who is telling you that she/he is over-medicated. Take this seriously (see number 3 above).
6. Recognize that a mental health diagnosis does not mean a youth won't be successful in life.
7. Avoid restricting services, activities, and independent opportunities to youth with mental health issues. It is often with opportunities that youth can overcome depression, anxiety, etc.
8. Use positive language when referring to a youth's developmental or mental health diagnosis.
9. Be mindful of the dangers of labeling and the devastating effects that mis-diagnosis can have on a youth's life.
10. Always ask yourself, "Is this disorder just normal teenage behavior?"
11. Seek out additional training on transition-aged youth with mental health needs.
12. Be aware of successful and positive mental health resources in the community/county.