

ADVANCES IN SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

BEST PRACTICES AND PROGRAM MODELS

**Edited by
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Preface

The U.S. educational system has historically provided a range of benefits outside the definition of academic instruction. Schools have typically employed multidisciplinary personnel, such as nurses to provide on-site health care and psychologists to complete assessments. Some children receive the majority of their meals at school. The National School Lunch program was implemented in 1946, breakfast has been served since 1966, and after-school snacks were added in 1998. So the concept of a “full-service school” was in effect long before it was given a name.

It has been almost ten years (Dryfoos, 1994) since Joy Dryfoos introduced the term “full-service schools” to describe a more effective means of service delivery to our nation’s youth and their families. And today, as every generation before, youth confront a landscape of unique challenges, the gravity of which is evident in our recent history. When we entered the 1990s we were engaged in the Gulf War conflict. Internal discord resulted in turmoil within our own national borders, reflected in civil rights riots in California, an internal bombing in Oklahoma, and unprecedented school violence around the nation. International conflict spilled into our country. As we turned the corner to a new millennium, we suffered the loss of over 3,000 lives in the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Today’s youth are facing challenges we could not have imagined when we were attending their schools—including a steadily increasing incidence of drug use, violence, and emotional disorders—underscoring the need to provide mental health services to our young people, who often are most effectively reached through school-based programs.

NEGATIVE PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS IN SCHOOL CHILDREN’S ENVIRONMENTS

Drug Use

Wide declines in drug use among youth were evident during the 1980s, but the national trend was reversed in the 1990’s. The percentage of high school seniors who reported using illicit drugs “during the past year” increased from 22 percent in 1992, to 35 percent in 1995 (Johnston, O’Malley, & Bachman, 1996; 2002). The trend worsened with younger children. The number of eighth graders who reported using marijuana during their lifetime jumped from 10.2 percent in 1991 to 19.9 percent in 1995—a 92 percent increase. Alcohol and tobacco use followed similar trends among youth (Johnston, O’Malley, & Bachman, 2002). By the time they are high school seniors, more than 80 percent of youth have used alcohol and approximately 64 percent have been drunk. By 2001, there were more current daily users of cigarettes than of any other drug class: 5.5 percent, 12 percent, and 19 percent in grades eight, ten, and twelve, respectively.

Potent new club drugs have proliferated among youth, including MDMA (“ecstasy”), Rohypnol® (flunitrazepam), GHB, and Ketamine (“special K”). The long-term effects of these drugs will only be evident after several more years of observation. And in the midst of this new drug traffic, the nation’s favorite prevention program

failed. A ten-year evaluation study of the DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program found no empirical evidence for its ability to curb youth drug use or attitudes about drugs (Lynam et al., 1999).

Domestic Violence

Approximately 1.5 million women and 834,700 men are physically assaulted by an intimate partner each year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Every year, 3 to 10 million children witness domestic violence (Carter, Weithorn, & Behrman, 1999). Witnessing violence is a risk factor for long-term physical and mental health problems, including alcohol and substance abuse, being a victim of abuse, and perpetrating violence (Felitti et al., 1998). Child abuse occurs in 30 to 60 percent of family violence cases that involve families with children (Carter, Weithorn, & Behrman, 1999).

Children are increasingly the victims of violence in our society. The United States has the highest rates of childhood homicide, suicide, and firearm-related death among industrialized countries (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 1997). In 1994, homicide was the third leading cause of death, and suicide was the sixth, among children aged five to fourteen years (Singh, Kochanek, & MacDorman, 1996). During adolescence, the risk of suffering domestic violence increases. Data from a study of eighth and ninth grade male and female students indicated that 25 percent had been victims of nonsexual dating violence and 8 percent had been victims of sexual dating violence (Foshee et al., 1996). Summarizing many studies, the average prevalence rate for nonsexual dating violence is 22 percent among male and female high school students and 32 percent among college students. (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989).

Youthful Perpetrators

Youth have historically been both the victims and perpetrators of a rising degree of violence. Today more youth are committing violent acts, compared to their predecessors of fifteen years ago (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1997). Youth violence has also become more lethal, illustrated by the doubling of the juvenile arrest rate for murder between 1985 and 1995. Youth perpetrated violence includes a wide range of externalized and internalized aggression, with increasing numbers of victims.

Externalized aggression ranges from verbal harassment and bullying to physical assault and multiple homicide. Youth who are violent at school are often disenfranchised and face repeated ostracism and overt bullying by others (Anderson et al., 2001). The key to diverting lethal school violence may lie in prevention of lower-level aggression, such as bullying. School-wide programs addressing bullying have shown promise (National Resource Center for Safe Schools, 2001; Garrity et al., 1994; Thornton et al, 2002). Many states have adopted legislation requiring school districts to implement antibullying policies and procedures in the hopes of reversing the trend in school violence (Zehr, 2001).

