

NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or...A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.



Volume 2, Issue 9

September 2009

Dear Colleague,

What is the impact of teens on other teens in treatment groups?

This month's research provides an overview to the interesting question about whether the influence of peers in adolescent group treatment is helpful or creates "deviancy training" for the youth with whom you are working. The research also points to the importance of adults and communities teaching, valuing, and providing access to a healthier model of social interaction.

We hope that this article and the NEARI resources we highlight in this month's issue will provide you with some thought-provoking materials about how to work with children and teens in today's environment.

As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to examine a particular issue, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis



NEARI Press

www.neari.com

Group Treatment for Adolescents: Helpful or Harmful?

by David S. Prescott, LICSW *

Question

What is "deviancy training" and why are researchers concerned that it happens in group treatment, right under the noses of professionals?

The Issue

In the past 15 years, a number of studies have indicated that putting adolescents who have engaged in misconduct together can actually increase their risk of committing further harm. Prominent journals and magazines have devoted attention to these challenging findings, with one influential article titled *When Interventions Harm*. This news has justifiably disturbed professionals providing group treatment to adolescents who have sexually abused.

The Research

Weiss and his colleagues closely examined published and unpublished studies of antisocial youth. They explored both conceptual and scientific issues, and concluded that the presence of antisocial peer groups does not necessarily increase the likelihood of future misconduct. The authors emphasized that while the evidence is convincing that misbehaving youth can influence each other in general settings ("deviancy training"), this negative influence is not seen in group treatment situations. While the authors don't explicitly say so, it is interesting that most of the studied effects have more to do with whether adolescents take up smoking or behave poorly in the classroom than with future arrest for a serious crime. In one well-known study, the purported effects of these peer groupings were not apparent until 30 years later, and "treatment" involved mentoring and case management.

NEARI RESOURCES

Understanding Children's Sexual Behaviors - From Natural and Healthy to Disturbed (4 CEUs)

Instructor: Toni Cavanagh Johnson, Ph.D.

Dr. Johnson is a licensed clinical psychologist, author, and internationally recognized researcher and trainer in the field of child sexual abuse. Her essential course helps people working with children understand what are the expected behaviors related to sex and sexuality in young children and how to distinguish them from behaviors that are of concern and require some intervention.

Cost: \$45

Time: 3-4 Hours

Continuing Education Credits: Available for a small fee.

[Click here](#) to view a sample of this online course (one-minute in length).

Publication from NEARI

Promoting Healthy Childhood Development Today: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

By James R. Harris, Jr. (2007)

This text combines accepted child-rearing techniques and theory with contemporary approaches in caring for children. The guide promotes positive childhood development and offers support for the adult caregiver, whether parent, foster parent, or residential facility staff. Harris recognizes the importance of adults consistently demonstrating the desired behavior and intervening in the child's uncritical acceptance of negative media messages. Using charts and examples, the book covers common areas of concern and conflict with uncommon sense, including avoiding bedtime battles, curtailing aggression in children, discussing drugs and alcohol with youth, alleviating school-related anxiety, and protecting children on the Internet.

Paperback, 92 pages

ISBN #: 1-929657-30-7

Cost: \$17, plus s&h

Implications for Professionals

The impact of peers is important. Although the authors conclude that some studies overstate the likelihood of harm by group-based treatment, it is worthwhile to remember that adolescents are susceptible to influence outside of treatment. Therefore, professionals working with adolescents need to look at the impact of friends, families, schools, faith organizations, and many other places outside of treatment that influence their clients.

Positive Peer and Adult Influence. Because of the impact that peers and other individual have on teens, it is essential that adolescents receive guidance and access to healthy, normative activities. The best prevention against "deviancy training" is likely prosocial adults and age-mates, and the opportunity to make decisions.

Implications for the Field

One study does not a reality make. There are many examples of times when one or two studies determined the future direction of professional practice for years. This study serves as a reminder that we should all study the research on the one hand and remain very skeptical on the other.

Reference

- Weiss, B., Caron, A., Ball, S., Tapp, J., Johnson, M., & Weisz, J.R. (2005). Iatrogenic effects of group treatment for antisocial youth. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 73*, 1036-1044.

To print a pdf of this article, click [newsletter](#).

Abstract

It has been argued that group treatment of antisocial adolescents may increase rather than decrease conduct problems. One mechanism that has been suggested to underlie this effect is "deviancy training," wherein during group sessions deviant peers reinforce each other's antisocial actions and words. These two hypotheses have important implications and warrant close review at conceptual and empirical levels. In this article, the authors present such a review. Conceptually, deviancy training potential of treatment sessions appears less significant than the more extensive peer influences outside treatment. Empirical findings previously cited in support of iatrogenic effects appear on close examination to provide little support. Finally, 17 of 18 new meta-analytic tests produced results not supportive of iatrogenic or deviancy training effects.

* With thanks to Phil Rich Ed.D. MSW, who brought this article to the author's attention.

Featured Website

<http://www.srcd.org/>

The Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) promotes multidisciplinary research in the field of human development, fosters the exchange of information among scientists and other professionals of various disciplines, and encourages applications of research findings.

Their social policy reports are a great resource and we would particularly like to point you to their 2006 report, *Deviant Peer Influences in Intervention and Public Policy for Youth*: www.srcd.org/documents/publications/SPR/spr20-1.pdf.

**About the Author:
David S. Prescott, LICSW**

[David Prescott website](#)

A nationally recognized expert in the field of sexual abuse assessment, treatment, management, and prevention, Mr. Prescott has published numerous articles and authored, edited, and co-edited books on risk assessment, interviewing, and providing residential treatment to youth. He is the President of ATSA and is currently the Clinical Director at the Minnesota Sex Offender Program in Moose Lake, Minnesota.

Questions/Feedback

Please email us at info@neari.com or call us at 413.540.0712 to let us know if you have a question or a topic you would like us to cover.

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