

Strategies for Creating Clinical Dynamite:

Working with Kids & Their Parents Who Are
Anxious & Depressed

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Disclosure

- ❁ Dr. Karen Cassiday has no financial disclosures
- ❁ The content of this presentation reflects only her clinical experience and opinion
- ❁ Dr. Cassiday also wishes she had magic wands to hand out to all participants...

Goals for Today

- ❁ Overcome your worst clinical nightmares
- ❁ Typical mistakes made by therapists dealing with multigenerational presentations of psychopathology
- ❁ Interventions that overcome multigenerational psychopathology
- ❁ Maintain therapist optimism and persistence

What is Your Worst Clinical Nightmare?

- ❁ Kids who won't try who have...
- ❁ Parents who won't try and....
- ❁ Live in a family culture of anxious despair
 - ❁ Pessimism
 - ❁ Negativity
 - ❁ Passivity
 - ❁ Therapist Eaters!!!!

Signs That This is Not Treatment as Usual

- ❁ The referral source makes a special request and apologizes profusely for the referral
- ❁ The entire family is in therapy, including couples therapy &/or family therapy
- ❁ Both the parents and the kid are blaming each other &/or the school for their problems & inertia
- ❁ Many good therapists have previously worked with this family/kid

Other Warning Signals

- ❁ Parent says that there is nothing that they can do in front of the kid
- ❁ Kid says that there is nothing that can be done in front of the parents
- ❁ No one seems interested when you discuss diagnosis & treatment options
 - ❁ “Yes, but....”
- ❁ Parents & kid openly express dislike for each other and their family

The Culture of Defeat

- ❁ Nothing I ever do is good enough
- ❁ I cannot stand my kids
- ❁ No therapist has ever been able to help my kid....
- ❁ No therapist has ever been able to help me...
- ❁ We have already tried everything....and we are possibly getting a divorce...
- ❁ We cannot stand ourselves & neither can anyone else!

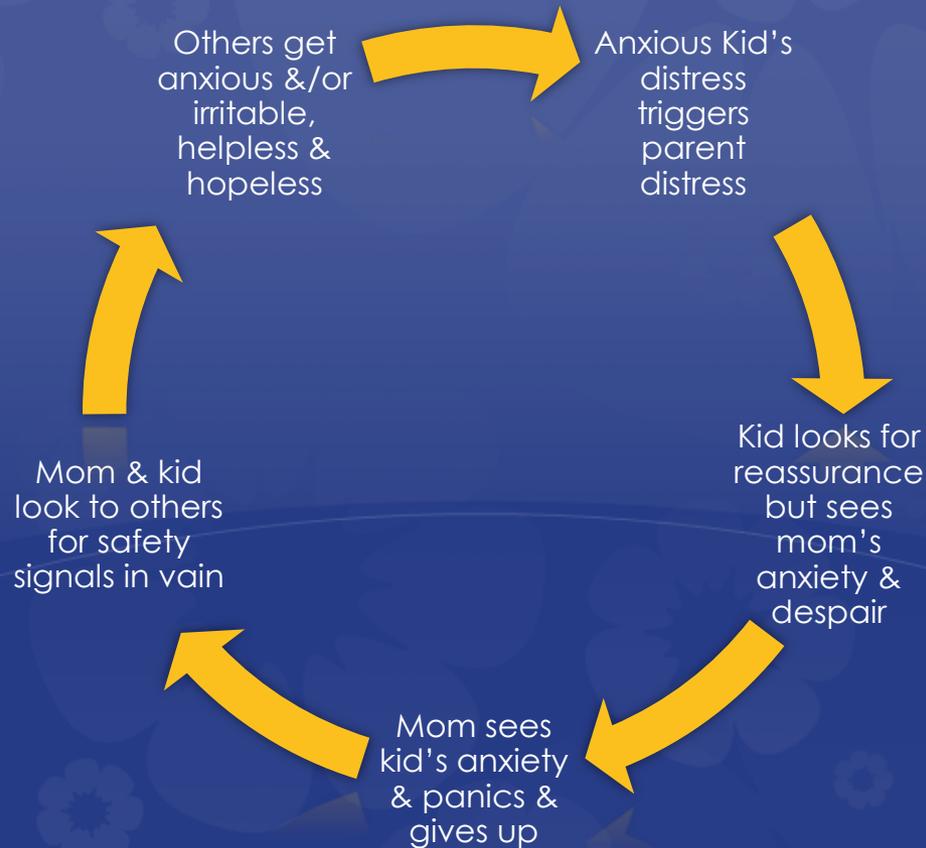
Culture of Defeat, cont'd



Culture of Defeat, cont'd



Anxious Family Cycle of Defeat



Traditional Approach to Treatment

- ❁ Kid gets individual therapy
- ❁ Mom gets referred to therapy
- ❁ Couple gets referred to therapy
- ❁ The whole family gets turfed to family therapy

What's Wrong With This Picture?

- ❁ Quid pro quo mentality
- ❁ Failure to identify useful targets
- ❁ Failure to work with what you have
- ❁ Setting yourself & the patient(s) up for repeat failure

What is the Goal?

- ❁ It might not be what you think!
 - ❁ Remission of symptoms, but which ones?
- ❁ Need to target treatment interfering behaviors & beliefs first
- ❁ Target symptoms of depression & anxiety second

Creating Clinical Dynamite

- ❁ How to break up & blast lose the following:
 - ❁ Unhelpful beliefs (even when they accurately reflect reality)
 - ❁ Unhelpful behaviors
 - ❁ Improper focus upon
 - ❁ Self-blame
 - ❁ Blaming others (including therapists)
 - ❁ Psychopathology
 - ❁ Being rescued by professionals

What Can be Done?