Between 1994 and 1999, 220 events resulting in 253 deaths were studied; 202 events involved one death and eighteen involved multiple deaths (Anderson et al., 2001). Of the 220 events, 172 were homicides, thirty were suicides, and eleven were homicide-suicides. Although the incidence of such lethal school violence is rare—

estimated to be 0.068 per 100,000 students—this type of violence is unprecedented in previous generations. For 120 (54.5 percent) of the incidents, respondents reported that a note, threat, or other action potentially indicating risk for violence occurred prior to the event. Homicide offenders were more likely than homicide victims to have been bullied by their peers and had expressed some form of suicidal behavior prior to the event.

Suicide

Internalized violence is evident in the suicide rates of youth. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for both children ten to fourteen years old, and young adults fifteen to twenty-four years old (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Between 1952 and 1995, the incidence of suicide among adolescents and young adults nearly tripled. Recognition of this dangerous trend resulted in increased research and prevention programs. In 1999, the *Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Suicide* (U.S. Public Health Service, 1999) outlined a national agenda for suicide prevention. Key people, such as parents, teachers, and school health staff, must be aware of the risk factors and warning signs for suicidal ideation among the youth they serve.

ADDRESSING EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS IN YOUTH

Approximately 9 to 13 percent of youth in the United States present with serious emotional or behavioral disorders (Friedman, Katz-Leavy, Manderscheid, & Sondheimer, 1996). However, only about 20 percent of youth in need receive mental health services (Burns et al., 1995). Youth today are challenged with a vast number of internal risk factors (e.g., cognitive and social skill deficits) and external risk factors (e.g., poverty, abuse, maladaptive modeling) that may interfere with healthy development, learning, and functioning. Schools are the center of youth life and serve to connect families to community resources. Mental health services can help youth face these challenges with resiliency and skill. Interest in school-based mental health (SBMH) has steadily increased in the past two decades. Professional organizations, such as the National Education Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Association of Social Workers, have adopted guidelines supporting SBMH.

Today, there are several hundred programs, and many more adjunctive services, that identify as "school-based mental health." This book is not meant to be an exhaustive account; rather, it showcases best practices in the field and illustrates a sample of programs in operation. For our purposes, school-based mental health is broadly defined as mental health resources delivered within or linked to school settings. The chapter authors represent a wide range of talent from across the nation and have published and practiced in the field. The program chapters were selected on the basis of how well each described the following: (1) program development and implementation—i.e., history and key events in the development of the model, funding strategies, administrative foundation, such as referral development and staffing, and interagency collaboration; (2) clinical foundation—theoretical foundation for the model and evi-

dence-based interventions utilized; and (3) outcomes—i.e., clinical outcomes, based on the utilization of repeated measures and research-supported instruments, consumer perspectives, and cost analysis. Our purpose is to inform stakeholders, including funding sources, families, and professionals, of the research basis and recent developments of SBMH across the nation.

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Table of Contents

About the Editor and Authors	iii
Preface	xv

PART 1: DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Chapter 1: The Value of School-Based Mental Health Services

Introduction	1-1
Services Offered in School-Based Mental Health Programs	1-2
Assessment Services	1-2
Treatment Services	1-3
Do School-Based Mental Health Programs Work?	1-3
SBMH Client Characteristics	1-3
Client Satisfaction	1-4
Treatment Outcome Studies	1-4
School-Based Clinic vs. Child Guidance Clinic	
Outcomes	1-4
School-Based Mental Health Services for	
Adolescents	1-5
The Vanderbilt School-Based Counseling Study	1-5
Effective School-Based Treatment Practice	1-6
Key Components of Successful School-Based Mental Health	
Programs	1-7
Collaboration	1-7
Comprehensive Services	1-7
Funding	1-8
Evaluation	1-8
Conclusion	1-8

Chapter 2: Advancing Mental Health in Schools—Guiding Frameworks and Strategic Approaches

Introduction	2-1
Mental Health in Schools—What Are We Talking About?	2-3
Delivery Mechanisms and Formats	2-4
Nature and Scope of Interventions	2-6
Comprehensive and Multifaceted Guidelines for Mental Health	
in Schools	2-7

An Integrated Framework for Addressing Barriers to Learning
and Enhancing Healthy Development at a School Site 2-10

