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The power of connection and outcome-oriented treatment with Military Adolescents

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Adolescence is a critical age for prevention work, which can be accomplished through classroom education and psychotherapy including individual, family, and group work. Gaining skills to overcome risk factors has the power to alter the course of lives. Some of these risk factors include social isolation, difficult home life situations, low self-worth, mental health issues, and peer pressure of social media. One of the most valuable protective factors is human connection. The United States military families experience unique challenges including living in foreign countries, frequent moves, absent parents due to deployments or divorce, separation from extended family, and continuous friend separation. Deployments last between six months to a year and often result in families experiencing more separation than togetherness. The average length of time military families spend at each duty station is three years. This leads to continual relocation adjustment and loss of meaningful relationships. I have worked with teens well into addiction, some flirting with going down that path, and others simply trying their best to manage complicated life issues without turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms. Alcohol and substance abuse are not the only threat to our youth; it is also behavioral addictions such

as self-harm, social media, gaming, pornography and eating disorders. Although I incorporate a variety of modalities, it is the use of outcome informed feedback that is the most integral part of my practice. Measuring the client's distress levels and whether they are improving is invaluable information. Client feedback promotes treatment satisfaction and therapeutic alliance. Research supports that the client/therapist relationship is the number one predictive factor for treatment success, regardless of the treatment modality used. It is my belief that human connection is the most valuable tool for prevention, healing, and recovery. These connections consist of family, friends, community and helping professionals.

Speaker Biography

Cristal Cook is a licensed clinical social worker and a certified addiction specialist with over 17 years of professional counseling experience with adolescents, adults, children, and families in various settings. She has worked in schools, community medical centers, private practice and with the American Military throughout the United States and abroad. She comes from a system's perspective and encourages the involvement of family, school personnel, and supportive community partners to provide quality prevention and direct services to adolescents and their families.

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