

VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS ACADEMY

THERAPEUTIC PROGRAM INFORMATION

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

Each student has an individual therapist who will meet with him/her at least for the stipulated therapy minutes on the IEP, and more often if needed. These sessions focus on a wide variety of issues, including the student's: reason for referral to VCA; 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 in collaboration with the teacher/case managers serve as the primary contact person for parents who coordinate their work with outside service providers, such as: Therapists, Psychiatrists, DCFS Caseworkers, Probation Officers, SASS Workers, School Counselors etc.

Dr. Bernadette Santiago serves as the Clinical Director of VCA. Therapists are available throughout the day for **individual therapy** and **crisis management**. If any staff member feels a student requires therapeutic support, or if a student requests to meet with his/her therapist, the therapist will be contacted immediately, and s/he will contact the student for a session as soon as possible. Therapists collaborate with the VCA 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 multiple approaches depending on the needs of the students including cognitive-behavioral/problem-solving, 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 rewrite their negative life stories. The goal is to work with students' strengths and gifts, and to help them be aware of their challenges and obstacles to 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** on a weekly basis. 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 Therapy, Occupational Therapy, among others. There are also **specialized pull-out groups** for our students with identified needs: Guys' Issues, Girls' Issues, etc.

Individual art therapy and **individual music therapy** are also options for our students who would benefit from, or require, these additional supportive services. Both the Art Therapist and Music Therapist 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, VCA offers, and strongly encourages, **family therapy** for our students, their parents/guardians, and if possible, siblings and extended family who live in the home.

Dr. Michael Greenbaum, a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist from Counseling Connections, 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, VCA offers a comprehensive array of support services, including:

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