 Addressing Barriers to Student Learning 2-10

 Moving From a Two- to a Three-Component Framework for
 School Reform 2-10

 Framing an Enabling Component for a School Site 2-13

 Classroom-Focused Enabling 2-13

 Student and Family Assistance 2-15

 Crisis Assistance and Prevention 2-15

 Support for Transitions 2-16

 Home Involvement in Schooling 2-16

 Community Outreach for Involvement and Support
 (Including a Focus on Volunteers) 2-17

Enhancing Strategic Approaches for Advancing Mental Health
in Schools 2-18

Conclusion 2-20

Chapter 3: The Basics of Organizing and Funding School-Based Mental Health Services

Introduction 3-3

Step One: Understanding the Shift From Community-Based to
School-Based Mental Health Services 3-3

 Overview of the U.S. Mental Health Service System 3-3

 Evidence of Schools as a Point of Service Delivery 3-4

Step Two: Understanding the Emerging Models of Organization for
Delivering School-Based Mental Health Services 3-5

 Model One: Traditional School–Community Relationship 3-5

 Model Two: A School–Community Partnership 3-6

 Model Three: The School–Community Collaboration 3-7

 Full-Service Schools. 3-7

 Community Schools. 3-7

 School-Based Health Center. 3-7

 Sample Prevention Programs of Model Three Schools 3-7

 Sample Intervention Programs of Model Three Schools 3-8

 Day Treatment Programs. 3-8

 Self-Contained Emotionally Handicapped Classrooms 3-8

 After-School Programs. 3-8

 Multi-Systemic Therapy Programs 3-8

 Community-Based Care Services. 3-9

 Sample Crisis Services of Model Three Schools 3-10

Step Three: Examining the Barriers to Funding School-Based Mental Health	
Services	3-11
Costs of Mental Illness	3-11
Funding Barriers	3-11
Categorical or Discrete Definitions of Funding	3-12
Distinct Eligibility Criteria	3-12
Duplication and Overlap of Services	3-12
Lack of Communication	3-12
Lack of Clear Documentation	3-12
The Maze of Funding Sources	3-12
Step Four: Determining a Funding Strategy	3-12
Six Principles of Successful Funding Strategies	3-13
Seek Funding for Services That Have the Most Value	3-13
Support Front-End Priorities	3-13
Collaborate	3-13
Plan With Families, Not for Them	3-13
Be Flexible in Specifying How Dollars Are to Be Used	3-13
Base Your Governance Structure on Collaborative	
Decision Making	3-13
A Four-Part Framework for Examining Financing Efforts	3-13
Redeployment	3-14
Refinancing	3-14
Raising Revenue	3-14
Restructuring Financial Systems	3-14
Step Five: Identifying Funding Sources	3-14
Four Principles for Researching Available Funding Sources	3-14
Identifying Appropriate Sources	3-15
Collect a Wide Range of Information	3-15
Tax All Funding Sources	3-15
Establish Collaborative Partnerships	3-15
Categories of Revenue Sources	3-15
Publicly Funded Grants and Patient Care Reimbursement	
From the Federal Government	3-16
Targeting Benefits and Services From Federal	
Funding	3-17
The Most Common Federal Sources	3-17
Utilizing the Early Prevention, Screening, Detection	
and Treatment Program and Medicaid	
Funding Options for School Mental Health	3-18
Challenges to Consider When Utilizing Medicaid	3-18

Utilizing SCHIP Funding	3-20
Utilizing IDEA Funding	3-20
Publicly Funded Grants From State and Local Government	3-22
State Support	3-22
Government Support	3-23
Privately Funded Grants	3-23
Patient Care Reimbursement From Commercial Insurance	3-24
Step Six: Anticipating Change as a Part of the Funding Plan	3-24
Parity	3-25
Disparity	3-25
Inclusion	3-26
Childhood Mental Health Disorders and Training	
Needs	3-26
The Extent of the Problem	3-27
The Need for Systems of Care	3-27
The Role of Prevention Programs	3-27
Treatments	3-28
Emphasis on Families and Culture	3-28
Conclusion	3-28

Chapter 4: Ethical Issues in School-Based Mental Health Treatment

Introduction	4-1
Ethical Considerations Related to Confidentiality	4-2
Confidentiality Related to Other Students and Visitors	4-2
Confidentiality Issues Related to Faculty and Staff	4-3
Ethical Issues Related to Informed Consent	4-4
Who Gives Consent to Treatment?	4-4
Components of Informed Consent	4-4
The Consent Must Be Informed	4-5
Informed Consent Must Be Voluntary	4-5
Person Giving Informed Consent Must Be Competent	4-6
Ethical Issues Related to Treatment Goals and Methods	4-6
The Child’s Clinical Needs	4-6
Needs of the Various Stakeholders	4-7
Conclusion	4-8

PART 2—COLLABORATION

Chapter 5: Individual Focus, Systemic Collaboration—The Current and Potential Role in the Integrated Delivery of Mental Health Services

