

Treatment Considerations with Undocumented Children, Adolescents and Families



LISA R. FORTUNA, MD, MPH

**ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF PSYCHIATRY
DIRECTOR OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT
MULTICULTURAL HEALTH RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS
MEDICAL SCHOOL**



Outline



**IMMIGRATION, LEGAL STATUS AND
FAMILY**

**MENTAL HEALTH, SERVICES AND
UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT YOUTH**

TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS

SEPARATION



Emotional Trauma and Psychological Stress



- Separation anxiety
- Other Anxiety Disorders
 - PTSD
 - Generalized Anxiety Disorders
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Grief
- Disruptive Behaviors
- Academic difficulties

Therapy Considerations



- **Psychosocial issues are big piece of this!**
- **Legal protection is a big issue!**
 - You can imagine why not a lot of research
- **Trauma and Stress**
- **Resiliency over real social and political stressors and barriers**
- **Family support**
- **Instilling hope and ameliorating anxiety and fear**

Barriers to mental health services for the undocumented



- Low entry and retention in mental health services
- Psychosocial stressors far outnumber psychiatric disorders in Latino mental health clinic (Fortuna and Perez, 2005)
- Addressing psychosocial stressors is primary
- Other economic, language barriers in addition to legal status

FEAR



Stressors/The problems



- **IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES**
- **UNRESOLVED ASYLUM/IMMIGRATION**
- **FINANCIAL HARDSHIP**
- **UNEMPLOYMENT**
- **INADEQUATE HOUSING**
- **FREQUENT MOVES**
- **LANGUAGE BARRIERS**
- **SOCIAL ISOLATION**
- **RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**
- **STRESS OF ADAPTING TO A NEW CULTURE**

Family Focused



- **Understanding family framework and need for support**
 - **There will be protectiveness**
 - **Fear**
 - **Role functioning challenges and reversals**
 - **Economic for both youth and parents**
 - **Explaining the reality to both young and older children**

Parenting



- **Honest**
- **Adaptability**
- **Consistency**
- **Positive Reinforcement**
- **Communication**
- **Supported**

Anna's Story



1

2

3

Identity and Action



Identity and Stress



- **Cognitive Behavioral (PTSD, Anxiety, Depression)**
- **Narrative Therapy**
- **Peer and Social Support**
- **Action Planning and Involvement**

COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING



5 Steps of CR:

1. **Situation** – Ask yourself “What happened that made me upset?”
2. **Feeling** - Identify your strongest feeling
3. **Thought** – Ask yourself “What am I thinking that is leading me to feel this way?”
4. **Challenge your thought** – List “Evidence For” & “Evidence Against”; “Is there an alternative way of thinking about this situation?”
5. **Outcome** – Does the evidence support my thought or not?
 - A) If NO, what is a more realistic thought?
 - B) If YES, develop an action plan

Narrative Approaches



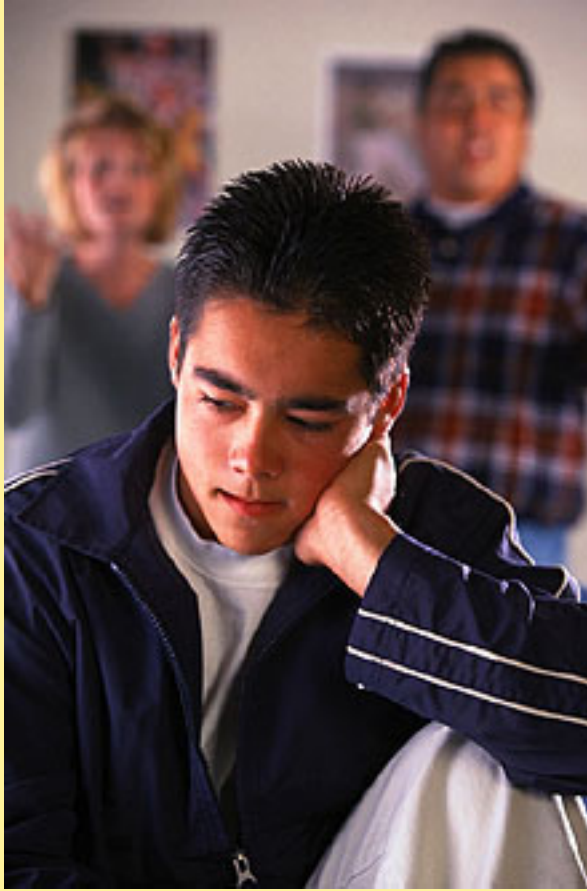
***The person is not the problem,
the problem is the problem.***

Narrative Therapy



- **A "Narrative Therapist" assists persons to resolve problems by**
 - **enabling them to deconstruct the meaning of the reality of their lives and relationships**
 - **to show the difference between the reality and the internalized stories of self.**

ACADEMICS and MOTIVATION



Academics



- **ACADEMIC SUPPORTS**
- **CONNECTION AND SUPPORT WITH TEACHERS**
- **ASSISTING PARENTS IN COMMUNICATING WITH SCHOOLS**
- **ASSISTING PARENTS IN UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC ISSUES**

Opportunities for Success



Future Orientation



	Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Related Trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Multiple Trauma •Severity •Loss of a loved one •Perception of threat •Unknown fate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cognitive framing •Challenging Trauma influenced thoughts •Social Support
Individual Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Previous Conduct or Mental Health Problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Positive Self Esteem •Strong cultural beliefs and identity •Positive Action and Adaptive
Family	<p>Stressed parental mental health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – especially maternal distress – political persecution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unaccompanied by family members 	<p>Role of the family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cohesion – adaptability --communication

BELONGING FINDING THE WAY



Saroem Phoung explained how peacemaking circles had transformed his life and work.

We have come from all over the world “*and yet know so little about each other*”... *They always tell us to be happy because we are in this country, but they have not shown the children the way to be happy.*”

By working with young people and families to help them “*find their way,*” (Phuong came to know and work with the circle process). “*This has changed my life completely,*” “*It gave me a new perspective.*”

Resources



Undocumented Immigrant Youth: Guide for Advocates and Service Providers

- <http://www.nassembly.org/ncy/documents/ImmigrationBrief.pdf>

Perez, M. C., & Fortuna, L. R. (2005). Psychiatric diagnoses and utilization of services among undocumented immigrants at a Latino mental health program. *The Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Services*, 3(1/2), 107-123.