Commentary

Post-Pandemic Case Management: Building Blocks for Resocialization

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There is a growing number of K-12 students who pose a threat of violence on their school campus. During the pre-pandemic-season, threats that were reported averaged between five to eight substantive threats per month in the sixth largest school district in the state.[1] During the height of the pandemic, the nation pivoted to a "shut-down"; therefore, socialization for many became an era of isolation. Americans who typically worked face to face now worked remotely from home. School children were no longer in a classroom environment. The functional limitation and closure of community organizations including churches, outpatient medical/psych care, and court system were not easily accessible for families. Critical shortages were beginning to ensue as a result of an abrupt interruption of basic supplies. Daily media coverage of the morbidity rate and challenges to medical care due to coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) became consummate in the area of life and death which brought uncertainty and a race to a critical resolve. Listed was just a small view of examples that led to isolation during the emergence of the pandemic.

When students returned, as a personal assessment, there was a noticeable surge of reports of threat related violence (including homicidal ideations/thoughts), relational aggression among peers including cyberbullying, suicidal ideations/thoughts across the board regardless of age, and an increase in intimate partner violence (IPV).[2] According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2022), there was a 36% increase in (IPV) during the pandemic. Post pandemic, threats of violence increased considerably. Now the new challenge involved improving resocialization in the school environment and mitigate maladaptive interaction among peers. Building blocks for resocialization can be utilized in any setting. Transitioning from isolation to a prosocial environment maybe easy for some but difficult for others. So, what should resocialization look like today and how should we proceed moving forward? Next are some possible action steps that can provide guidance for resocialization.

First things first. Evaluate programs available for those you serve. Refamiliarize yourself of how individuals can easily access those programs. If possible, compile a list of resources that your client can utilize (keep in mind cultural differences and preferences). Conduct an informal needs assessment of the individual's personal social-emotional and physical needs. Knowledge of resources may deduct stressors within their home and social environment. Maslow's hierarchy of needs include physiological (food and clothing), safety (job security), love and belonging needs (friendship), esteem, and self-actualization.[3] Stabilize the environment, stabilize the child.[4] This goes for adults as well.

Next, practice reconnecting. In order for an appliance to run properly to serve its purpose it must first be plugged in. Humans are the same way. In the workplace or school environment set up a peer to peer system (positive connection is key). No person is an island. Relationships are critical for companionship and social involvement. It must be modeled, then paired. After a few weeks encourage new relationships to form. Conduct ice breaker activities to learn something new about the individual. Be fun and affirming. This will increase receptive and expressive language with those you serve.

Finally, continue to build social skills through autonomy. A person should have a personal tool kit to handle stressors and know how to seek help when perceptive external locus of control arises.[5] This means a person believes that what happens to them is the result of luck or fate or is determined by people in authority. They may tend to give up when life does not "go their way", because they do not feel that they have the power to change it. During the pandemic, many may have felt extremely isolated and powerless, others may have gravitated to cyber group think which may have inspired maladaptive behaviors. As a result, clients may have developed poor insight and formed a "herd" mentality that produced lawlessness or thoughts that reduced hope and encouraged self-harm. Building positive resocialization skills may reduce isolation and increase connectiveness.

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In order to promote social connectedness through autonomy, include daily self-affirmation before starting the day, encourage family check ins within the home environment, use a calendar to schedule face to face social plans with others, check in with at least one trusted peer/adult weekly, connect with a human resource professional in the work place or school counselor in the school setting if a referral is needed (i.e. mental health, support group, talk line, social clubs, volunteer clubs, travel programs, and personal interest groups). For students, remember to contact parent(s) if consent is needed for mental health referrals. A social contract is highly suggested. You and the client must develop the social contract and sign it. The contract is very informal but encourages accountability. Lastly, set up a scheduled check in to ensure follow through.

Pre-pandemic, an organization was founded and led by family members whose loved ones were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School December 14, 2012. This non-profit organization promotes social connectivity to reduce social isolation and prevent gun violence in the K-12 setting across the United States of America.[6] The Sandy Hook Save Promise program encouraged all students to greet those who appeared isolated in various social settings i.e. school cafeteria, hallway, and classroom. The program was utilized and deemed instrumental to prevent social isolation.[7] Resocialization is an area that must not be overlooked. Resocialization *via* positive relationships and connectedness should be considered as prevention (reduction of crime and low morale), intervention (tools to handle difficult personal issues), and maintenance (sustain a high quality of inclusivity). A famous quote by Patch Adams states, "*We can never get a recreation of community and heal our society without giving our citizens a sense of belonging*".[8]

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