Introduction	5-1
------------------------	-----

System of Care	5-2
Service Providers	5-2
Common Paths to Reform	5-3
Criticisms	5-3
Proponents of Reform	5-4
School Challenges	5-5
School-Based Reform Efforts	5-6
Full-Service Schools	5-6
Systems of Care	5-7
Obstacles and Best Practices	5-7
Financial Obstacles	5-7
Cultural Obstacles	5-8
Family Obstacles	5-9
Problems With Collaborative Efforts	5-9
Conclusion	5-10

Chapter 6: Involving Educators in School-Based Mental Health Programs

Introduction	6-2
Background and Context	6-2
Youth and Available Mental Health Services	6-2
Model for School-Based Mental Health Programs	6-3
Continuum of Programs	6-3
Collaboration	6-4
Center for School-Based Mental Health Programs	6-4
The Butler County School-Based Mental Health Program	6-5
Overview	6-5
Teacher-Consultants	6-5
Addressing Barriers to Learning Programs	6-6
Conferences	6-6
Teams	6-6
The Ohio Mental Health Network for School Success	6-7
Overview	6-7
Goals and Action Agenda	6-7
Educators as Key Members of the Mental Health Team	6-8
General Perspective on Empowerment of and Collaboration With Educators	6-8
Definition of Educator	6-8
Mental Health–Education Service Integration	6-8
Mandate to Educate	6-9
Collaboration	6-9

Recommendations to Enhance School-Based Mental Health Programs	6-10
Creating and Maintaining Ongoing, Empowering Dialogue With Educators	6-11
Communication via Newsletter and Web Site	6-12
Ongoing Commitment to Dialogue	6-12
Teacher-Consultants	6-12
Ongoing Communications	6-14
Assessing and Responding to Educator-Identified Needs and Concerns	6-14
Importance	6-14
Themes	6-14
School-Specific Needs Assessment Studies	6-15
Analysis of Educator Responses	6-15
Prioritizing Promotion of Healthy Development and Problem Prevention	6-16
Beyond Intervention	6-16
Examples of Desired Outcomes	6-17
Next Steps	6-18

Chapter 7: Effectiveness of Family Focused Interventions for School-Based Prevention

Breakdown of the Family	7-1
Parent Involvement and Support	7-2
Role of School and Family	7-2
Teachers	7-2
Support	7-2
Collaboration	7-3
Parents of At-Risk Students	7-3
Extracurricular Activities	7-3
Parent Support/Education Groups	7-4
Counseling and Guidance Programs	7-4
Funding	7-4
Tips for Identifying and Implementing the Best Family-Strengthening Programs	7-5
Needs Assessment	7-5
Family Protective and Resilience Factors	7-5
Training to Implement the Programs With Fidelity	7-6
What Works in Family-Focused Approaches to Prevention	7-7
Behavioral Parent Training	7-7
Family Skills Training or Behavioral Family Therapy	7-7

Family Therapy	7-8
Effectiveness of Family Interventions	7-9
Principles of Effective Family-Focused Interventions	7-10
Tips in Implementing Science-Based Family Programs	7-10
Conclusion	7-11

Chapter 8: Functional Family Therapy as a School-Based Mental Health Intervention Program

Introduction	8-2
Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Students	8-2
Treatments for Mental Health Problems	8-3
Functional Family Therapy as Primary Resource	8-3
What Are School-Based Mental Health Services?	8-4
Functional Family Therapy	8-5
Background	8-5
Implementation	8-5
Prevention and Intervention	8-6
An Evidence-Based Treatment	8-6
The FFT Clinical Model	8-7
Phase One: Engagement and Motivation	8-8
Phase Two: Behavior Change	8-9
Phase Three: Generalization	8-10
The FFT Implementation Model	8-11
Implementing FFT in School Settings	8-13
Case Example 1: Northeast Implementation of FFT	8-13
Program Funding	8-14
Problems Targeted by the Intervention	8-14
Implementation	8-14
Program Operation	8-15
Challenges	8-16
Anecdotal Outcomes	8-16
Case Example 2: West Coast Implementation of FFT	8-17
Program Funding	8-17
Problems Targeted by the Intervention	8-17
Implementation	8-18
Program Operation	8-19
Challenges	8-20
Anecdotal Outcomes	8-21
Principles for Implementing Effective Programs in School Settings	8-22
Collaboration and Partnership	8-22
Appropriate Program Selection	8-23

Stable Program Funding	8-24
Systematic and Collaborative Program Planning, Training, Implementation, and Operation	8-24
Conclusion	8-25

