



The WCPA News

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Comprehensive Substance Abuse Treatment Program

By Michael Mahon, M.A.

At West County Psychological Associates, we believe that chemical dependency is a multi-faceted disease with observable, measurable symptoms. If left untreated, substance abuse will result in the progressive deterioration of one's vital life areas. By arresting the abuse of mood altering chemicals, and utilizing appropriate treatment, one can once again become a respectable and productive member of the family and of society.

Unfortunately, schools have traditionally felt "left out of the loop" by substance abuse treatment centers. We believe that schools have the greatest potential for identifying students who are at-risk, because families of at-risk adolescents are sometimes slow to identify and intervene effectively in the adolescent's behavior. It is the goal of West County Psychological Associates to provide a comprehensive program that works in cooperation with the school, as well as to educate school professionals about how to identify and refer students appropriately.

Substance abuse affects all the systems of the student, (i.e. family, social, and school) and therefore, it is important to address as many of these systems as possible, in order to achieve treatment results. Because of this, parental and school involvement in treatment is essential, so long as such involvement is acceptable and is not detrimental to the treatment milieu. Consistent with this philosophy, and with parental permission, we incorporate schools into our programs of substance abuse treatment. We currently offer schools a comprehensive program for substance abuse recovery. This program includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- One free evaluation session for any student referred due to concerns of substance abuse
- If deemed necessary, a subsequent comprehensive 3-part evaluation at regular fee
- A "Vital Life Impressions Conference" with the student, family and a school representative
- Private counseling sessions for students, with consistent updates provided to the school
- Recovery-oriented group therapy
- Comprehensive urine drug screens, both on an individual basis and in bulk (for schools with random drug-screen policies)
- Groups for at-risk students offered at the school
- Faculty inservices on identifying substance abusing and at-risk students
- Individualized consultation regarding a school's substance abuse and prevention policies
- Faculty workshops and informational parent lectures on chemical dependency and substance abuse

As listed above, once a referral has been made to West County Psychological Associates, every effort is made to contact the student's parent to schedule the no-cost evaluation. Two recommendations may come from this initial evaluation: either "No treatment/therapy necessary," or "Further evaluation recommended."

With the parent's permission, the therapist will then contact the appropriate school representative, to discuss the findings and recommendations. In the event that further evaluation is recommended and the student remains at West County

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Our Philosophy

We believe that individuals and systems:

- Are capable of permanent change
- Function best with clearly defined authority that stems from a family systems hierarchy
- Are accountable for both positive and negative aspects of behavior
- Achieve success by conscious choices that lead to strength and development of personal responsibility
- Control their environment by establishing boundaries that are consistent with their values

WCPA promotes change and growth by:

- Helping to establish order within the environment
- Meeting consistently in a collaborative relationship to achieve identified goals
- Helping to identify and process significant issues
- Aiding in resolving issues as they arise

The result for the system or individual is the development of a strong sense of identity and boundaries that allows for the achievement of goals.

From the Director

We have all seen children who have performed poorly during most of their academic history and then do exceedingly well one year, claiming it's because they "liked the teacher." I have come to believe that what inspires these children is the knowledge that their particular teacher cares about them and believes in their abilities to succeed.

And yet, at times, we all question the impact that we have on others. And teachers, who impact each generation so profoundly, are not immune from this doubt. We all wonder - in this sometimes chaotic world, does what we believe or what we say have any meaning for others? Are we able to clearly articulate our values to ourselves, let alone to our children and students? Do we sometimes forget how much we model, both positively and negatively, for those children with whom we come into contact?

We can only give our students what is within us. Truly, we teach what we are. For their sakes and ours, we must model and believe in our own sense of integrity, our own honesty and our own caring. If we really want to impact the children in our lives, we need to believe in ourselves first and then believe in each child.

Mary Fitzgibbons, Ph.D.

Substance Abuse Treatment (Continued)

Psychological Associates, then a set of three sessions are required at the regular therapist fees. The first two sessions consist of more in-depth interviews with the student and parents, as well as a detailed psychosocial assessment. After this second session, the school representative is again contacted to discuss findings, as well as to get input from the school concerning treatment planning and to schedule the Vital Life Impressions Conference. The third session is this Vital Life Impressions Conference, between the student, the therapist, the parents and a school representative. In this conference, areas of impairment are identified and a comprehensive treatment plan is discussed. Although treatment plans are individualized, the most common scenario is one individual session and one group session per week. Parent education and support groups are also available.

