NINE EVIDENCE-BASED PRINCIPLES IN YOUTH SERVICES

Evidence-Based Practices have been defined as "The integration of the *BEST AVAILABLE RESEARCH* with *CLINICAL EXPERTISE* in the context of *PATIENT CHARACTERISTICS, CULTURE, AND PREFERENCES*" (APA, 2006; 2021; Melchert et al., 2024). This holistic definition highlights the importance of youth and family services being guided by evidence-based *PRINCIPLES* that assist providers in delivering best practices that are *NOT* overly manualized, or a one-size-fits-all approach. Nine principles (general guidelines) are described below, which can assist youth programs in developing effective, adaptable services, that are informed by 'research', 'clinical expertise', and meeting the 'individualized needs' of the diverse population we serve.

Principle #1: ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN POSITIVE, THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Focuses on strategies that will help establish and maintain positive, therapeutic relationships, which can engage youth/families in services and lead to positive outcomes.

Principle #2: MAINTAIN A STRENGTHS-BASED EMPHASIS

Emphasizes the identification, creation, and reinforcement of strengths and resources within youth, their family, and community. Resilience protective factors, positive reinforcement, and solution-focused interventions (exceptions to problems) are all emphasized.

Principle #3: HOLISTIC, INDIVIDUALIZED, ONGOING ASSESSMENT

Emphasizes the importance of assessing the whole person (psychological, developmental, biological, social, cultural, etc.). Evidence-based assessment tools are utilized along with clinical judgment. A functional behavior assessment of problem behaviors AND prosocial behaviors is conducted, and situational/contextual factors are considered. Assessment recommendations target youth's individualized strengths and protective factors, as well as limitations and risk factors. Assessment is viewed as an ongoing process due to the dramatic changes (i.e., physiological, neurological, psychological, social, etc.) that occur during adolescence.

Principle #4: ENHANCEMENT OF HOPE & SELF-EFFICACY (INTRINSIC MOTIVATION)

Highlights strategies that enhance hope and self-efficacy (belief in person control) including: Meeting basic human needs; Educating youth/families about brain's prefrontal maturation & neuroplasticity; Educating about resilience and posttraumatic growth outcomes; Utilizing motivational interviewing strategies; Collaborating on 'approach goals'; Giving a rationale for services to help clients to be their own best therapist; facilitate connections with positive people from similar backgrounds (e.g., culture, life experiences).

Principle #5: UTILIZATION OF EMPIRICALLY-SUPPORTED INTERVENTIONS/ PROCEDURES

Highlights interventions that research has identified as being effective for certain diagnoses. It also includes the use of evidence-based curricula; however, when full fidelity would adversely affect external validity (which is often the case within agencies serving a diverse and fluctuating client population), adherence to the underlying components is the focus. These components include maintaining Small Caseloads; Having an Ecological Focus on youth's family and community supports; Utilizing Cognitive-Behavioral interventions including Skills Training with Direct Practice; Targeting Dynamic Risk Factors, Protective Factors, and Strengths/ Resources.

Principle #6: DELIVERY OF SERVICES IN A MANNER THAT ENHANCES ENGAGEMENT/ RESPONSIVITY

Emphasizes the importance of tailoring interventions to the youth's individualized learning style, motivation, abilities, strengths, and interests, in order to maximize their capacity to learn from the services provided. Specific delivery strategies include multi-sensory interventions; 'Least Restrictive' environments that closely approximate Real-Life Experiences; and Active, Participatory interventions (while remaining sensitive to socially introverted and socially anxious youth).

Principle #7: MAINTAIN AN ECOLOGICAL EMPHASIS (SUPPORT IN NATURAL COMMUNITIES)

Focuses on the importance of increasing prosocial supports and resources within the youth's life/community/culture (e.g., contact with Psychologically Healthy, Prosocial people; Educational services; Vocational/ Employment training and opportunities; Family therapy; Home-based services; Transition services; and Restorative Justice opportunities).

Principle #8: COMMITMENT TO PROGRAM INTEGRITY

Focuses on the overall organization and structure of the program to ensure it includes the internal components necessary for effective services (e.g., Well-organized and structured program- "doing what you say you are doing"; Ongoing training and supervision/coaching of staff; Quality Assurance checks-internal & external audits; Hiring of Qualified Staff; Use of Multidisciplinary Teams-MDTs). This principle also emphasizes the importance of 'Do No Harm' regarding the interventions utilized.

Principle #9: MEASURE AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON RELEVANT PROCESSES/ PRACTICES

Focuses on the utilization of pre- and post-outcome measures to help determine if youth services are effective. The results of outcome measures are shared with treatment providers and direct care staff. Feedback from youth and families is also sought during the course of treatment.