PART 3—PROGRAM EVALUATION

Chapter 9: Mental Health Program Evaluation—A Multicomponent, Multiperspective Mixed-Method Approach

Introduction	9-2
Assumptions	9-3
Foundation: School Psychology and Applied Anthropology	9-5
Participatory Consultation	9-5
Reflective (Science-Based) Practice	9-5
Participatory Action Research	9-6
Ethnography	9-6
Best Practices in Assessment	9-7
Process: Participatory and Iterative	9-7
Evaluation as a Participatory Process	9-8
Evaluation as an Iterative Process	9-8
Foci: Components and Perspectives	9-9
Multiple Components of Success	9-9
Acceptability	9-11
Social Validity	9-11
Integrity	9-11
Outcome	9-12
Sustainability	9-12
Institutionalization	9-12
Process-Outcome Links	9-13
Multiple Perspectives on Success	9-13
Whose Perspectives Should Be Considered?	9-14
What Are the Ecological Considerations?	9-14
Methodology: Qualitative and Quantitative	9-15
Conclusion	9-17

Chapter 10: Program Evaluation—Developing Outcome Indicators for School-Based Mental Health Programs

Introduction	10-2
Benefits of Mental Health Services	10-2
Integration of Mental Health Interventions	10-2

Gathering Outcome Data	10-2
Selecting an Appropriate Measure	10-3
Content of the Instrument	10-4
Source of Outcome Data	10-8
Teacher-Provided Information	10-8
Parent-Provided Information	10-9
Children’s Self-Reported Information	10-9
Professional Informants	10-9
Choosing Information Sources	10-10
Establishing a Data Collection System	10-10
Timing of Outcome Assessment Intervals	10-10
Implementation Challenges	10-11
Teachers	10-12
Administration	10-12
Parents	10-13
Lack of Resources	10-13
Summary	10-14
Putting the Data to Use	10-14
Using Aggregate Data to Evaluate Programs	10-14
Using Individual Data to Monitor Treatment Progress	10-15
Summary and Conclusion	10-16

Chapter 11: School Mental Health—Improving the Evidence Base for Interventions

Introduction	11-1
Services	11-2
Interventions	11-2
Program Evaluation Activities and the Model-Guided Method	11-2
Phase One	11-3
Phase Two	11-3
Phase Three	11-3
Phase Four	11-4
Phase Five	11-4
Implementing Evidence-Based Research in School Mental Health	
Programs	11-4
Implementation Studies: Tracking the Transportability of	
Treatments	11-6
Challenges to Conducting Implementation Studies	11-6
Overcoming Challenges	11-7
Examples of Transportability Studies	11-7

Educating Clinicians to Improve the Evaluation Process 11-9
 Disseminating Results of Effective Interventions 11-9
 Conclusion 11-10

PART 4—PROGRAM MODELS

Chapter 12: The “Let’s Talk About It” Model—Engaging Young People as Partners in Creating Their Own Mental Health Program

Introduction 12-2
 Youth Development and Mental Health Practice 12-3
 Stressors of Youth 12-3
 Group Work 12-3
 Support of Youth 12-4
 “Let’s Talk About It” 12-5
 Performance Social Therapy 12-5
 Youth Involvement 12-6
 Genesis of the “Let’s Talk About It” Program 12-6
 The Setting 12-6
 Beginnings 12-7
 Participation 12-8
 Progress 12-9
 Building the Group 12-9
 Emotionality and Painful Life Experiences 12-9
 Violence and Choicemaking 12-9
 Responding to Violence 12-10
 Channeling Anger Positively 12-11
 Dealing With Anger 12-12
 Program Growing Pains, Homosexuality, and
 Inclusion 12-13
 Key Principles of the “Let’s Talk About It” Program 12-15
 Relating to Young People as Partners and Competent
 Community-Builders 12-15
 Developing Choicemakers 12-16
 Performance 12-16
 Decisions 12-17
 Responsibility 12-17
 Heterogeneity and Inclusivity of the Groups 12-18
 Broadening the “Let’s Talk About It” Community 12-18
 Outcomes 12-20
 Not a Conclusion 12-21

Chapter 13: Integrating Research and Practice to Facilitate Implementation Across Multiple Contexts—Illustration From an Urban Middle School Drug and Sexual-Risk Prevention Program

Introduction 13-1

Group Norms Prevention Program 13-3

 The Program as Conceptualized 13-4

 The Program as Realized 13-5

 Year One: The Pilot Year 13-8

 Year Two: Full Implementation in Grade Six 13-12

Lessons Learned 13-21

 Consider Multiple-Level Factors 13-21

 Be Flexible 13-22

 Study Program Implementation Systematically 13-22

 Work on Relationships Continuously 13-22

 Integrate Research Insights Into Practice 13-22

Chapter 14: Preventing Special Education Placements of Children Subjected to Social Stressors—An Attachment Theory Perspective

