INCLUSION OF FAMILY THERAPISTS ON SCHOOL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TEAMS
4TH ANNUAL SC SCHOOL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONFERENCE
MYRTLE BEACH, SC
APRIL 28, 2017
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Agenda
- Introductions
- Rationale:
  - School-based services
  - Why include MFTs?
- Three Programs
  - Richland Two (Columbia, SC) – High Needs Youth
  - Lexington/Richland 5 (Irmo, SC) – High Needs Youth
  - Seminole County (Sanford, FL) – Title 1 Elementary School Students

What is going on?
- Students behavioral health needs are steadily increasing and the issue of school safety remains under the microscope.
- The number of students with identified behavioral health needs far exceed the treatment capacity available in the school or the community.

(Bains & Diold, 2016; Capp, 2015; Foster et al., 2005)
Impact of School Tragedies

- The U.S. holds the record for the highest number of mass shootings of any country in the world, with the most deadly shootings occurring in the last ten years. Schools have been the primary targets of this mass violence and school-aged students the primary perpetrators (Willingham, 2016). Therefore, the focus on schools and school behavioral health services is both timely and critical.

- What have we learned from school tragedies (e.g., Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook) about mental health, our students, and our obligation?


Importance of communication and collaboration

The Ecological Model

- Bronfenbrenner (1977)

- In school-based counseling programs family, community, and educational systems intersect.
School-based Counseling Services

- School-based services create opportunities to provide services to low-income and ethnic minority children, who often face difficulty accessing mental health care and counseling (Mellin, 2009; Stagman & Cooper, 2010).
- Logistical factors, such as lack of transportation, inability to pay, and lack of options, create barriers and often cause families who may be able to initially access mental health care to discontinue their services prematurely (Bear, Finer, Guo, & Lau, 2014; Powers, Edwards, Blackman, & Wegmann, 2013).

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Marriage and Family Therapy

- The traditional emphasis on the individual is expanded to include consideration of the nature and roles of individuals in relation to others, particularly in the family system.
- Marriage and family therapy focuses on the context and relationships in which the student participates, including the married or committed parents, family, school/classroom, work, social, community and other relational systems.

How MFT’s think/work

- Systemic training / thinking
- Work with relationships; not individuals
- See the family as the client;
- See symptoms as related to the system
- Trans-generational and developmental

- Think in layers - deep or/and wide
- Believe therapist not the expert
- Change can occur in any part of the system
- Contextual
- Resource model

(Hennum & Hennum, 2013)

A different lens

- Authors have singled out the need for MFT services in the schools; yet there are logistical, territorial, and theoretical problems with actually having a separate staff of family therapists who view the world from a no-blame, circular perspective (Cooper-Haber & Haber, 2015).

- Rather than asking the family what kind of trouble the student got into and to talk about it, the therapist might ask: "Who wants to be here most? Who in the family is most worried about you?"
MFT’s

- MFTs do not consider the individual issue, often related to the reason for referral, as necessarily the most important issue to be addressed (Crespi and Uscilla 2014; Mince 2000).

- Mince (2000) maintained that having a family therapist on the team made the family feel safer and more approachable when dealing with school-related problems.

MFT’s “play well in the sandbox”

How MFTs serve the school population

- Family Counseling
- Family Meetings
- School/family conferences
- Home visits
- Multi-generational or extended family sessions
- Coordination with other agencies/services/providers (including in-district collaborative teams)

(Huss, Bryant, & Mulet, 2008; Laundy, Nelson, & Abucewicz, 2011; Powell, 2011)
“Late to the party”… schools recognizing the need for counseling for the family: how to do it?

- University training programs partner with schools or school districts (quid pro quo): Florida, R2, Wolford, Connecticut, U San Francisco, others.
- School districts contract with family therapists in the community to provide these services either in the schools or in the community.
- School districts hire family therapists to provide behavioral health services to families.
- Schools partner with community agencies or programs to obtain services for their students and families.

Training & Supervision

- There has been little research measuring the effectiveness of MFT’s in the schools and even less assessing family therapy training programs at school-based facilities (Cooper-Haber & Haber, 2015).
- It is important that university training programs partner with school districts that acknowledge the importance of working with families. After all, the schools essentially become the gatekeepers for the MFT profession and must take seriously this responsibility.
- Irrespective of the duties, relationship, or professional growth of the trainee, the ethical responsibility lies with the mandate that the organization (school program) must monitor the clinical work of the trainees and the effect that they are having on their clients.

