

Residential Counselor Orientation Series – Episode 4 – Team Building

High level team work is an absolutely essential aspect of being an effective Residential Counselor.

There's a classic way to think about the formation of effective teams. It breaks team development into 5 over-lapping phases: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Adjourning.

1. Forming refers to all the dynamics that happen between team-mates when you're relatively new to working with one another.
 - The key to moving through the forming phase is constant communication among team members. Let your partners know where you are, what you're doing, and which kids, or zone, you're covering.
2. In the Storming Phase, little conflicts among your team-mates have appeared.
 - The key to moving through the storming phase is feedback. Make giving you feedback as easy as possible. Make it clear to your teammates that you want to know how to excel at being an effective teammate. At least at first, focus on getting feedback on how you're doing as a member of team, rather than your work directly with the kids.
3. In the Norming Phase routine tasks, including transitioning through all the different parts of the daily schedule, are generally going smoothly.
 - The key to supporting this normative level of teamwork is appreciation. Don't take for granted when parts of the shift go well. That only happened because of you and your team-mates. Be generous in expressing your appreciation for your fellow staff do.
4. The Performing Phase of team development. Now, it's not just the routine parts of the shift that are going well, but the team skillful adapts and overcomes various challenges.
 - Find ways to recognize and celebrate when your team performs at a high level.
5. The Adjourning Phase in residential treatment is most relevant in the context of how each shift is ended. That's when you're most likely able to speak with one another. That's when you can ask for feedback, express appreciation, and celebrate the team's successes. However, there's also a really important team function that should be prioritized – and that's debriefing; specifically what's known as "Critical Incident Stress Debriefing".
 - Residential treatment work frequently exposes staff to extreme situations that can have trauma-like effects. Checking-in with fellow staff at the end of the shift and sometimes telling the story of what happened, in a calm fashion, can blunt the neurological effects on your brain of intense experiences with clients.

Residential work is highly stressful and the skilled Residential Counselors attend to their own self-care. You can't effectively take care of others if you're not also taking care of yourself.