Finally, why should a school choose to use West County Psychological Associates? There are two answers. First, at West County only qualified substance abuse therapists perform any of our substance abuse services. From the no-cost initial evaluation to individual and group therapy, only educated and experienced substance abuse therapists will work with such clients. This is not always true in insurance referrals or even in hospital settings, where a therapist of any background or specialty may be providing the substance abuse treatment. Second, at West County we are committed to working directly with schools to tailor recovery programs that include school input every step of the way and that respect the fact that the abuse of chemicals affects the school environment profoundly.

If you are interested in learning more about our Comprehensive Substance Abuse Treatment Program, or in referring a student for a free evaluation session, please contact Michael Mahon, Gerre Johnson or Holly Watson at our office, (314) 275-8599.

Schedule your summertime and back-to-school inservices now!

With summer vacation around the corner, we are sure that your schools are busy and that you, your staff and your students are looking forward to some time off. We hope that your spring semester has been a safe and productive one, and that your summer will be restful and rejuvenating.

At this time, we would like to remind you about our availability for your summertime and back-to-school faculty inservice days. If your school is planning an inservice day, or if there is a topic that has challenged your staff this spring, we would be happy to come and present to your faculty. The length of our presentations can vary from one hour to full-day workshops – we will work within your time frame and schedule. Below, you will find a brief menu of some of the topics that we are frequently asked to present for school professionals. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but is merely representative of those topics that are most frequently requested. If you are interested in a topic which you do not find on the list, or would like us to send you a longer menu of topics, please let us know.

As always, we admire the work that you do with children and families. Please let us know if we can be of assistance to your school, (314) 275-8599. We hope that you and all at your school have a safe and happy summer!

- **School Violence Seminar:** In response to the widespread concern about school safety, we offer a six hour-long seminar about school violence and school safety, using the latest FBI information.
- **Dealing with Difficult Parents** Specific types of difficult parents are clarified, along with concrete suggestions for responding to each type. Participants role-play the situations and practice the recommended steps.
- **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** Discusses assessment, diagnosis, treatment and classroom interventions. Particular attention is paid to understanding stimulant medications.
- **Discipline that Gets Results** This presentation covers what works and what doesn't in the classroom. How to preserve your own peace of mind during the process is also discussed.
- **Improving Parent-Teacher Conferences** Designed to give concrete suggestions for improving conferences and making them less stressful for everyone involved. Also shares what to do if a parent becomes angry.
- **Bully-Proofing the School** Offers information about how to promote a no-bullying atmosphere at your school, and how to respond to bullies and victims, when they're discovered.
- **Understanding Self-Esteem** This presentation defines self-esteem, describes how it is created, debunks self-esteem myths and shares how it can be either stifled or supported by parents and schools.

Psychological Testing Services at WCPA

As the school year draws to an end, we want to update you on the variety of assessment services available at WCPA. Remember, these services continue throughout the summer, so if there are students who would benefit from an assessment in any of the following areas, they can be assessed before the next school year begins.

- **ADHD** ADHD is frequently mimicked or co-occurs with other diagnoses. This assessment rules out other issues that may be causing the behavior, and provides an accurate diagnosis and comprehensive recommendations.
- **Educational Assessment** An in-depth evaluation that pinpoints a student's learning problems and recommends strategies to help the student learn best. Includes assessments for learning disabilities and/or mental retardation.
- **Risk Assessment** Available for students who have made statements or gestures that have raised schools' concerns regarding possible school violence. These assessments include a student and family interview, school contact, psychological testing, and a written report to provide schools with the comprehensive information they need for decision-making.
- **Psychological Assessment** Psychological assessments are available for all variety of behavioral and emotional concerns, such as depression, anxiety, developmental delays, personality issues and conduct problems.

Many families wish to have the best assessment conducted for their children, but find the costs prohibitive. As a result, we have developed payment plans for just such families. Please have your families contact the office for more information on this option. And, as always, we continue to provide treatment, in addition to assessment, for all of the issues listed above. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns about our assessment services.