- ❁ Goal #1-Do not repeat the mistakes of the past
 - ❁ Find out what has been done in previous therapies
 - ❁ Assume that you cannot improve upon it
 - ❁ Aim to be different and creative

What Can Be Done?

- ❁ Goal #2
 - ❁ Change the family belief system
 - ❁ Use concepts used in individual therapies
 - ❁ Pleasant events scheduling
 - ❁ Act “as if”
 - ❁ Radical acceptance
 - ❁ Defeat defeatism with gratitude, good humor and realistic hope

Typical Unhelpful Early Targets

- ❁ Failure to complete homework in the child
- ❁ Failure of parents to follow through with consequences/rewards
- ❁ Lots of expressed negative emotion
- ❁ Crisis management mentality
- ❁ Chronic fighting/arguing
- ❁ The identified disorder(s)

How to Talk to The Parents

- ❁ You have accidentally.....
- ❁ You have probably already know this...
- ❁ You are trying too hard
- ❁ You love your child too much
- ❁ It's time for you to take a vacation from parenting, let me show you how
- ❁ Most parents in your situation would have given up by now

Why Refocus

- ❁ Do you want to be the next therapist who is eaten alive?
- ❁ Families who cannot establish reasonable behavioral management will be unable to utilize your interventions
- ❁ Time spent with each other is mutually punishing
 - ❁ The emotional pain threshold is very low
 - ❁ You need to stop the pain fast, before you lose the family

Create Experiences That Motivate

- ❁ Experience teaches better than talking
- ❁ Create experiences that promote hope, shared well-being & a desire to work together
- ❁ Undercut the cycle of mutually reinforcing psychopathology
- ❁ Avoid re-creating the cycle of mutual blame

How to Talk to Kids

- ❁ Would you like to learn how to get your parents off your back?
- ❁ Would you like to prove them wrong?
- ❁ Would you like to get your parents to be quiet?
- ❁ Would you like to stop being the focus of everyone's attention?

Refocusing the Family

- ❁ Tell everyone that they all have a point, that they are all correct
- ❁ Normalize their situation, no matter how crazy
- ❁ Redefine the problem
 - ❁ How can we all learn how to make life better for everyone?
 - ❁ Get a long term focus on good living
 - ❁ We have to stop the pain before we can heal

What Helps Families Function Well?

- ❁ A culture that promotes
 - ❁ Good physical health
 - ❁ Good mental health
 - ❁ Gratitude
 - ❁ Acceptance & non-judgement
 - ❁ Social Support

Hot Button Areas to Address

- ✿ Sleep
- ✿ Exercise
- ✿ Lack of family fun time, sense of humor
- ✿ Therafamily Syndrome
- ✿ Nutrition & Diet
- ✿ Lack of novelty & excitement

Sleep

- ❁ Who is sleeping/not sleeping?
 - ❁ Ensure the sleep of the parents first
 - ❁ Ensure regular sleep/wake times for the family
 - ❁ What will help each person get adequate sleep?
 - ❁ Be willing to use antihistamines, melatonin
 - ❁ Family practice of laying in bed quietly
 - ❁ Fasting from TV/screens time

Exercise

- ❁ Who is active/inactive?
- ❁ Family walks, bike rides, dancing, dog walking, cat walking, Wii sports, DDR
- ❁ Parents need exercise breaks- exercise is compared to meds & therapy
- ❁ Make this part of the experiment-let's see what happens?

Failure to do Homework

- ❁ Go electronic
 - ❁ Use texting,
 - ❁ smartphone videos of doing the activity
 - ❁ smartphone voice recordings
- ❁ Or just scrap it-let them just tell you each week what happened

Ignore the Grumbling

- ❁ Normalize grumbling from both sides
 - ❁ I can see why it is horrible for each of you
 - ❁ Kids & parents always grumble about e.o.
- ❁ Rewards from therapist for ignoring it
 - ❁ Offer family reframes-family spam
 - ❁ Why listen to stupid things that people say?

Creating Family Fun

- ❁ Competition for best jokes/worst jokes
- ❁ Family movie night-no comments allowed
- ❁ Thank you competition
- ❁ Family grace that thanks God for 3 things each day
- ❁ Family gratitude journal
- ❁ Bed time ritual of naming 3 gratitudes

Creating Family Fun

- ✿ Contest for funniest Youtube video (ifunny.com)
- ✿ Watching comedies together
- ✿ Game night with non-competitive games
 - ✿ Charades
 - ✿ Guitar hero
 - ✿ Wii orchestra/rock band
 - ✿ Analyze Me, Party Pooper, The Game of Things

Family Fun, cont'd

- ❁ Avoid family board games-tends to provoke too much competition and criticism
- ❁ Go on weird tourism adventures
 - ❁ Use the Weird _your state's name_ tour guides
- ❁ Create a strange family collection
 - ❁ Squashed bottle caps, scariest crucifix, most unusual thing done with bacon, weirdest find in a thrift shop

More Family Fun

- ✿ Mix up the roles/crazy day
 - ✿ Kids cook dinner and parents play video games
 - ✿ With teens-kids pay the bills and parents play the video games/watch TV or Youtube.com

Decreasing Hostile Behaviors

- ❁ Anti-nagging rule-parents pay a dollar for each nag or criticism
- ❁ Practice ignoring each other-playing turtle in the shell
- ❁ Report cards given by kids
- ❁ Stop futile efforts at persuasion
- ❁ Rewards for other family members staying out of a fight

Case Example

Summary

- ❁ Improve family culture first
 - ❁ Stop the blame
 - ❁ Increase mutual pleasure
 - ❁ Instill family pride/positive identity
 - ❁ Change the topic of conversation
 - ❁ Establish good health behaviors
 - ❁ Decrease hostile behaviors
 - ❁ Create some fun!

Your Questions?

...and thank you!