

How to Support Staff during Periods of High Acuity

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Acuity

Acuity is defined as acuteness.

Acuity is described as one of the parameters considered in patient classification systems that are designed to serve as guidelines for allocations of staff, to justify staffing patterns, and to aid in long term projection of staffing and budget.

Acuity

National Trends

Rates of psychiatric hospitalizations among all age groups has risen dramatically in the past 15 years

Children– from 155 to 283 per 100,000 from 1996 to 2007

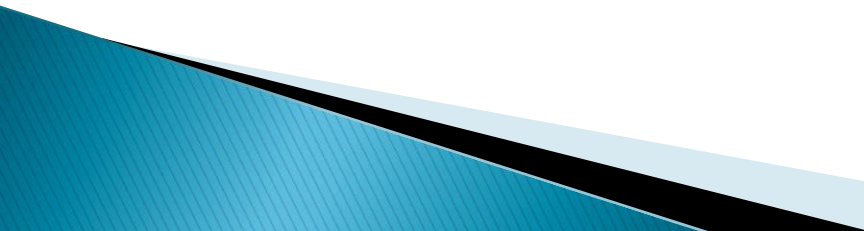
Adolescents– from 683 to 969 per 100,000 from 1996 to 2007

Adults– 921 to 995 per 100,000 during this time

Acuity

- ▶ More National Trends
 - Seasonal trends among diagnostic groups
 - Bipolar
 - Psychotic Disorders
 - Depression/Anxiety
 - ER visits and the full moon
 - Lots of antidotal data that the full moon increases ER visits among psychiatric patients.
 - This has been debunked by researchers.

Indicators of High Acuity in the School Setting

- ▶ Increased number of time outs and disciplinary actions
 - ▶ Increased hospitalizations of students
 - ▶ Increased crises among students
 - ▶ Increased incidents of aggression by students
 - ▶ Decreased student engagement in academics
 - ▶ Decreased academic performance
 - ▶ Feeling of increased emotional intensity in the milieu
 - ▶ Increase in administration of PRN's
 - ▶ **STAFF BURNOUT!**
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Acuity Trends in Schools

▶ Efficient Programs

- Reasonably predictable trends in increased acuity throughout the school.
 - Seasonal trends include a brief honeymoon at the beginning of the year, followed by increased acuity in the late fall and spring.
 - Increased acuity before major school breaks including winter break and spring break.
- Staff can likely predict student specific trends in acuity

Acuity Trends in Schools

- ▶ Inefficiently Programs
 - Likely to experience more periods of increased acuity.
 - Likely to experience periods of prolonged increased acuity.
 - Annually, there may be no honeymoon period for students or staff and brief periods of calm in the milieu.
 - Increased focus on milieu/behavior management.
 - Less feeling of camaraderie among staff and students.

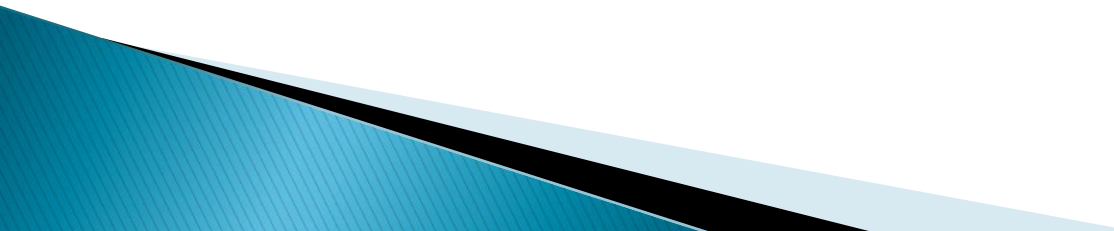
Making your Program more Efficient All Year

▶ Staff

- Its PEOPLE not PROGRAMS!
- Hire high quality staff
- Train your staff on an on-going basis
- Non-reactive staff
- Maintain staffing ratios that are consistent, not only with your census and budget, but the level of acuity in your program at any given time.
- Get to know your staff and spend time with them.

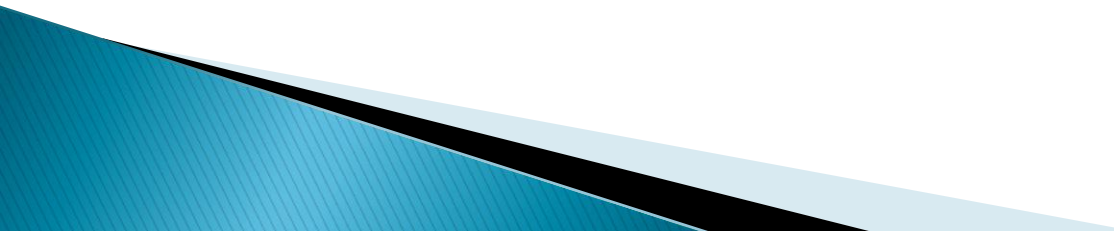
Making your Program more Efficient All Year