R2’s MFT Training Program

- Training counselors to be systemic requires their learning how to engage multiple systems, with the goal of achieving the most success or benefit for the student.
- Supervisors encourage the therapist to understand how each person in the student’s life is involved with the student and/or the family as part of the problem or, most importantly, as part of the solution.
- The staff at R2 feels it essential for the trainee to become familiar and comfortable with intervening at the macro level of school organization as well as at the micro level of the individual student and family.
- They have found that inclusion in the culture of the school such as in team meetings (Individual Education Plan [IEP], IEP’s, parent-teacher conferences) increases the level of empathy and effectiveness in working with the family, the student, and the school (Cooper-Haber & Haber, 2015).
The importance of training FT’s in the schools; a 2-way street

- Trainees bring excitement
- Trainees bring diversity
- In the first 10 years (2005-2015) at FIS, 212 trainees and volunteers provided over 90,000 hours of service to the students and families. This number represents both direct and indirect hours of service to students and families required by trainees’ graduate programs or licensing boards.

Training

- Live supervision
- Co-therapy
- Thinking Systemically
- Engage with school faculty and staff
  - IEP’s, teacher conferences, classroom observations, meet with school psychologist, social worker, school counselor, nurse, family liaison, administrators, discipline dean
- Genograms
- Family Floor Plans
- Community Events

Richland Two
Columbia, SC

A SCHOOL-BASED FAMILY INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR HIGH NEEDS YOUTH
Integration of MFTs into Existing Systems

- What is academic/learning support services?
- How structured?
- Fitting treatment/support services to families into the existing system of supports
- How was that done (Cooper-Haber & Haber, 2015; Cooper-Haber & Sanchez, 2015)

Family School Intervention Services

- Family School Intervention Services... MFTs in schools
- Primary purpose: reduce suspensions and expulsions
- Discipline to mental health

MFT's work both directly & indirectly with systems

A CASE
- IP is a 12 year old white female
- Mother identifies as being the bread winner
- Father identifies as being the spiritual leader and stay at home parent
- 4 other siblings under the age of 6
- Multiple home and school moves

The Dilemma?
From family system to school system

Guidelines and Strategies
- Think act strategically
- Other voices should be heard without encouraging differences between the parties
- Clarify perceptions or expectations
- Intervene objectively on nonviolent negative behavior
- Spread and teach helpful communications

Lexington/Richland School District 5

- Families referred by the Hearing officer (mostly secondary schools and alternative academy)
- Families referred by the school Triage teams (all levels, mostly elementary)
- Participating in truancy alternative program, development of crisis response protocols, professional development, grant writing, etc.

Seminole County
Sanford, FL

A SCHOOL-BASED FAMILY COUNSELING PROGRAM AT TITLE 1 ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
Practicum Placements-Clinic or School

Practicum Students
• Practicum I or II
• Marriage, Family, and Couples
• Mental Health
• School Counseling

Doctoral Students
• Coordinating

Exhibit:
• School Psychologist
• School Counselor
• School Social Worker
• Family Liaison
• Administrators
• Teachers and parents

Purpose of Intervention

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of school-based family counseling services on elementary school students’ in the state of Florida, seeking to examine the influence of a school-based family counseling intervention on elementary school students’ academic, behavioral, and emotional functionality, as well as family functioning.

Methods

The study will:
• Examine impact of school-based family counseling on children’s school attendance, disciplinary referrals, and effective self-regulation strategies (as measured by parents/primary caregivers and teachers rating on the Child Behavior Checklist; Achenbach, 2001).
• Compare the effectiveness of counseling in increasing these self-regulation strategies based on whether children perceive the counseling experience as primarily positive or negative (as measured by the Counseling Session Experience Scale; Kelchner, Pennock, & Lambie, 2016).
• Investigate how school-based family counseling services impact family cohesion and adaptability scores (as measured by family members ratings on the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale IV [FACES]; Olson, Gorall, & Tweet, 2006).
The Child’s Counseling Session Experience Scale© (CCSES) is designed to assess elementary school aged students’ experiences with individual counseling sessions. The two primary areas examined by the CCSES are (a) the therapeutic relationship in counseling and (b) supporting the client change process in counseling. The CCSES is aligned with the theoretical tenets of Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2012) with elementary school aged clients.

**Seminole County Data**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counseling sessions scheduled</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>1365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling sessions completed</td>
<td>574 (83.36%)</td>
<td>1110 (81.32%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students completing 5 or more sessions</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students completing 10 or more sessions</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>36</td>
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Completed CBCL Forms 103 205
Completed Teacher Report Forms 110 198
Completed FACES Forms 80 80
Completed CCSES Forms 109 109

Reflections

- "This entire experience has shown me the importance of working systemically."
- "It is almost magical to see everyone working with the whole child and even better seeing the difference it makes."
- "I did not realize how important it is to work with all parts of the system. This importance is even greater in the schools."
- "I suppose I cannot express how much I learned working collaboratively during my first real counseling experience."
- "All I want to do!"

References

References


Objectives

- 1. Present program effectiveness
- 2. Gain knowledge on school systems where this approach has been utilized
- 3. Better understand literature about the benefits of the systemic approach to school counseling