

EMOTIONAL HEALING

THE STORY

Claire called the National Youth In Care Network to find out what she could do for her friend in the group home. Her friend was being kept in her room with loss of privileges because she refused to go see the therapist. Her choices were go and talk to someone you don't want to talk to or stay in your room. This is not an appropriate way to introduce someone to therapy and healing. This has the potential to affect the way she feels about therapy for the rest of her life. This is probably not an isolated incident.

Youth have indicated that while they were taken from their homes and placed in pseudo families they were not given appropriate access to healing resources. The issues that they have to deal with such as serious physical, emotional and sexual abuse are not eradicated because they are removed from the home. Youth in foster care and group home settings suffer punitive sanctions and/or medical restraint due to behaviors that spring from feelings such as anger, grief, fear, frustration, loneliness, and low self-esteem. They are punished for acting up without an investigation as to why these behaviors are occurring. Youth are searching for services and resources to address emotional needs and these should be ready and available as soon as the youth asks for them, not waitlisted or pushed to the bottom of the pile.

Youth in care are a unique population of youth and depending on their situation and individual resiliency factors they will all need some type of guidance and help either from a trusted adult or

professional. However, youth should not be pushed into therapy or be forced to share before they are ready. This is a population of young people who have trust issues with adults and have suffered from the loss of personal attachments. In the words of Paul Steinhauer: "These children have learned to keep adults at a distance through avoiding them emotionally, as if allowing themselves to care would ultimately lead to punishment, rejection and abandonment." There should be an over-riding goal of providing for the young person's wellbeing. Social service providers need to work with young people to regain their trust and help them to understand that there are adults who wish to support them and guide them on their road to recovery in their own time. Social service providers need to maintain strong contact with the "child in their care" and help guide them to the appropriate resources when the time is right.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Compile a list of all community resources a youth can connect with when they are ready to do so.
2. Compile a list of helping professionals a youth can contact when the time is right.
3. Provide consistent contact and encourage the development of personal attachments to repair damaged trust.
4. Don't give up on a youth who may reject help at this moment, everyone else has given up on them and they have become conditioned to reject help as a defense mechanism for constant betrayals of trust.