## New Teacher Training Program

## (Posted on 8/30/2013)

For the upcoming 2013-2014 school year, many states are now requiring schools to have training for behavior intervention. The faculty/staff of the schools will learn to spot signs and symptoms, or 'red flags,' of behavior connected to mental illness and unhealthy behaviors.  These red flags include irritability, depressed mood, changes in eating habits, withdrawal from friends, family, and activities, and more symptoms listed by the American Psychiatric Foundation.  Once several red flags/symptoms off that list are consistently present, the school staff will alert family or legal guardian of the student, and refers that student to specialist.

It is issues such as depression, bullying, and pressure to fit in and/or succeed, all contributing to unhealthy behaviors that can develop into mental illness that creates a need for such intervention.  While I can’t say for certain this will reduce the harm mental illness and unhealthy behaviors can lead to, I do believe that developing such skills through training will increase behavior management skills of staff by preventing bad things from happening in later stages.

The longer mental illness or unhealthy behaviors are carried out without intervention, the harder it is to intervene and less likely a staff member will be able to manage unhealthy habits or mental illness.  Teachers will have a much better chance of meeting student needs and maintaining a safe learning environment by intervening before mental illness causes unstable behavior.

One controversial concern about this new intervention program is that students will be labeled as 'mentally ill' or 'unstable.'  As a result, students will be less motivated to receive treatment.  For this reason, it is crucial that these intervention programs make it clear to the student that their privacy is protected and treatment will be confidential.    It is also crucial that these students are allowed to continue their usual routines at school so that student peers don't get suspicious or catch on to anything that could blow the student's confidential cover.

**Man's Best Friend Benefits Health**

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There's a saying that a dog is a human's best friend.  However, they can be a lot of work.  They have to be fed, groomed, cleaned up after, vaccinated, and even disciplined.  One would think that it's like having a kid.  Despite these stressors, the suggested health benefits can be a huge reward for such efforts.  In particular, I'm talking about the release of the hormone oxytocin in our bodies that has been associated with strong human-dog bonds.

Oxytocin is a hormone released by the body's pituitary gland, and plays a role in reducing anxiety and boosting immunity by reducing stress hormones (i.e. cortisol) released by our body.  It is often referred to as the 'love drug' because its release is triggered by intimacy (hugging, cuddling, etc.) and emotions related to feelings of 'falling in love.'

A study in 'Hormones and Behavior' journal, performed by scientists at Azabu University, Sagamihara, Kanagawa-ken, Japan, was performed to examine the release of oxytocin levels between people who either interacted or didn't interact with dogs as part of the experiment.  The results found that the more the subjects in the study interacted with the dogs in the experiment, the higher the oxytocin levels were found in those subjects [Nagasawa, Kikusui, Onaka & Ohta, 2009].

While evidence in such studies suggest and don't necessarily prove what goes on between human and dog interactions, one thing is certain:  a person must make the effort to balance out the time spent feeding, cleaning, and disciplining a dog with playful activities and intimate contact such as petting or belly-rubs.  In this sense, a person must achieve a work-life balance with their dog in order to achieve the chemical balance between stress hormones and oxytocin.  Developing such habits for bonding with one's dog also practices healthy habits that can be used with further bonding of family and friends.

**SOURCES**

Nagasawa, M., Kikusui, T., Onaka, T., & Ohta, M. (2009). Dog's gaze at its owner increases owner's urinary oxytocin during social interaction. Hormones and Behavior, 3(55), doi: 10.1016/j.yhbeh.2008.12.002