Introduction 14-3

Basic Description of Program 14-6

 Outpatient Satellite Clinics 14-6

 Target Population 14-6

 Staffing 14-6

 Referral System 14-6

 Intake Procedure 14-7

 Psychotherapeutic Component 14-7

 Treatment Planning in Collaboration With School Personnel 14-7

Examples of Additional Supportive Services Primarily for Children 14-8

 Emergency Services 14-8

 Psychiatric Evaluations to Assess a Child’s Possible Suitability for a Trial of Medication 14-8

 A Developmental or Learning Evaluation 14-8

 Academic Tutoring 14-9

 An After-School Educational Program 14-9

 Summer Programs 14-9

Examples of Additional Supportive Services Primarily for Families 14-9

 Case Management and Crisis Intervention Services 14-9

 Investigative and Protective Services 14-9

Examples of Additional Supportive Services Primarily for	
Parents	14-10
Support Groups	14-10
Psychiatric Treatment for a Parent	14-10
Examples of Intensive Interventions When Treatment Through	
the On-Site Program Is Not Sufficient	14-10
Referral to a Special Education Program That Provides	
a Therapeutic Milieu	14-10
Evaluation and Treatment of Clients Involved With	
Drugs or Alcohol	14-10
Placement in a Residential Facility	14-10
Rationale Behind the Therapeutic Approach	14-11
The Basic Issue	14-11
Contextual Factors Associated With Disruptions in Attachment	
Relationships	14-11
Immediate Environment	14-11
Basic Disruptions in Attachment Relationships	14-12
Parental Emotional Issues	14-12
Parental Discord	14-12
Family Losses and Burdens	14-12
Inappropriate or Negative Parenting	14-13
Poverty	14-13
Case Examples of Contextual Factors Associated With	
Disruptions in Attachment Relationships	14-14
A Possible Genetic Predisposition Toward Vulnerability	14-15
Potentially Negative Influences Prior to Conception or	
In Utero	14-16
Quality of Prenatal Care and Care at Delivery	14-16
Medical Problems	14-16
Nutrition	14-16
Clinical Interpretation of the Presenting Problems	14-16
The General Clinical Picture	14-16
The Child's Sense of Self	14-17
The Child's Performance in School	14-18
Maladaptive Attachment Responses in the Classroom	14-18
When the Attachment System Remains Chronically	
Activated	14-19
Parents, Guardians, and Other Caregivers	14-19
The Therapeutic Mission	14-20
Mobilizing the Child's Capacity for an Attachment Relationship	14-20
Basic Theoretical Premise	14-20

Basic Aims	14-21
Therapeutic Strategies	14-21
Providing a Corrective Attachment Relationship/Experience	14-21
Establishing a Secure Base for the Child Within the School Environment	14-22
Establishing the Child's Trust in the Therapist's Responsiveness, Availability, Accessibility, and Usefulness	14-24
Establishing Family Trust	14-25
Being There for the Child	14-25
Titrating, Modifying, Anticipating, Intervening, and Guiding	14-26
Supporting the Child's Efforts at Achieving Tangible Success	14-26
Traditional Outpatient Psychotherapeutic Treatment	14-27
Collateral Parent Counseling and Family Psychotherapy	14-27
Strategies for Modifying Environments	14-28
Maximizing Structure for the Child Within the School Environment	14-28
Maximizing Structure for the Child Within the Home Environment	14-29
General Guidelines for Applying the Attachment Model of Treatment in Schools	14-29
Evidence for the Effectiveness of the SIMHS On-Site Program in Preventing Special Education Placements: Follow-up Studies	14-30
Educational Placement Classification at Discharge From the Program	14-30
Six-Year Follow-up	14-30
Responses	14-30
Placement in Special Education at Six-Year Follow-up	14-30
Improvement in School Behavior	14-31
Improvement in Attitude	14-31
Improvement in Self-Esteem	14-32
Improvement in Report Card Grades	14-32
Discussion	14-34
Limitations of the Current Study	14-34
Future Studies	14-34
Conclusion	14-35

Chapter 15: The Bridges Project—Meeting the Academic and Mental Health Needs of Children Through a Continuum of Positive Supports

