Addiction and Multigenerational Poverty

Facilitator: Nigel Wrangham

Note taker: Laurie Huffman

New marijuana laws in Oregon and youth

* How to talk to youth about risk of marijuana use without seeming reactive?
	+ Use of motivational interviewing approaches can be helpful, discussing the pros and cons of use from the youth’s point of view
	+ It can be helpful to challenge a youth to stop use for 6 months, which can then help the youth better understand their relationship with the drug
	+ Discuss the relationship between pain, stress and use of marijuana
* Need for more accurate information on marijuana
	+ Marijuana can worsen anxiety and depression
	+ Some youth remain developmentally young with marijuana use
	+ Marijuana today is more potent than a generation ago
	+ Some youth have very tough withdrawal, with loss of appetite, agitation & depressive symptoms
	+ It’s important to know about current marijuana-related products: what they are called, how they’re used, risks posed. For example, “dabs” are seen as “the crack of marijuana” and use poses risk of marijuana overdose. Symptoms: acute, continual vomiting
* Participant comments
	+ Lots of use among youth, but that isn’t really a change. Some teens are limiting their job options because they can’t pass drug tests due to marijuana use.
	+ We need more well-designed research on marijuana. One of the challenges now is that there are so many different kinds and they may have differential affects
	+ In some families, there are categories of use and dysfunction (with distorted views of functioning status)

Recognizing multigenerational poverty as a chronic stressor

* New poverty is also an issue
* As a society, how well do we deal with chronic stress?
	+ Discussed a community where one participant used to work that was marked by multigenerational poverty. Its public schools were not accredited, no healthy foods were available, lead contamination was prevalent. High drug use rates, high incarceration rates. Schools not safe. Few positive role models. For most, the reality was that there was no way out. People feeling hopeless. What can you say or do to help? Talked about the importance of putting yourself in the shoes of others, and how challenging that can be. E.g.: We look as these dynamics as barriers but those living it don’t view barriers – they see what it is as normal.
	+ To be effective as providers, we need to recognize our culturally-influenced perceptions. E.g.: it is easy to assume that a student would be happy about approaching graduation, but the student may actually be fearful about this and may not want to leave school.
* Consider how we view college: “We fetishize college”
* What can make a difference?
	+ Providing youth with opportunities to “try stuff on”. E.g.: mentoring, Youth Move.
	+ Relationships are the key
		- Recognize the importance and impact of a safe, caring adult
		- Counselors can strive to open up a new perspective.
		- It is powerful to youth to hear an adult say “I believe you” “I believe in you”
	+ Offer activities outside because poverty is isolating
	+ Many in poverty have the view “There must be something wrong with me if I’m poor.”
	+ Helpful construct: PERMA, Martin Seligman (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement) Do youth see this in their lives? Do they personally experience any of these qualities?
	+ Sometimes you can influence a family/community if they see that you really care for their kids. This can generate hope.

Policy Issues

* Some current policies are punitive. For example, at times parents are charged monetary fees when their children act out. This can be devastating to poor, disenfranchised families. Often, this kind of policy is linked to “zero tolerance” stances. We need to look at how this links to our foundation of genocide and slavery.
* Need for more trauma-informed approaches such as “the Bully Program” in which youth are recruited to help develop and implement bullying interventions. This kind of approach moves away from the drawbacks of “us vs them”.
* It’s important to have the community at the table (e.g. in suicide prevention planning) to develop effective approaches that are not polarized.

Resources

* Eric Martin, ACCBO, training on “The New Marijuana”. Also see his TED talk.
* PERMA, Martin Seligman (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement)
* “The Bully Program” in which youth are recruited to help develop and implement bullying prevention interventions.