▶ Administrators

- Be a presence in your school for both staff and students. Get to know the staff and students.
 - Practice non-reactivity in the milieu.
 - Be consistent and predictable.
 - Make meetings count!
 - Do not overburden staff with committee obligations.
 - Kindness and Respect!
 - Recognize and reward outstanding staff.
 - Plan yearly obligations around high acuity times.
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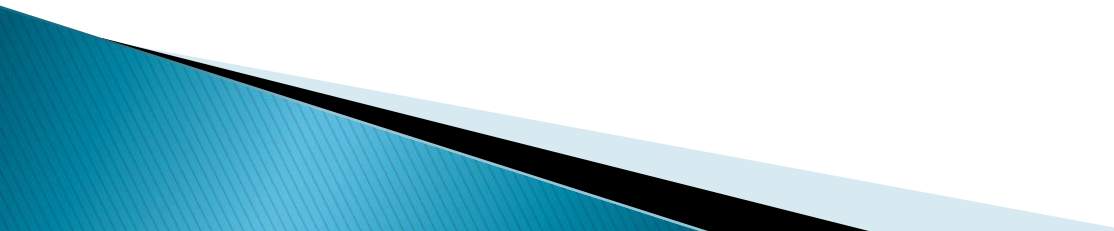
Making your Program more Efficient All Year

▶ Program

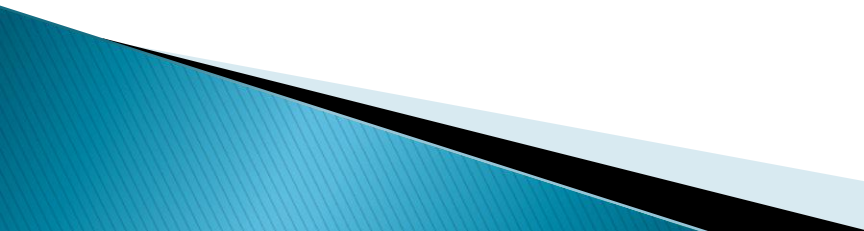
- Have clearly defined policies that meet the needs of your milieu and make sure staff are aware of these policies.
 - Positive reinforcement and Discipline.
 - Provide staff with frequent feedback on performance.
 - Provide opportunities for staff collaboration.
 - Provide staff with the resources they need.
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Making your Program more Efficient All Year

▶ Supervision

- Staff supervision is critical in an efficiently run program.
 - Formally through supervision time, both individually and in groups.
 - Allow for peer supervision.
 - Meeting/education.
 - Informally through case study presentation in which particularly challenging students are highlighted and staff are given another way of understanding them.
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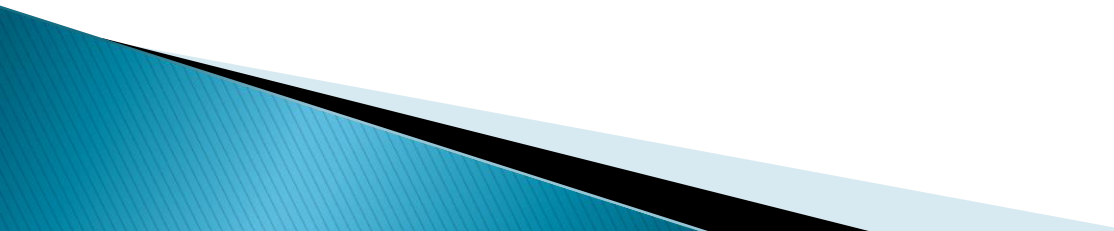
Making your Program more Efficient All Year

- ▶ Encourage open communication all year
 - Parents
 - Providers
 - Other staff
 - ▶ Encourage staff to anticipate and proactively intervene with students when they are prone to high acuity time.
 - Recognizing individual warning signs
 - Consultation with administration
 - Increase interventions
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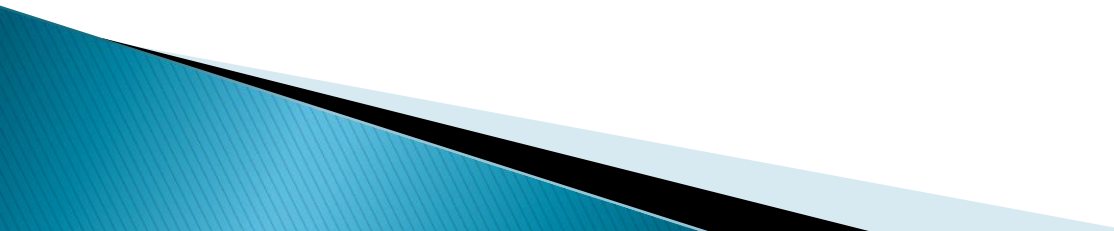
Intervening when Acuity Rises

- ▶ Seek support/consultation from outside agencies when necessary
 - Hospitalization
 - Consultation with therapists and psychiatrists
 - Probation
 - Parents

Intervening when Acuity Rises

- ▶ Multiple modes of intervention
 - Medications and PRN's
 - Medication consultation
 - Psychological testing
 - Consultation with Speech, OT
 - Use expressive therapies
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Intervening when Acuity Rises

- ▶ Increase your presence in the milieu.
 - ▶ Increase staffing!
 - ▶ Leave your door open and invite staff to share their struggles.
 - ▶ Plan more staff education/consultation time.
 - ▶ Acknowledge how hard your staff is working.
 - ▶ Make the school a welcoming environment through refreshments and opportunities for staff to let loose.
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Intervening when Acuity Rises

- ▶ Consistently reinforce program rules and expectations with students and staff.
 - ▶ Support staff in their interventions with students in order to empower staff.
 - ▶ Publicly acknowledge and thank staff for their effort.
 - ▶ Ask staff to brainstorm interventions for students and implement appropriate suggestions.
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