

CORAL GABLES GAZETTE

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FEBRUARY 26 - MARCH 3, 2004

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Teen substance abuse treatment needs family's help

In response to "UM researcher wins national award" (Gazette Feb. 5-11), as a professional in the field of adolescent addictions, my congratulations to Dr. Howard Liddle on winning the 2003 Dan Anderson Research Award from the Hazelden Foundation.

This well-deserved recognition serves to also acknowledge the importance of family interaction in adolescent substance abuse treatment. Liddle's findings on multidimensional family therapy (MDFT) support a family-based treatment for teenage substance abusers. During the family therapy approach parents are helped to examine their particular parenting styles, to distinguish influence from control, and to accept that

not everything can be changed in order they have a developmentally appropriate positive influence on their child.

MDFT was compared to two alternative models of drug abuse treatment: peer group therapy and multifamily educational group therapy. Results indicated overall improvement among teens in all three programs with MDFT showing the highest improvement rate. This finding shows that family-based therapy is an effective approach to treating adolescent drug abuse. The studies also found that the more youth participated fully in a therapy session, the more likely that such engagement would take the form of conversation with the therapist.

Research has suggested that

substance abuse by one member of a family system changes the way the family adapts and functions. Things do not get better right away. Abstinence is not enough and the family needs to learn a whole new way of interacting. The family dynamics can actually lead to the teen being at risk of relapse. Liddle's study also found improvement in "social behaviors such as school performance and family functioning" which leads me to emphasize that the therapist, school officials, including teachers and administrators, and counselors all should be cultivated as friends of the family, all working towards the best interest of the teen.

MARINO E. CARBONELL
South Miami Psychotherapist