Counseling People with Developmental Disabilities: Techniques that Work

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History

- History has not been kind to individuals with DD.
- More time and energy has been spent on controlling people with disabilities with medication, physical restraints, and restrictions.
- Counseling is often excluded as an option.

Where Are We Today??
The need for counseling…

- Employment
- Friendships
- Family Support
- Mental Health Services
- Discrimination
- Segregation

The Need for Counseling

- Social Loneliness
- Emotional Loneliness
- Negative Experiences
- These factors increase the risk of developing depression and other mental health issues and are VERY COMMON AMONG PEOPLE WITH DD

Dual Diagnosis

- Research indicates that almost 50% of the total population of people with developmental disabilities are currently taking at least one psychotropic medication(Reiss).
- This population appears to be at greater risk of developing depression, anxiety, and various mental health issues.

Most Common Current Treatments

- Medication management
- Psychiatrist Follow-Up
- Behavior modification
- These are not enough….example

What about Counseling??

- It is clear that there is a need
- Lack of education and lack of experience within the counseling profession
- Lack of training
- Techniques must be altered slightly
- Currently, many therapists do not feel comfortable working with clients with DD.

What about Counseling?

- Sometimes an assumption is made that people with DD don't have the cognitive skills to participate in counseling.
- Therapists can be effective with individuals with DD, but often need to approach therapy differently.

How did we get here??

Lack of Education

+

Lack of Exposure

=

Fear

“Us” and “Them”

- Special Olympics
- Special Needs
- Special Education
- “You must need a really, really special counselor to work with those special people”.

Not “Us”, Not “Them”… “We”

- Education and Exposure lead to acceptance, understanding and appreciation.

Diagnosis

- Accurate diagnosis is essential.
- Multiple methods must be used including self reports, observations, information from staff, family etc.
- Don’t jump to conclusions, look for possibilities.

Functional Analysis

- Communication
- Sensory Processing
- Environment
- Culture
- Medical
- Medications

The “Problem”

- Often, behavioral challenges are not the problem… they are a SYMPTOM of the problem.
- “If you see the problem as the problem, then that my friend is a problem!”

Specific Techniques

- Basic helping skills are the same
- Modified CBT techniques
- Solution Focused Therapy
- Communication Alternatives
- Role Playing
- Therapeutic Interventions

Credo for Support

- “For the first time in history, people with disabilities are attempting to take their place in society as fully contributing citizens. The danger is that society will respond with remediation and benevolence, rather than with equality and respect.”

Summary

- The counseling profession truly has the power to promote social change… if it is willing to.
  - …Are you?
    - If you are…educate yourself, expose yourself to new experiences and educate others.

Resources

- NADD
- Reiss
- Herb Lovett
- Lila Morton Penga