

CONNECTIONS DAY SCHOOL

THERAPEUTIC PROGRAM INFORMATION

Therapeutic services are an integral part of the CDS program. The Clinical Staff/Therapists at Connections Day School (CDS) are here to provide individual, group & family therapy, and crisis intervention for each of our students.

Each student is assigned an individual therapist who will meet with him/her in a manner to best meet the student's needs while also meeting the requirements outlined in the student's IEP. These sessions focus on a wide variety of issues, including the student's: reason for referral to CDS; primary issues and concerns; level of self-awareness and insight; emotional and behavioral management skills; coping, problem-solving and self-soothing skills; communication and relationship skills, etc. Therapists also serve as the primary contact person for parents; and case managers who coordinate their work with outside service providers, such as: Therapists, Psychiatrists, DCFS Caseworkers, Probation Officers, SASS Workers, etc.

Dr. Kristen Pollina serves as the Senior Psychologist of CDS, and Dr. Giovanna Vitullo serves as the SEDOL Diagnostic/IAES Program Coordinator. Dr. Pollina and Dr. Vitullo are Licensed Clinical Psychologists who supervise all of the clinical staff. CDS is a well-established and respected training site for graduate students in clinical psychology who are at various points in their training to earn Master's degrees or Doctoral degrees in Clinical Psychology.

Therapists are available throughout the day for **individual therapy** sessions, and **crisis management**. If any staff member feels a student requires therapeutic support, or if a student request to meet with his/her therapist, the therapist will be contacted, and s/he will pull the student for a session as soon as possible. Therapists collaborate with the CDS teaching staff to identify appropriate times to pull students from their academic day for therapeutic services and support.

If a student reports any distressing and/or concerning event, or shares information about the following three issues, staff members must report this information to her/his therapist or supervisor immediately:

1. The student intends to harm her/himself.
2. The student intends to harm someone else.
3. The student is being harmed by, or is harming, someone else.

Within individual therapy, clinicians utilize a cognitive-behavioral/problem-solving approach as well as psychodynamic, family-systems and narrative principles. In addition, the Lakota-Sioux Circle of Courage, which teaches the value of belonging, independence, generosity and mastery, is explored to help students develop these essential life skills. This multi-faceted approach works to assist the students in: overcoming issues at hand; practicing more successful behavioral alternatives; and exploring ways to re-write their negative life stories. The goal is to work with students to build on their strengths and gifts, and be allies with them in their "fight" against the challenges and obstacles that get in the way of their success. The therapeutic milieu is based on a positive, nurturing model, where natural, logical consequences for behaviors are frequently utilized.

Therapists facilitate **group therapy** within the students' homerooms every day. These groups are focused on the development of social/emotional skills, life skills (Circle of Courage), coping & problem-solving skills and relaxation, self-soothing & stress-management skills. Students also rotate through the various

specialty groups throughout the week: Art Therapy, Music Appreciation, Drug & Alcohol Education and Personal Management. There are also **specialized pull-out groups** for our students with identified needs: Substance Abuse, Family (Substance Abuse) Issues, Chosen Stars (for adopted & foster children), and Grief & Loss.

Individual art therapy and **individual substance abuse treatment** are also options for our students who would benefit from, or require, these additional supportive services. Both the Art Therapist and Substance Abuse Specialist are active members of the clinical team, who frequently collaborate with the therapists and other related services staff.

In order to support our students in their efforts to make and sustain progress in their lives, CDS offers, and strongly encourages, **family therapy** for our students, their parents/guardians, and if possible, siblings and extended family who live in the home.

In addition, there are monthly **parent groups and activities** in the evenings (see the CDS website for the schedule), where collaboration and communication with CDS staff and families is reinforced; and where guest speakers and educational programs are utilized to explore a variety of topics relevant to our CDS families. These topics include: behavior management within the home, preparation for life transitions, understanding the experience of your special education student, encouraging social/emotional development, preventing and addressing drug and alcohol issues, multi-family art therapy, and much more.

Dr. Michael Greenbaum, a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist from Counseling Connection (our Parent Company), meets monthly with all therapists for individual **psychiatric consultation**. Dr. Greenbaum is also available at other times of the month for psychiatric consultation, observations and evaluations.

In addition to the services identified above, CDS offers a comprehensive array of support services, including:

- Small Group & Individualized Academic Instruction
- Substance Abuse Evaluation
- Occupational Therapy and Speech & Language Evaluations and Services
- Social/Emotional, Problem-Solving & Coping Skill Building
- A Comprehensive Behavioral Management Program
- Daily School Nurse Services
- Transition & Post-Graduation Preparation