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D I F F E R E N T I A L T R E A T M E N T M O D E L

COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF INSTITUTIONS

DIVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES

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BACKGROUND

The treatment concept that 'not all children are alike' and, therefore, should be treated as unique individuals is a truth that has long been expounded in juvenile corrections.

While making this kind of popular public proclamation, juvenile corrections programs have generally continued to operate as if all children are alike and can, in some way, respond by becoming involved in a common overall program of group living, academic and vocational training, and by adhering to a set of rules and structure described as common needs of all children.

To further compound the problem, programs have often been staffed for single security coverage by underpaid, poorly trained staff. These staff members have been overburdened with numbers of youth to supervise in facilities primarily designed for custody. Therefore, the physical facilities have contributed very little to the creation of a helping, treatment climate.

Youth have typically been assigned on a random basis to cottages and programs where the range of problems, sophistication and maturity usually covered each end of the spectrum. The result of this system has often been a masking and cancelling-out effect on the program by negative peer influences, causing many youth to regress rather than to improve through their involvement with the program.

THE OFFICE OF YOUTH SERVICES is following a differential treatment approach that recognizes both the shortcomings of the past and provides committed youth with the opportunity to be placed in treatment programs that have the potential to meet their collective and individual needs.

An Interpersonal Maturity Level (I-Level) Classification interview is conducted by qualified diagnosticians with each committed youth entering the Youth Services system. This interview is designed to describe the relative strengths and vulnerabilities of each youth, and therefore the diagnosis has direct bearing on the type of treatment needed. Three major components of differential treatment are:

1. Residents can be grouped in rather broad categories with other youngsters who generally have like needs, potentials, and limitations.
2. A treatment program is designed to allow the highest possible degree of personal growth for the youth in each of the identified

treatment units. Significant in each treatment unit are not only the use of appropriate treatment models but also the creation of a treatment climate, i.e., routine, structure, rules, activities and staff-client relationships, that will enhance the chances of both the group and the individuals within the group to respond to the program. Responsible program design provides an opportunity for each youth to improve his unique and individual survival skills through involvement in the program, especially in the areas of interpersonal relationships, improved self-concept, academic growth, and vocational exploration.

3. Youth workers are matched according to their best "natural style" with the appropriate classified group so that a positive reciprocal relationship between workers and youth is achieved.

The differential treatment model helps to create an atmosphere and climate for change and growth while at the same time it minimizes most of the traditional institutional negative factors, such as fear, required standards of behavior and conformity, and achievement for all youth regardless of their potentials and core personalities.

The grouping of youth into treatment categories for the purpose of differential treatment can enhance the opportunities for each youth to maintain his personal identity and pride in areas related to his ethnic, religious and cultural background. The homogeneous groupings represent a wide enough variety of personalities, environments, achievement levels and coping skills to provide an appropriate setting for group problem-solving techniques to be effective.

Differential treatment is a strategy for program development that allows for the uniqueness of both the individual and the group. An analogy describing this process is that of two marksmen, one with a small bore rifle and the other with a shotgun, each attempting to hit a small target from 75 yards. The Interpersonal Maturity Level Classification system allows us to hit the appropriate target to a greater extent than the traditional, ineffective shotgun approach described in the opening statement of this paper.

Ideally, through the differential treatment concept of program development, as many as nine different variations of programs can be developed to meet the needs of different classifications of youth. The following are brief descriptions of just two of these programs.

NEUROTIC ANXIOUS. The neurotic anxious youth is characterized by his stance of dependency and need to enter into close relationships. He can openly discuss his problems and inadequate feelings and can acknowledge a need for change. This youth seeks relationships with adults in order to fulfill his need for support, reassurance and even rejection.

He is restricted by his neurotic "bad me" feelings and has a limited view of himself and the world around him. His statements about insight into his own behavior are often more lip service which he uses to maintain his dependent stance. He can usually be characterized by his negative life script which goes back over a considerable period of time - usually to early childhood.

NEUROTIC ANXIOUS MATCHED WORKER STYLE. The worker should have experienced and worked through some of the same types of problems in his early life to fully understand the feelings of the neurotic anxious youth. He needs to have the ability to look behind the words and behavior of the youth and help them to cope with their problems more directly. The worker should be able to demonstrate a sincere warmth and concern while at the same time be able to be a parent or authority figure to provide a degree of structure and to set up behavioral objectives for the youth.

He should be the type of person who can tolerate and deal with dependent, seemingly sick, self-defeating behavior while maintaining his own sense of humor and perspective.

GENERAL TREATMENT APPROACH. Most group and individual psychotherapeutic techniques are effective with this type of youth providing those techniques cause him to look at new and different view of himself and his circumstances. A combination of individual and group techniques are usually effective, again providing they allow the youth to deal with real issues and the leader is in touch with the tendency of double messages, "poor me" games, and self-defeating behavior patterns.

The general climate of this unit would maintain a relaxed atmosphere; this group tends to like movies, games, music and discussion sessions. Rigorous physical activities of a non-competitive nature are helpful but not generally a primary concern to this group.

NEUROTIC ACTING-OUT. The neurotic acting-out youth is characterized by his aloofness, need for autonomy, and projection of self-adequacy. He has a low tolerance for adults who want to plan or direct his activities or behaviors. He tends to gloss over his own errors and is prone to challenge rules or efforts to control him. He tends to be reserved and in some cases distrustful of the motives of those who attempt to establish a relationship.

He tends to be counteractive to authority on the basis that it interferes with his right to make mistakes and be a free individual. This youth tends to be very active both physically and emotionally in his efforts to outrun or disprove the existence of internalized "bad me" feelings.

NEUROTIC ACTING-OUT MATCHED WORKER STYLE. The workers are generally characterized as self-confident, independent and maybe somewhat aggressive and active in their own life styles. Their stance with youth tends to be cautious, easygoing, nonconfrontive, and nondemanding. They generally come across to the youth as a big brother, friendly uncle, or concerned friend.

GENERAL TREATMENT APPROACH. Once this group has been matched with an appropriate worker and a relationship of trust has been established, response can be elicited with a variety of psychotherapeutic techniques.

Rewards and sanctions should be earned or administered in a consistent and automatic way so that the counseling staff are not seen as those who reward and/or punish him. The staff should be free to look objectively at progress and problems with the boy or girl in a nonpunitive, nonaccusatory manner.

The program structure must be well defined and clearly understood by all youth in the program, who should have input into the structure of the program.

The program should allow for maximum opportunity for vigorous physical activity, generally of a competitive nature. Youth should also be given opportunity for emotional and verbal release.

Obviously the two descriptions above for the Neurotic Anxious and Neurotic Acting-Out classification subtypes give only a brief idea of different treatment strategies that are utilized in Youth Services' differential treatment programs. A more detailed, comprehensive paper entitled "An Overview of the Interpersonal Maturity Level Classification System" is available upon request from the DIVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES.