

Shrink Rap - Mentoring; The Power of One

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In the counseling field there are numerous schools of thought regarding the most effective therapy techniques. While the specific strategies utilized are of great importance, the success of any therapeutic approach is primarily a function of the underlying relationship between client and therapist. More specifically, the client knowing that the therapist genuinely cares.

I recently had the opportunity to sit down with the dedicated and talented staff of September High School. I asked them about their core beliefs regarding their work. They all agreed that the most important ingredient to success was the quality of the relationship with their students.

All human beings have an instinctual need for warmth, nurturance and support from at least one other human being. This begins on a tactile level at birth. Infants (and young children) who are persistently denied caretaker attention invariably develop emotional difficulties and abnormal behavior patterns. These children often display a lack of social responsiveness. They often apathetically stare into space, lacking social interest, curiosity and spontaneity. In severe cases, these children also fail to thrive in terms of weight gain and motor development.

As a parent it's easy to get consumed by the myriad tasks and issues that come with the responsibilities of raising a child and lose sight of the importance of the underlying relationship. It often involves the simplest things, like conveying a sense of love and caring, as well as simply having fun together.

It is not widely known, but one of the most effective interventions for young children and adolescents is something that you don't need any graduate training to provide. It should be no surprise, with what we know about the importance of relationship, that this powerful experience is the gift of mentoring. Studies reveal that youth who are provided with an effective mentor often demonstrate significantly improved academic, social and emotional functioning and are at a reduced risk for substance abuse, criminal and violent behavior. Mentoring is a unique way for one person volunteering a limited amount of time to have a powerful impact on the life of a child. Research has shown that it is specifically the quality of the relationship between mentor and child that dictates its success and why mentor training is such an important component of any mentoring program.

There are many agencies in our community that match at-risk youth with mentors. Several of these mentoring programs have formed a collaboration called MentorsMatter. This service helps to match potential mentors with programs based upon their interests and time availability. Typically time commitments vary from a few hours a week, to a few hours a month. Too often we feel helpless in the face of challenges in our society. Mentoring is an opportunity for individuals to make a real impact. For more information, call The Volunteer Connection at 303-444-4904 or email them at mentors@volunteerconnection.net.