Introduction	15-2
Challenges for Youth	15-2
Challenges for Agencies	15-3

Challenges for Schools	15-4
Building Bridges of Support in Kentucky	15-4
The Bridges Project	15-5
Positive Behavioral Supports	15-7
Universal Interventions	15-8
Targeted Interventions	15-9
Intensive Interventions	15-9
Program Evaluation Efforts	15-10
Descriptive Information	15-10
Outcome Data	15-10
Implementation Realities	15-11
Identifying and Supporting Qualified Staff Is Critical	15-11
Conjoint Hiring and Supervision Improves Relationships	15-11
Supervision Is Essential to Maintaining Fidelity to the Model	15-12
Technical Assistance and Training Must Be Ongoing and Focused	15-12
Evaluation and Program Efforts Should Be Mainstreamed	15-13
Attending to Individual and Cultural Differences Is Vital	15-13
Readiness for Innovation Must Be Assessed	15-13
Areas for Expansion	15-13
School-Based Mental Health and Early Childhood	15-14
Mental Health Promotion Efforts	15-14
Expanding Interagency Partners	15-15
Sustainability and Funding Opportunities Must Be Explored	15-15
Kentucky School Mental Health Coalition	15-15
Health Care Providers	15-15
Conclusion	15-17

Chapter 16: Community Resources for Families Programs—Using Client Outcomes to Measure Program Success

Introduction	16-2
History of Boise Intervention	16-3
Expansion to Northern Idaho and State-Wide	16-4
1999–2000 State-Wide Program Process	16-5
Referral Process and Reasons	16-6
Services	16-6
Cost of Providing EA Services to Families	16-7
Characteristics of the Caretakers	16-7
Impact of the Statewide Expansion	16-7
1999–2000 Program Effectiveness Evaluation	16-7
Study Question No. 1: Was Climate of Safety Improved?	16-8

Outcome Measure No. 1: CRW Ratings at End of Service	16-8
Outcome Measure No. 2: Number of Families Receiving Subsequent CPS Referrals	16-9
Outcome Measure No. 3: Family Access to Medical Services	16-9
Outcome Measure No. 4: Connections to Community Agencies	16-10
Outcome Measure No. 5: Connections to Community/School Activities	16-12
Goal No. 1 Conclusion	16-12
Study Question No. 2: Is School Readiness Increased?	16-13
Outcome Measure No. 1: Interviews With School Personnel	16-13
Outcome Measure No. 2: CRW Ratings	16-15
Goal No. 2 Conclusion	16-15
Study Question No. 3: Was Self-Reliance Improved?	16-16
Outcome Measure No. 1: Increases in Employment in Sample Families	16-16
Outcome Measure No. 2: Increases and/or Upgrading of Housing	16-17
Outcome Measure No. 3: Increases in Health Insurance	16-18
Outcome Measure No. 4: Type and Number of Community Contacts	16-18
Outcome Measure No. 5: CRW Outcome Ratings	16-19
Goal No. 3 Conclusion	16-20
Discussion	16-20
Increased Child Safety	16-20
Increasing School Readiness	16-20
Increased Self-Reliance	16-21
Conclusions Drawn From CRFF Program Implementation 1994–2000	16-21

Chapter 17: Moving Psychiatric Day Treatment Services From the Hospital to a School-Based Mental Health Program

Introduction	17-1
Outcomes of Day Treatment	17-2
Valley Mental Health School-Based Day Treatment	17-3
History and Development	17-3
Components of the School-Based Day Treatment Program	17-4
Level System With Token Economy	17-4

Verbal Reinforcement of Appropriate Behavior	17-5
Reductive Techniques	17-5
Social Skills Training	17-5
Individualized Behavior Contracts	17-5
Family Therapy	17-5
Generalization	17-6
Outcomes	17-6
Clinical Outcomes	17-6
Consumer Satisfaction	17-7
Conclusion: Factors Comprising Successful School-Based Mental Health Interventions	17-7

Chapter 18: School-Based Mental Health Programs—The South Carolina Experience

Problems Facing School Population in South Carolina	18-1
School-Based Mental Health Is Going Where the Children Are	18-4
Goals and Objectives of School-Based Mental Health Programs	18-4
History of South Carolina School-Based Mental Health Programs	18-5
What School-Based Programs Strive to Accomplish	18-5
Range of Preventive Service Programs	18-6
Empowerment of Youth and Families	18-7
Service Providers	18-7
Program Growth	18-7
Ongoing Program Development/Sustainment	18-8
Outcome Data	18-9
Future of School-Based Mental Health in South Carolina	18-10

Chapter 19: Project ACHIEVE and the Development of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Self-Management Systems—Prevention, Intervention, and Intensive Needs Approaches

Introduction	19-2
Characteristics of a School-Wide Positive Behavioral Self-Management System	19-4
Putting SPBSMS into the Context of School-Wide Action Planning and Project ACHIEVE	19-5
Project ACHIEVE Components	19-5
Strategic Planning/Organizational Analysis and Development	19-8
RQC	19-8
Effective Teacher/Staff Development	19-9
Instructional Consultation; Curriculum-Based Assessment/ Intervention	19-9

Behavioral Consultations and Interventions	19-10
Parent Training, Tutoring, and Support	19-11
Research and Accountability	19-11
Summary	19-12
Six Primary Areas of a School-Wide Positive Behavioral	
Self-Management System	19-12
Teaching Students Prosocial Skills	19-12
Four Basic Skills Areas	19-12
Stop and Think Social Skills Program	19-13
Behavioral/Social Learning Approach	19-14
Accountability	19-15
Consistency	19-16
Special Situation Analyses: Analyzing Building-Wide	
Behavioral Situations	19-16
Student Characteristics, Issues, and Factors	19-16
Teacher/Staff Characteristics, Issues, and Factors	19-16
Environmental Characteristics, Issues, and Factors—	
Physical Plant and Logistics	19-17
Incentives and Consequences	19-17
Resources	19-17
Peer Group	19-18
Crisis Prevention, Intervention, and Response	19-18
Prevention Relative to Student-Oriented Crises	19-18
Prevention Relative to Event-Oriented Crises	19-19
Community and Family Outreach	19-19
Project ACHIEVE’s Empirical Outcomes From Three Longitudinal Sites	19-20
Demographic Overview of the Three Sites	19-20
Jesse Keen Elementary School	19-20
Cleveland Elementary School	19-21
Hotchkiss Elementary School	19-21
Results in Brief	19-22
Jesse Keen Elementary School	19-22
Cleveland Elementary School	19-23
Hotchkiss Elementary School	19-25
Conclusion	19-26

Chapter 20: Problems and Solutions in Sustaining School-Based Behavior Management Programs—The North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System Experience

Introduction	20-2
History and Development	20-2

The ASMH Mission	20-2
Contextualizing School-Based Behavior Management:	
Identifying Key Questions and Dynamics	20-3
Bully Reduction Anti-Violence Education	20-3
Buy-in	20-4
Redefining Goals	20-5
Transfer of Skills	20-5
Process of Culture Change	20-7
Balance	20-8
Outcome	20-8
Computer Institute	20-11
Redefining Goals	20-11
Transfer of Skills	20-12
Process of Culture Change	20-13
Balance	20-13
Outcome	20-14
Intensive and Collaborative Clinical Assistance Network	20-14
Buy-in	20-15
Redefining Goals	20-16
Transfer of Skills	20-17
Culture Change	20-18
Balance	20-19
Outcomes	20-19
Lessons Learned	20-22
Buy-in: The Interplay of Multiple Factors	20-22
Redefining Goals: Improving the Needs/Resource "Fit"	20-23
Transfer of Skills: Defining Expectations for Self-Sufficiency	20-23
Culture Change: The Need for Partnership, the Inevitability of the Unexpected	20-18
Agenda for the Future	20-25

Chapter 21: Confronting Stigma in Idaho—An Idaho Community-Based Social Marketing Campaign

Introduction	21-2
Prevalence of Mental Illness	21-3
Stigma and Mental Illness	21-3
Early Intervention	21-4
Using Social Marketing to Address Stigma	21-4
Attitudes and Behaviors	21-5
Communication Tools	21-5

The Idaho Antistigma Project	21-5
Background	21-5
Development of the Antistigma Campaign	21-6
Goals	21-6
Goals for the General Public	21-7
Goals for Senior High School Students	21-7
Goals for Junior High/Middle School Students	21-7
Methods	21-7
Participants	21-7
Materials	21-8
The General Public	21-8
Opinion Leaders	21-8
High School Students	21-8
Junior High/Middle School Students	21-8
Procedure and Analysis	21-10
Participants	21-10
Schools	21-10
Training Program	21-10
Social Marketing Technique	21-11
Data Analysis	21-11
Results of the Junior High/Middle School Campaign	21-11
Demographics	21-11
Response Rates	21-12
Contact Units	21-12
Achievement of Goals	21-12
Antistigma Goal: Reduce Stigma Toward Mental Illnesses	21-14
Science Goal: Increase the Level of Knowledge About Science of Mental Illness and Evidence-Based Practice ...	21-15
Treatment Goal: Encourage Early Identification and Treatment Based on “Warning Signs” of Mental Illness	21-15
Discussion	21-16
Goals	21-16
Antistigma Goal	21-16
Science Goal	21-17
Treatment Goal	21-17
Challenges to Successful Program Implementation and Limits of This Study	21-17
Demographic and Geographic Issues	21-17

Response-Rate Issues	21-18
Effect on the Target Audience	21-19
Future Directions	21-19
Appendix A: Bibliography	A-1
Index	I-1

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