

Residential Treatment: A Last Resort for Struggling Adoptive Families

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Does my child need residential treatment

- Child's behaviors are too severe in intensity, frequency or duration to be managed in a home setting
- Child has repeatedly failed to improve with support from local services (caveat)
- Child is cycling in and out of the local hospital psychiatric unit
- Child is physically aggressive and stronger than parents
- Child has harmed or is threatening to harm other children in the home
- Level of parent "burn-out" should also be considered

A last resort...

- Often families are in areas where there are not therapists trained in working with the child's issues
- Going from weekly therapy that's not working to residential treatment is a BIG leap
- An INTENSIVE PROGRAM may be an alternative

What is a residential Treatment Center (RTC)

- This term is used differently from state to state but generally a 24 hour care facility for mental health issues that is not a hospital
- Treatment approaches vary from state to state and programs are not consistently regulated
- Group Homes, Independent Living Programs, Therapeutic Boarding Schools, Wilderness Programs

Licensed and Accredited

- Licensing standards vary greatly from state to state and much of it is about physical environment rather than treatment approach
- Accreditation: More rigorous standards about treatment. The main accrediting organizations for RTCs are:
 - The Joint Commission (formerly Joint Commission on Accreditation Healthcare Organizations - JCAHO)
 - The Council of Accreditation of Services for Children and Families (COA)
 - Commission on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Services (CARF)

Treatment Philosophy

- This is one of the most important things to understand about a program
- Treatment philosophies vary GREATLY!
- Common approaches are Behavior Modification, Token Economies, Positive Peer Culture (PPC), Boot Camp and Compliance Based Approaches, Relationship Based
- Make sure the treatment approach will match your child's needs

Questions to ask:

- What are the goals and objectives of the program? Avg. length of stay?
- How is the treatment delivered? What are staff to student ratios? Who is included in the ratio?
- What are the specific clinical models employed?
 - What is the level of training in each model?
 - Are clinicians certified in the models they implement?
- How is progress measured? How is fidelity (adherence to the treatment model) monitored?
- Who comprises the child's treatment team?
- What is the role of parents in treatment?
- How often will staff from the program communicate with you and who will communicate with you? Will you get written reports? Who should you bring concerns to?

Chaddock Treatment Pyramid

Residential Life-Milieu

- How are direct care staff trained?
- What are their credentials?
- Are background checks done?
- What is a typical evening and weekend schedule?

Medical Issues

- Is there a psychiatrist on site?
- How often are children seen by a psychiatrist? What level of access do parents have to the psychiatrist?
- Are nurses on site? Is there 24 hour nursing care?
- What is the general philosophy about medication? How are medications administered?

Behavior Management

- What behavior management techniques will be used?
- Does the facility use restraints?
 - Chemical
 - Mechanical
 - Physical – if used how are staff trained? What program is used?
- Is seclusion/isolation used?

Academics

- What is taught, how and by whom?
- Are teachers special education certified?
- How often are IEPs reviewed?
- What is teacher/student ratio?
- Will credits earned transfer to home school district?
- What is the length of the school day?
- Is there summer school?
- Is there "college prep" curriculum?

Financial Issues

- How is treatment paid for?
- What various funding sources are accepted?
Note: Sometimes school districts pay for placement
- What does daily rate include?

Red Flags

- Child not permitted to have contact with family for periods of time
- All contact by parents must be monitored
- Previous licensing complaints against facility or allegations of abuse
- Can not give a parent reference for you to speak with

Other points to think about:

- For profit versus non-profit
- Visit the program and listen to your gut!
- Do you hear a common language and philosophy coming through clearly? Good programs will have a consistent culture you can feel when you are in it.
- How are staff selected for hire?
- Is the an after care program?

References:

- “Selecting a Residential Treatment Center” by Peg Nichols from Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder www.chadd.org
- “Does Your Child Need Residential Treatment?” by Karen Doyle Buckwalter and Karol Ehmen Adoption Today Magazine

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