Integrating Social Interest with At-Risk Youth

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Alfred Adler was born in 1870 and died in 1937.

Initially trained as an ophthalmologist

Participated in weekly meetings with Freud in his early career.

Founded own group - The Society of Individual Psychology (Cherry, n.d.).
Adler’s Theory

Overholser states (2010). “Alfred Adler developed his view under the name Individual Psychology (p. 348).”
Individual psychology is based on the idea that striving by individuals comprises of the community as well as the individual (Dreikurs-Ferguson, 2004).
Important tenets of Individual Psychology:

- Style of Life
- Cooperation
- Encouragement
- Social Interest
Video on Adler Theory

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rArdwQdyMZE&feature=results_main&playnext=1&list=PLF6C01416D25629E9
Case Study

- 16-year-old male ("Tom") ordered to complete the program at Elmore Academy
- Entered the program on 13 different medications
- Witnessed significant abuse as a child
- Divorced parents and lived with dad
- Mom sexually abused him as a child
- He was placed due to disruptive behavior in the home
Tom’s Diagnoses

The following is a list of diagnoses at the time of intake:

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Conduct Disorder
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Depression
The Style of Life is what creates meaning (Carlson, et. al., 2006).
Purpose of the Style of Life

1. Guide to life
2. Limiter
3. Predictor

(Carlson, 2006)
Tom’s Style of Life

- **Tom’s Guide to Life:** Tom’s ‘compass’ was distorted due to the trauma in his past, the divorce of his parents and moving frequently.
- **Tom’s Limiter:** Due to the different styles of parenting, his ‘limiter’ was never fully developed.
- **Tom’s Predictor:** Tom’s predictor was he was likely to experience more abuse and disruptions.
Cooperation takes place when individuals work to connect and reach toward others (Davidson, 1991). Those who become uncooperative are doing so in an effort to cope with a life situation (Davidson, 1991).
Cooperation (cont.)

When a member of a community becomes uncooperative, the other members can come together to teach the individual to overcome the issue and become cooperative again.
Tom’s Cooperation

Tom was not born uncooperative. His life’s journey brought him to the point of being uncooperative. He was this way with his family and community in an effort to cope and compensate for what he was lacking. He was not encouraged by others and shown the importance of being cooperative.
An individual can build on cooperation through Adler’s Life Tasks:

1. Work
2. Intimacy
3. Friendship
Tom’s Life Tasks

- Intimacy: Tom’s intimate relationships were disrupted throughout his life. Due to this, he overcompensated through work.
- Work: Tom worked harder than any other student in the dorm. When there was a job to do, he was the chosen student because staff members knew the job would get done.
- Friendships: Tom struggled to build friendships because he was not taught how to be appropriate around others by his parents, who did not have healthy relationships.
Life Tasks Lead To:

Adler’s term for participating fully in each of the life tasks was “Gemeinschaftsgefühl” or Social Interest.
Encouragement is:

- Concern shown for an individual
- Work is done to instill hope
- When that individual can see a solution to the issues he or she is facing.

(Carlson and Slavik, 1997).
Restructuring Goals

Helping a youth to restructure the goals that are set will help to decrease his or her fear of failing (Carlson and Slavik, 1997).
Encouragement versus Praise

Examples

Encouragement:
“"I know you tried your best on the test.""
“You put a lot of effort into cleaning your room today.”

Praise:
“I know you can get an A on your next test.”
“You did better than anyone else at building blocks.”
Encouraging Tom

It took Tom approximately three months to gain an understanding that the team was there to help and encourage him. When he accomplished something or put time into an activity, he was given credit, not for the accomplishment, but the effort he put it.
How Discouragement is Developed

Discouragement occurs when individuals are having feelings of inferiority and do not cope in effective ways. When this happens, an individual develops skewed beliefs and behaves in a manner that is against the norm in order to cope with the struggles they are facing (Kelly, 2007).
Signs of Discouragement

- Substance abuse
- Isolation
- Behavioral Issues (acting out)
- Self-harm
- Unhealthy peer relationships
- Truancy
- Risky behavior
Signs of Tom’s Discouragement

Signs of discouragement Tom displayed:

- Abuse of prescription drugs
- Abusing his siblings
- Failing school
- Self-harm
- Fights in school
- Theft
- Sexualized behavior
Mental health can be measured by the level of a person’s social interest. It is the inclination to be involved in life’s tasks and cooperating with others (Carlson, et. al., 2006).
Social Interest Activities

Social Interest is demonstrated through activities in which individuals participate to bring them together with others toward a common goal.
Examples of Social Interest

- Sports activities
- AA/NA meetings
- Scouts
- Drama
- Spiritual activities
- Volunteering at a homeless shelter
- Student Council
- Employment
- Community service

Each of these activities will help move the community toward a common goal.
Tom’s Social Interest Activities

Tom was not participating in social interest activities at intake. He was not working, did not acknowledge spiritual beliefs, and did not volunteer or participate in school activities. The court did order him to participate in NA meetings. However, he attended one time and never went back.
What does ‘At-Risk’ Mean?

At risk youth is a term to describe youth who have deficiencies in reading, been diagnosed with a disability, been exposed to trauma or abuse or display behavioral issues in the home or community (Moore, 2006).
Reason for Tom’s Placement

- His behavior was deemed to be placing others at risk.
- His behavior was impacting the family negatively.
- His placement at Elmore Academy kept others safe, instilled skills and values so he could return and contribute to his family and community.
At-Risk Youth are often not involved in social interest activities due to lack of knowledge, discouragement or financial reasons. Another possibility of a lack of social interest is the child is focused on overcompensating for their own shortcomings, they have forgotten about the importance of a sense of community.
How to Get Youth Involved

- Encouragement
- Funding
- Resources
- Community support
- Education
- Therapeutic intervention
Tom’s New Social Interest

Throughout his stay, Tom was able to build on his skills, talents and interests. He reduced and/or stopped taking several medications he was prescribed. He gained employment, participated in sports, built on his spirituality and learned how to build healthy relationships.
Parent Involvement

More often than not, the parents of the youth we serve often are lacking skills on the importance of youth being involved in the community. Teaching parents the importance of social interest is fundamental. If the parents are unaware and we are returning the youth to them, the likelihood of sustaining what has been instilled in them is slim.
Parental Involvement (cont.)

Ways in which parents can be involved:

- Education
- Access to resources
- Funding if available
- Adult groups
- Encouragement
- Empowerment
Tom’s mother was never involved in his program. His father and siblings were able to participate in therapy while he was away to work on issues the family faced as a whole. Tom’s father was given resources, funding and access to other county information to help him parent his children. Due to this, Tom was able to return home to live with dad and his siblings.
Tom Today

Tom’s journey is one of countless success stories generated at Elmore Academy. With the skills and values he attained, he brought those home and implemented them through work, sports and education. He joined the football team, gained employment on a farm working with animals and is taking post-secondary classes now. Without the knowledge about the importance of participating in his community, Tom likely would not have sustained what he learned and apply it to life today.
Recommending Reading

Helpful Resources:

- *The Pocket Coach for Parents* by Tina Feigal, M.S. Ed.
- *Children the Challenge* by Rudolf Dreikurs, M.D.
- *Punished by Rewards* by Alfie Kohn
Conclusion

- The use of encouragement is key.
- Educating and helping to find resources helps youth to become involved.
- Parent education and involvement is vital.
